

**INTERPRETING REGION AND CULTURE:  
RAJASTHAN IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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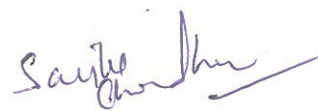
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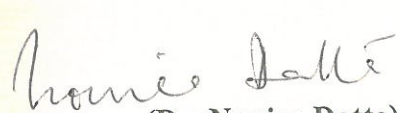
### DECLARATION

I, SARIKA CHOUDHARY, hereby declare that the Dissertation titled “**Interpreting Region and Culture: Rajasthan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**” submitted by me in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** to Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work. The Dissertation has not been previously submitted in part or in full for the award of any degree of this or any other university.

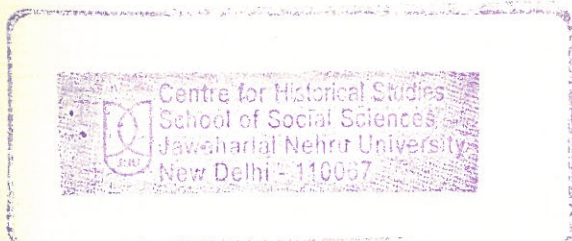
  
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### CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this Dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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## Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been at turns interesting, frustrating, fun and rewarding. I could not have done it without the help and support of a great many people, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks.

First and foremost, I am thankful to my supervisor **Dr. Nonica Datta** for enabling me to complete this dissertation. She provided me with the best guidance, consistently steering me in the right direction and at the same time allowing my dissertation to be my own work. She never lost patience with me and encouraged me whenever I was feeling low. I am truly grateful for her guidance. I also thank the staff of National Archives of India and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, in Delhi and the staff of Regional Libraries, in Rajasthan for helping me with the sources for my work.

I am thankful to my friends at the University, **Steve, Rohit, Kavita, Maria** and **Salma** for their cooperation and academic assistance. I express my gratitude to my friend **Anuradha** and sister **Nidhi** for their steady emotional support. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my dearest **BSG members** in JNU, for their constant prayers in times when I felt like giving up. They taught me the importance of perseverance and steadfast faith. Thanking **Srishti Mehra** and her entire family will not be enough, who provided me with the comfort of a home in Delhi. For lifting my spirits, sharing my pain and planning random outings throughout the year, I am also grateful to my friends **Sheetal Yadav** and **Sonali Gupta**. I would also like to acknowledge the love and support of **Kirti Bhan** and **Kartik** who always pushed me to keep my focus on my work. I would like to extend special thanks to **Anuttama Banerjee** and **Shubhangi Gupta** who contributed immensely to both my professional and personal life. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to my friends **Arshi, Survi, Saloni, Neha Goel** and **Akshita** for their love, support and encouragement through phone calls and messages. For being a source of immense inspiration for me, I thank my friend **Neha Jain**.

This dissertation would not have reached completion without the unwavering moral support of my parents, **Suman Choudhary** and **Mukesh Choudhary**. They never stopped believing in me and continued to encourage me to do my best. Even in times when I doubted myself, they kept their unflinching faith in me. I pay my deepest gratitude for their unconditional love and being my eternal pillars of strength. I also thank my brothers **Sourabh** and **Praveen** for their encouragement. And most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the blessings of my maternal grandfather **Late. Fateh Singh Lamba**, who has been guiding me and showering me with all the strength and love, since forever. I dedicate my work to him and my mother.

I thank Almighty for giving me good health and patience to never give up and courage to keep striving towards achieving my goals.

Sarika Choudhary

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Introduction

The idea of Rajasthan has evolved over a period of time beginning with the ‘region’s’ interaction with the British. The colonial perceptions about the Rajputana (The word Rajputana was first used by Colonel James Tod) territories, their history and culture began to be shaped as a result of their engagement with the British officials. Rajputana comprised of various Rajputs ruled principalities that were indirectly ruled by the British official called the ‘Resident’.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is in the context of colonial intervention that the conceptualization of Rajasthan as a region is understood here.

There are a number of ways in which a region is conceptualized by scholars and accordingly definitions are given for ‘region’. The production of a space and institutionalization of a concrete region is not done in isolation, but it is intertwined with the associated motives and the extended processes of governance and politics. A region can be defined as a “perceived segment of space differentiated from others on the basis of various characteristics which may be natural, political, economic or cultural.”<sup>2</sup> Moving beyond the physical and geographic criteria, Bernard Cohn defines historical region as “one in which there are sacred myths and symbols, held by significant groups within the area, regarding the relationship of people to their “past” and the geographical entity.”<sup>3</sup> Regions are also seen as “historically contingent social processes” and “time and space

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Schwartzberg, 'Prolegomone to the Study of South Asian Regions and Regionalism', In (ed.) Robert I. Crane, *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), pp. 89-111.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society', In (ed.) Thomas Metcalf, *Modern India: An Interpretive Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 35.

specific, in the sense that they have their beginning and end in the perpetual regional transformation.”<sup>4</sup> A region, therefore, becomes a space where its history and culture are shaped, imagined and invented.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge about Rajasthan was gathered and archived by British officials that constituted a body of work shaping the region’s history and culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. “The great phase of comprehensive data-collection in India-archaeological, ethnographical, sociological, demographic, statistical and economic- had begun in the decade from 1860-70 and it was this activity that brought into focus what information was missing or could not be handled by routine civilian training.”<sup>6</sup> In this process of “selecting, framing and authorizing, every archive necessarily excludes a great deal that is not of the direct interest to its custodians.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, information about many groups and classes remained “unarchived”. Therefore, the unarchived histories pose a challenge to the official archive and familiarize us with the idea of heterogeneity and multiplicity of perspectives.

Through the ethnographic projects, the colonial officials counted, classified and codified the indigenous population into well-manageable official categories. The selective appropriation of knowledge, through these projects, led to the construction of a ‘homogenized’ version of the Rajasthan’s society and culture. These official accounts, to a large extent, fixed identities of individuals and groups and

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<sup>4</sup>Anssi Paasi, ‘The Region, Identity, and Power’, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 14 (2011), pp. 9-16.

<sup>5</sup>Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, ‘Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference’, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Feb., 1992), pp. 6-23.

<sup>6</sup> Prabodh B.Pandit, ‘The Linguistic Survey of India-Perspectives on Language Use’, In Sirarpi Ohannessian, Charles A Ferguson and Edgar C. Polome, *Language Surveys in Developing Nations: Papers and Reports on Sociolinguistic Surveys* (Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), pp. 71–85.

<sup>7</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Unarchived Histories: The 'Mad' and the 'Trifling' in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (New York: Routledge, 2014), Introduction.

eventually the information gathered through such projects remained distant from people's perspectives and lives. A similar process is discernable in Rajasthan when it came under British control to be administered indirectly by colonial officials and administrators.

This thesis tries to examine and interpret the region and culture of Rajasthan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, through an engagement with a variety of sources and archive. This is done by understanding the construction of region through colonial perceptions and exploring the history of Rajasthan. The thesis tries to understand the multiplicity of narratives about the region and its culture by investigating the oral traditions of the local people. It seeks to investigate the process of British conceptualization of Rajasthan as a distinctive region. It attempts to understand how a Rajput-dominated imagination, overshadowing the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the region, is constructed through the British engagement with the various Rajput principalities. The sources include the British ethnographic works, the history of the region written by Rajasthani historians, oral narrative and interviews.

The thesis looks at the historical works on Rajasthan written by the Rajasthani historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These works are analyzed to understand the ways in which history of the region was imagined and written. The colonial ideas and perceptions about Rajasthan influenced the consciousness of Rajasthani historians and their method of history writing. The role played by Rajasthani historians' accounts in setting a trend in history-writing in Rajasthan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is also analyzed.

And finally, an attempt is made to understand the popular culture and people's association with the region by engaging with the oral traditions of Rajasthan.

The thesis tries to examine the way Rajasthan came to be re-imagined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the efforts of the folklorist Komal Kothari and Vijaydan Detha. I argue that as opposed to the colonial and official imagination, people's construction of the idea of region and culture remains flexible and for them, boundaries of a region are porous and hazy.

## **2. Historiographical Review**

### **Forming a Region**

*The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*<sup>8</sup> emerged as an important work in recognizing Rajasthan as a distinctive region. It was a result of prolonged discussions and individual multi-disciplinary researches undertaken in Rajasthan on the question of a distinctive regional identity. The book focuses on the idea that there was a distinct culture of the northwestern part of India, different from the rest of the country. The various papers analyze the ways in which people came to associate themselves and define their relationship with the region through their religious practices, cultural performances and historical monuments. However, the book only discusses the high caste Rajputs and their cultural practices. It does not look at subaltern communities and their engagement with the region.

The framework for conceptualization of the region is provided in *Rajasthan as a Region: Myth or Reality* by Deryck Lodrick. He argues that there are three kinds of regions: instituted, denoted and naively given. Instituted regions are demarcated by individuals as distinct and separate units to limit the "areal extent of operations".<sup>9</sup> Denoted regions are created purposefully for organizing the information and data by

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<sup>8</sup>Karine Schomer, Deryck Lodrick, et al., *Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, 2 Vols (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Lodrick, *Idea of Rajasthan*, p. 3.



scholars and officials. Both these typologies are constructed by external agencies for their own purposes of operations. However, the naively given region is subjectively defined by the people on the basis of shared history or culture. This work gives an insight into people's lives and their perspective on the way a region is perceived.

### **Political Structure and History**

Ian Copland's work is of immense importance as it provides the framework for understanding the political structure of Rajputana. Copland, in his work *The British Raj and the Indian Princes*, talks about the reason for continuation of the princely states in India till the eve of independence. Copland argues that the British resorted to the policy of indirect rule and more importantly allowed for its continuation, in those parts of the subcontinent that remained topographically and geographically difficult to approach and distant from the heart of the imperial power so that the cost of administration could be reduced in such hazardous regions.<sup>10</sup> Copland further argues that the British perceived these states "strategically-as source of possible strength and/or danger to the British Raj"<sup>11</sup> and thus devised a policy of what William Lee Warner called as "subordinate isolation".<sup>12</sup>

It was 'subordinate' because of the government's insistence on the states relinquishing the right to conduct their own foreign relations; it was one of 'isolation' because, the company was content to leave the *darbars* very much to their own devices.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes: Paramountcy in Western India, 1857-1930* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>12</sup> William Lee-Warner, *Protected princes of India* (London: Macmillan, 1894), Cited in *The British Raj*, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Copland argues that the British considered the princely states as ‘breakwaters in the storm’<sup>14</sup> and saviour of the Raj, especially after 1857 mutiny. The states remained a major source of military strength for the British. This becomes the reason for their existence till independence.

Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph in their work, *Essays on Rajputana: Reflections on History, Culture and Administration*, discuss the history, culture and character, and administration of Indian princely states in the 19th and 20th centuries. They talk about the effects of the British indirect rule on political order and society in Rajputana. The authors argue that the British influence remained too irregular and undefined depending upon the outlook of the Viceroy, his agents and the developments in British India. Further, they argue that the social and economic fabric of Rajputana transformed with the abolition of Jagirdari system in post-independence India. The Rajput ethic based on their ownership of land broke down and this created new avenues for assertion by other groups in society. However, the work is a study of Rajputs and it focuses only on their worldview and perspective, excluding all other groups.

A recent addition by both these scholars to the study of Rajasthan and its history is *Romanticism’s Child: An Intellectual History of James Tod’s Influence on Indian History and Historiography* in which they examine the role of James Tod in constructing the imagination of Rajasthan. The work focuses upon the life of Tod and the intellectual influences underlying his work *Annals* and later impact of the text on the vernacular-language texts and popular construction of past.<sup>15</sup> They also highlight the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>15</sup> Cynthia Talbot. Review of Rudolph, Lloyd I.; Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber, *Romanticism’s Child: An Intellectual History of James Tod’s Influence on Indian History and Historiography*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. April, 2018.

difference in the opinions of Tod and Mill, author of *History of British India* (1818) on the question of policy stances towards Rajasthan where Tod advocated for indirect rule while Mill emphasized on direct annexation of the Rajputana principalities. This work adds to the already existing scholarship on Tod and history of Rajasthan, one of the most important being Jason Freitag's *Serving Empire, Serving Nation: James Tod and the Rajputs of Rajasthan*.

Ghanshyam Lal Devra is an important historian who worked on Rajasthan and published more than 12 books and 104 research papers on the history and culture of Rajasthan and neighboring areas. His works deal with various aspects of the history of trade, urbanization and commerce. While looking at the popular trade routes of Rajasthan, he argues that to find solution for the administrative anarchy and financial crisis, the Rajput principalities signed various treaties with the East India Company. However, when the company failed to provide them desirable economic relief, the alternative was sought in the 'seema shulk', custom duties and transit duties that sustained the Princely states.<sup>16</sup> His most notable works include *Rajasthan ki Prashasnik Vyavastha (1574-1818)*, *Bureaucracy in Rajasthan, 1745-1829* and *Some Aspects of Socio-Economic History of Rajasthan*.

### **Oral Tradition and Culture**

Since the thesis also seeks to focus upon the peoples' perspective and their worldview through an investigation of the oral traditions, a few works that deal with this theme are important to mention. An important work in this field is Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold's *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. They have focused on women's songs of landowning classes in Ghatiyali village in

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<sup>16</sup> Ghanshyam Lal Devra, 'Popular Trade Routes of Rajasthan', 2014, retrieved from [www.gsldevra.com](http://www.gsldevra.com).

Rajasthan to highlight women's resistance to the prevailing gender stereotypes through their expressive traditions. They explore the ways in which women in rural India redefine gender, kinship and identity through their songs.

Another significant work is Rustom Bharucha's *Rajasthan an Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari*. This excellent study is a result of his long and extended conversations with Komal Kothari, who is a pioneer in the study of folk culture of Rajasthan. Kothari's wide and deep understanding of Rajasthan, ranging from women's folk songs, folk music, oral epics to land, water and every minute detail about the heterogeneous Rajasthani culture, mostly orally transmitted, has been given a tangible and concrete shape by Bharucha through this work.

Malavika Kasturi in her work, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India*, examines the factors of caste, kinship and colonial relations between the Rajputs and the colonial state. She argues that there were long-term political, economic and social processes that played a crucial role in structuring the Rajput identity and reconstituting social hierarchies. The Rajputs expressed their identity in terms of their lineage, household and agrarian society which were shaped by the institutional and economic changes occurring in the colonial period.

Badri Narayan in his work, *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contesting Memories and Dalit Political Discourse*, examines the process by which myth becomes a tool to explore the collective memories and questions of collective identity, social order etc. and memories play a crucial role in constructing social and political identity. Narayan argues that myths become catalyst in evoking memories and at the same time they get reflected in the folk stories. This process helps different castes and

communities to construct their identities. However, Narayan also argued that these collective memories do not remain homogenous and are full of contesting multiplicity and differences. While analyzing proverbs, one can notice such contestations and heterogeneous strands running in societies depending upon gender and age of people and the power relations of various groups.

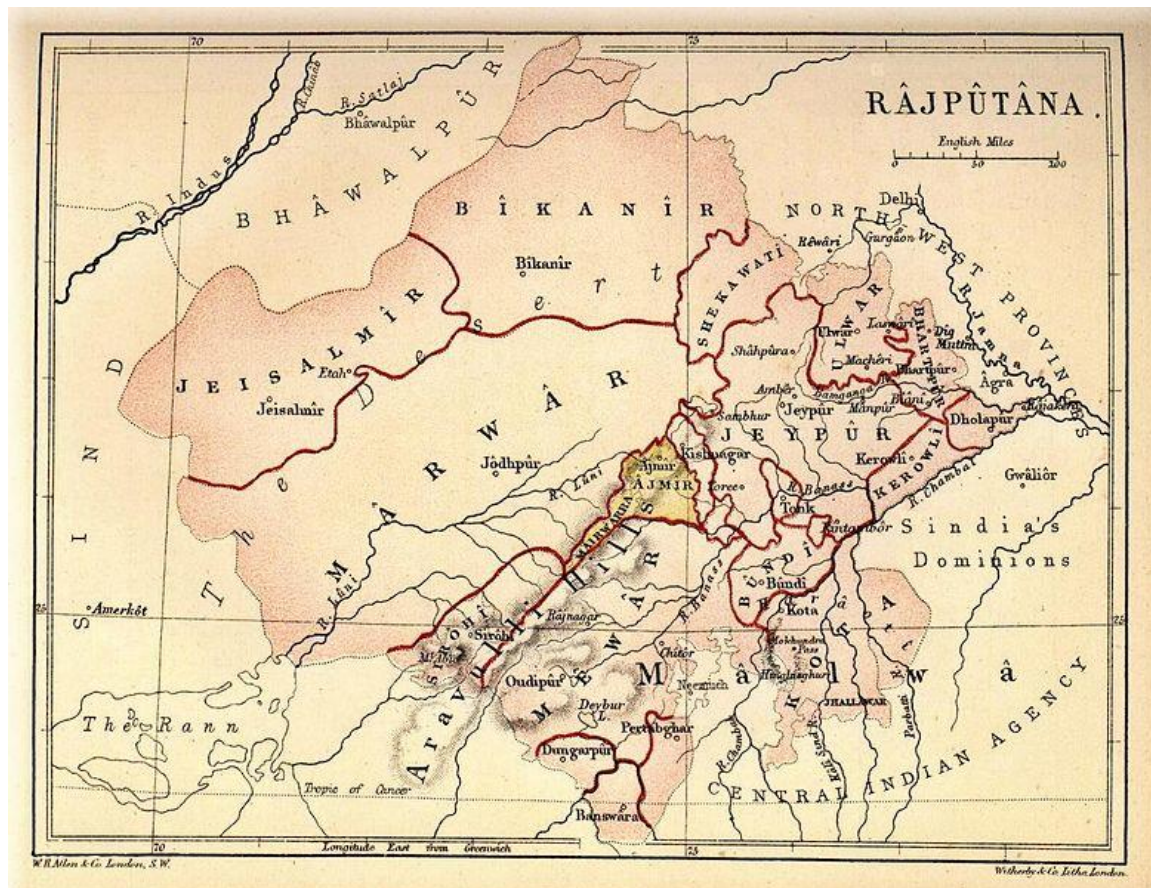
In another work *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics*, Badri Narayan argues that myth and reality are intertwined in the narratives of the lower castes so that often myths become more influential and give meaning to reality. Narayan further argues that these marginalized groups give new interpretations to the existing myths to present a glorifying self-image. He shows how the Dalit women heroes of 1857 emerged as symbols for Dalit assertion in Uttar Pradesh to build their positive political and cultural identity.

All the above-mentioned works have contributed to this thesis and deepened our understanding of the region, political structure and culture of Rajasthan. This thesis explores a rich archive of materials on Rajasthan- colonial ethnographic works, histories written by Rajasthani historians and published texts on oral traditions and dictionaries of proverbs to understand changing conceptions of region and its culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **3. Research Themes**

The thesis tries to interpret the region and culture of Rajasthan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by engaging with a variety of sources. It primarily focuses on the Western

desert region of Rajasthan known as Marwar<sup>17</sup>, with its centre at Jodhpur. In January 1818, Jodhpur was brought under British control and became a princely state.<sup>18</sup> The



Map 1: Showing the boundaries of Rajputana along with Ajmer-Merwara (Directly ruled area by the British).

Source: Pope, G. U. *Text-book of Indian History: Geographical Notes, Genealogical Tables, Examination Questions*, (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1880).

choice of the area is determined by the availability of the source material since the “area is rich in artistic traditions and home to a variety of relatively small semi-nomadic caste

<sup>17</sup> Today, the Marwar region of Rajasthan comprises of five large districts of south-western part of this desert state. These districts are Jodhpur, Nagaur, Barmer, Jalore and Pali.

<sup>18</sup>C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighboring Countries*, Vol. 3 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909), p.140. The Treaty No. LIV was signed between the East India Company and the Maharaja of Jodhpur, Man Singh.

groups” like the “musicians, poets, comedians, snake-charmers, professional mimics, actors, or genealogist-historians.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Chapter 1: The Colonial Construction of Rajasthan**

The research is divided into three chapters where the First Chapter focuses on the colonial construction of Rajasthan. The Chapter attempts to understand the colonial ideas about the region that are generated and propagated through their works in Rajasthan. Further, it looks at the way their perceptions resulted in the construction of a Rajput-dominated identity of the region. The major themes deal with the British construction of Rajputana as a region with defined borders and boundaries. The Chapter delineates a general background of the engagement of the British with the princely states. It discusses the ways in which Rajasthan emerged as an administrative and political entity with a regional identity.

To guide the British policy towards the princely states, Sir Charles U. Aitchison (1832-96) edited a *Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India*. It was published in 14 volumes beginning from 1862 to 1933, focusing upon the specific region and state. He clearly mentioned and justified the purpose of British interference in the region of Rajputana. Aitchison regarded the British intervention to be relevant for the suppression of Pindaris and in maintaining a barrier against their predatory system and extension of Maratha power.<sup>20</sup>

The Chapter further delves into the colonial ethnographic projects in India, in general, and specifically the works undertaken in Rajasthan during the colonial period and the motivations behind them. These works include Tod’s *Annals* published in two

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<sup>19</sup>Jeffrey G. Snodgrass, ‘The Centre Cannot Hold: Tales of Hierarchy and Poetic Composition from Modern Rajasthan’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Jun., 2004), pp. 261-285.

<sup>20</sup>Aitchison, *Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, p. 1

volumes in 1829 and 1832 which became the first authoritative work on the history of Rajasthan; John Malcolm's *Memoir of Central India, including Malwa and the Adjoining Provinces* (1832); M. A. Sherring's *Tribes and Castes of Rajasthan: Together with Description of Sacred and Celebrated Places of Historical Value of Rajasthan* which is part 1 of volume III of *Hindu Tribes and Castes* (1872) and G A Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1908-1928) which uses language as a tool for the construction of a cultural identity of the region.

It was the Colonel James Tod who first coined the term Rajasthan for the region in his work *Annals*.

Rajasthan is the collective and classical denomination of that portion of India which is 'the abode of (Rajput) princes'.<sup>21</sup>

Tod's insights into the terrain made the region accessible to the British for further enquiry and created an object of study to be known and administered.<sup>22</sup> Tod attributed a distinctive national identity to the Rajputs by conceptualizing their nation as consisting of a single community with bounded territories.<sup>23</sup> Along with ascertaining the territorial boundaries of the state, Tod defined the Rajputs, who were the rulers of various princely states of Rajasthan.

Tod's work popularized Rajasthan's history among the Europeans and exalted the martial virtues of valor and adventure of Rajputs. Tod understood the "romantic, adventurous side of the Rajput character, and he recorded with full appreciation the fine stories of manly valor, of the self-sacrifice of women and medieval

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<sup>21</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or the Central and Western Rajput States of India* (ed.) William Crooke, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Jason Frietag, *Serving Empire, Serving Nation: James Tod and the Rajputs of Rajasthan* (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2009), p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Nibert Peabody, 'Tod's Rajast'han and the Boundaries of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb., 1996), pp. 185-220.



chivalry”.<sup>24</sup> His work produced a discourse where a Rajput-dominated imagination of Rajasthan was constructed and publicized.

Where Tod’s work conceptualized the region by romanticizing the Rajputs, M.A. Sherring and G. A. Grierson constructed it in cultural and linguistic terms. Sherring enumerated the castes and tribes of Rajasthan and in the process codified and standardized the hierarchy among various social groups. Sherring also classified the various castes by their geographical distribution and their occupation. Sherring delineated the cultural and religious milieu by describing the sacred and celebrated places of Rajputana including temples, mosques and various shrines.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of Rajasthan as a cultural region emerged. It was Grierson’s survey that resulted in the demarcation of Rajasthan as a distinctive cultural region based on “Rajasthani” language. He invented the term “Rajasthani” to denote the language of Rajasthan. Grierson asserted that:

Rajasthani means literally the language of Rajasthan, or Rajwara, the country of the Rajputs. The name, as connoting a language, has been invented for the purpose of this survey, in order to distinguish it from western Hindi on one hand and from Gujrati on the other...natives do not employ any general name for the language, but content themselves with referring to the various dialects, Marwari, Jaipuri, Malvi, and so forth.<sup>25</sup>

Grierson also demarcated language boundaries and provided a map for the same. In this way, he codified the cultural identity of the region and this influenced the subsequent conceptions of Rajasthan as a cultural region.<sup>26</sup>

These works constructed the region of Rajputana in territorial, political and cultural terms. The Chapter finally argues that because of the British engagement, a

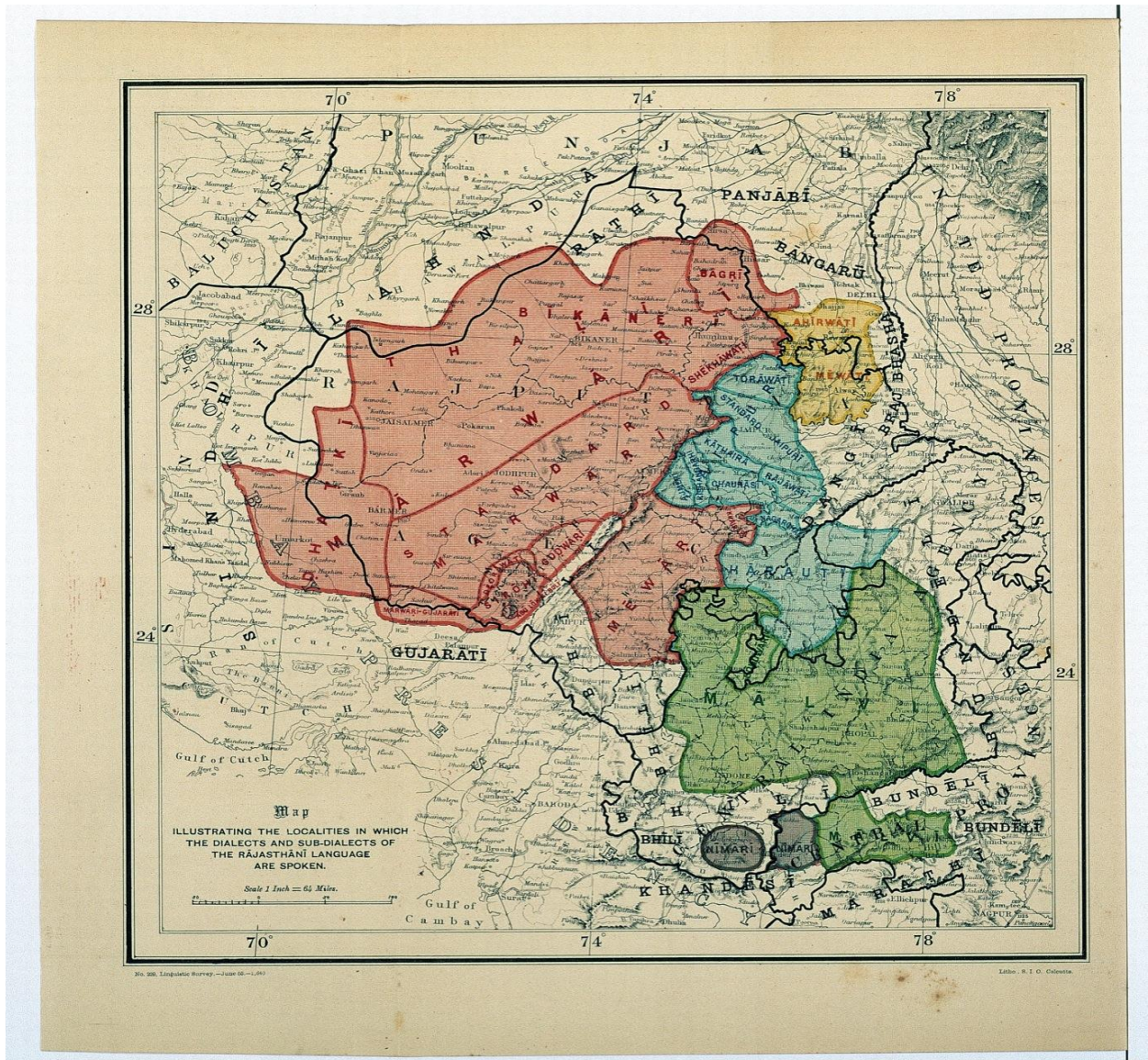
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<sup>24</sup> Tod, *Annals*, p. xlii.

<sup>25</sup>G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Part 2, Vol. 9 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Lodrick, *Idea of Rajasthan*, p.18.

regional identity based on Rajputs' worldview was imposed upon the hitherto fluid and flexible geographical area. This geographical area corresponded with Rajasthan.



Map 2: Locating boundaries of Rajasthani Language

Source: G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Part 1, Vol 1 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908).

## Chapter 2: Idea of Rajasthan: Understanding the Region through its History

In the Second Chapter an attempt is made to understand how the colonial rule influenced the Rajasthani historians' method of writing history. The Chapter also focuses on the

ways in which history of the region was imagined and written. Further, the role played by Rajasthani historians' accounts in setting a trend in history-writing in Rajasthan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is analyzed. This is done by examining the various works of eminent Rajasthani historians Gauri Shankar Ojha (1863-1947), Bishweshwar Nath Reu (1890-1947), Dashratha Sharma (1903-1976) and G N Sharma (1909-1996). Ojha was closely associated with the colonial officials. I argue that this association shaped his ideas and his methods of documenting history of Rajasthan to a great extent. Ojha assisted in preparing the report on dialects of Udaipur and Sirohi for Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, and also assisted in compiling the *Imperial Gazetteer of Rajasthan*, and the *Gazette of Mewar, Jaisalmer and Sirohi*.

The Rajasthani historians remained obsessed with writing about the political history of the various Rajput states. Volumes of works are produced that dealt with the glorification of the various Rajputs rulers and their struggles and alliances with the Mughals, Marathas and the British. The object of their studies remained the high Rajputs and one hardly gets an insight into the peoples' perspective about the region.

Chapter two also looks at the way the history of Rajasthan is used as a tool by the Indian national movement to ensure the support of Rajasthani people. This is done by importing the regional historical symbols, figures and episodes at the national level by the nationalist leaders. This process finally resulted in strengthening of the Rajput-dominated imagination of Rajasthan.

### **Chapter 3: Re-Imagining Rajasthan: Interpreting Culture through Oral Tradition**

This Chapter investigates the process of re-imagination of Rajasthan which began due to the various projects undertaken by folklorist Komal Kothari (1929-2004) and Vijay Dan

Detha (1926-2013) on popular oral traditions. An alternative form of archive emerged as a result of their efforts which got institutionalized as Rupayan Sansthan, in Jodhpur in 1960. Both Kothari and Detha tried to collect and document the folk culture, including folktales, folk songs, sayings, proverbs and oral epics. They tried to offer a finer picture, inclusive of representations of different communities of Rajasthan. This Chapter argues that there is a visible shift in the way the region, history and culture of Rajasthan are perceived via these oral narratives. This can be inferred from the reading of a different kind of source collection to understand the popular culture of the region.

The oral narratives become important for understanding the everyday experiences of people and their cultural engagements with the region. The Chapter is concerned with an analysis of the Rajasthani proverbs from a socio-cultural standpoint. Proverbs can be defined as a “safe index of the lives, mode of living, current thoughts, the intellectual and social status, surroundings, and the social life of people”.<sup>27</sup> Various proverbs relating to history, historical figures, geography of the region, seasons, agriculture, communities and castes, gender and area offer an insight into the various aspects of the region.

For example, the mainstay of the economy of the Western region is agriculture and animal husbandry.<sup>28</sup> The relationship between pastoralism and agriculture is reflected in the proverbial wisdom related to them and is transmitted through generations to attest to their importance in peoples’ lives. “*Khat pare to khet, Nahin to Kero-ret*”- it means without fertilizer or manure, an agricultural field is nothing but a heap of sand. A proverb related to seasons is “*Aandhi Jitra meh hoye*”- the frequency of

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<sup>27</sup>John Christian, *Behar Proverbs* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1891), p. viii.

<sup>28</sup> S. P. Malhotra, *Socio-Economic Structure of Population in Arid Rajasthan* (Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur), p. 19.

rain depends upon the frequency of dust-storms. A proverb addressing the caste system in the society is: “*Baniyo khat mein to baman that main*”- meaning that when a Bania falls sick, this will be beneficial for the Brahmin as he will be called to perform puja for his sake. These proverbs reflect the everyday experiences of the inhabitants in the region and their inter-relations in society. They also constantly allude to the changing conceptions of the region, geography and territory in popular perceptions.

The proverbs are primarily taken from the two Rajasthani proverbial collections provided by Kanhaiyalal Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein* (1961) and Vijaydan Detha’s, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahawat Kosh* (2001), which constitute a body of folklore shaped by popular narratives, histories and repertoire.

#### **4. Methodology and a Note on Sources**

For undertaking the present research, archival sources and collections of oral narratives from the National Archives, New Delhi, are extensively used. The archival sources include the historical accounts and ethnographic works undertaken by the British officials in Rajasthan. A number of works by the Rajasthani historians, from the Central Library of University of Jaipur and digitized sources of Rajasthan States Archives, Bikaner, are also consulted. These include the comprehensive history of Rajasthan published by the Rajasthan States Archives, in three volumes called *Rajasthan through the Ages*.

In addition, the oral tradition of the region is also examined to understand the people’s perspectives. I have conducted interviews to understand the perceptions of local people about the region of Rajasthan. Further, the oral narratives including the published collections of proverbs, folk songs and the oral epics are used. The Rajasthani proverbial collections by Kanhaiyalal Sahal entitled, *Rajasthani Kahawatein* (1961) and

Vijaydan Detha's *Rajasthani-Hindi Kahawat Kosh* (2001) are consulted at the National Archives, the University of Jaipur Library, various Regional School Libraries, the Library of BITS, Pilani and digitized sources of Rupayan Sansthan, Jodhpur.

The understanding of the archival sources is guided by the framework provided by Ann Laura Stoler in her article *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance*.<sup>29</sup> She argues that the colonial archives should not be seen as things to be used, but as a process of production of knowledge. "The task is less to distinguish fiction from fact than to track the production and consumption of those "facts" themselves."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the British ethnographic sources are read by situating them in a colonial context and exploring the motivations behind their production.

In a context when peoples' 'voice' remains unheard and their perceptions are hardly taken into account, an investigation of oral narratives, as alternative source, becomes crucial to understand the everyday experiences of people and their lives. Oral traditions are reflective of the everyday lives and history of people and provide a potential tool for identifying the ways by in which different relationships in society are arranged and reconfigured. They become an important source for the transmission of such patterns, therefore, it becomes crucial to examine them.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present thesis seeks to study Rajasthan as a region and its culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is done by understanding the ways in which the idea about the region is constructed by the British through their ethnographic projects. The process begins by outlining the boundaries of the region through maps and official accounts. These sources

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<sup>29</sup>Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2, (2002), pp. 87–109.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

give a concrete form to the boundary and border of Rajasthan and construct the region in territorial and political terms.

The aspects of knowledge production, imperial power and the classification and codification of the region's diversity were important features of British ethnographic projects. The British ethnographic enquiry had resulted in revelation of the diversity in the Rajasthani society and culture. But at the same time, the officials attempted to classify those diverse groups, their practices and dialects for their scientific understanding. The officials sought to gather information about the inhabitants and the region, but in the process defined them and codified their identities. The Rajputs became the object of their projects and their valorized past and glory became synonymous with the idea of Rajasthan. The Rajput-dominated imagination of Rajasthan was conceptualized.

The colonial ideas influenced the Rajasthani historians' methods of history-writing and their attitudes towards the region and its culture. The Rajasthani historians followed the footsteps of the British officials in mainly focusing upon their 'scientific' method of documenting history. The Rajasthani historians wrote accounts of the dynastic rule of various princely states based on Tod's *Annals*, inscriptions and *Khyats* (a form of literature). They focused on the Rajputs and wrote accounts of the political history of the Rajput rulers. This set a trend of writing volumes of accounts highlighting the individual states of Rajasthan. History-writing in Rajasthan became associated with the political history of the region. The social and cultural diversity of the region was neglected in such frameworks.

In such a scenario, the rich oral tradition of Rajasthan becomes an alternative source for understanding the narratives of non-hegemonic and marginalized groups in the



society. The Rajasthani proverbs are examined for understanding the complex ways in which people associated themselves with the region. The everyday experiences of these communities, resulting from their engagement with the region, are reflected in the proverbs and oral narratives. I argue that their idea of region and a cultural identity emerging from association with their inhabited space remained far removed from the official colonial idea of Rajasthan and its high Rajput culture. People developed their own strategies to deal with the material conditions in the region and these strategies were reflected in their proverbial wisdom and continue to be transmitted through generations.

The re-imagination of Rajasthan begins when the oral tradition of the marginalized communities is collected and studied by various scholars. Therefore, present-day Rajasthan is not perceived only as the ‘abode of Rajas’, but known for its social and cultural diversity which points towards a shift in the way the region is understood in popular accounts.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RAJASTHAN

#### 1. Introduction

The political milieu of Rajasthan in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a period of transition, characterized by the decline in the power of the Mughals and expansion and consolidation of the British rule. The British ruled India in both direct and indirect ways. The directly ruled regions came to be known as the 'British India', whereas the indirectly ruled territories came to be known as native states, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Princely states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter deals with the British conceptualization and construction of Rajputana as a region. This is done by examining the British ethnographic projects, undertaken in the principalities and understanding their motivations behind those projects. The chapter tries to understand the process through which Rajasthan emerged as political and administrative entity, as a result of the colonial engagement with the region. The British developed the political tool of 'indirect rule' to effectively define and control the princely states the Rajasthan. The chapter argues that because of the British engagement, a Rajput dominated regional identity was imposed upon the hitherto fluid and flexible geographical area that corresponded with Rajasthan.

Barbara Ramusack's work *The Indian Princes and their States* is important to understand the political structure of Princely states in India under the British rule. She argues that the princely states were not simply pawns in the hands of the British and they were not created by them. She categorized the princely states in three groups- antique, the

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.

successor and the warrior/conquest states. Accordingly, Rajputana came to be categorized as the “antique” states. This meant that the Rajput-ruled principalities existed during the Mughal period and were later incorporated into their administrative and military apparatus before finally getting accommodated into the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> It was because of this reason that she asserted that these princely states were not the creation of the British, but they existed even before them. However, the political status of the princely states changed due to the treaties signed with the British.

British treaties did not beget Indian princes or princely states, they did shape their future form and activities by establishing parameters that increasingly restricted princely options.<sup>3</sup>

The British concluded various treaties with the principalities that resulted in placing the political agents called Residents, in their courts and expansion of the British military resources. The officials devised the policy of indirect rule to incorporate the states in their sphere of influence, but with a minimum expenditure on their administration. They exercised further control through surveying and mapping these states which also served to reify the princely states as political, religious and ethnic entities.<sup>4</sup>

Analyzing the ethics, authority and structure of the Rajputana princely states, Susanne Hoerber Rudolph in her article<sup>5</sup> argues that the characteristic government in the pre British period in Rajputana was of monarchical nature where the rulers exercised their power over one region. However, with the coming of the British “old Rajputana must be re-constructed from what English observers discovered through their

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<sup>2</sup>Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, p.13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, ‘The Princely States of Rajputana: Ethic, Authority and Structure’, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January-March, 1963), pp. 14-32.

own experience.”<sup>6</sup> She argues that due to their economic means, social standing and public authority, the Rajputs were the most prominent caste in Rajasthan. She asserts that for Rajputs:

To live otherwise, to engage for example in the mundane pursuits of commerce or agricultural labor, was degrading. To cultivate the intellect would weaken the spirit. "The Rajput disdains the plow," was the common observation of the ethnographers. "A Rajput who reads will never ride a horse," says a proverb.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, defending the virtues of bravery and honor, without any consideration for the consequences becomes a characteristic feature of the Rajputs culture. The eulogy of the martial virtues of Rajputs is best accounted by Colonel James Tod, the British political agent to the Western Rajput states, where he began to write the much-celebrated history of Rajasthan in two volumes- *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or, the Central and Eastern Rajput States of India*. He romanticized the virtue of valor over utility, for statesmanship. This work informed not only the British about Rajasthan but also the subsequent researches undertaken by other historians on Rajasthan.

Rudolph argues that the legitimacy of the ruler’s power depended upon his lineage and the state was ruled by a Maharaja of a particular clan, belonging to the *Kshatriyas* caste. He had considerable land (*bapota*) under his control to provide for his “material and practical means for his social standing”<sup>8</sup>. However, power within the state remained diffused between the Maharaja and the various jagirdars<sup>9</sup> which resulted in weak articulation of state. This remained evident in the weak fiscal and military power of the Maharajas and the clear distinction between his and the nobles’ legal jurisdiction,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>Jagirdars were the powerful nobles of considerable social standing who held estates or *jagirs* where they exercised their exclusive control.

throughout Rajputana. Rudolph asserts that “Rajputana had a cultural and ethnic unity, a common caste culture, expressed through bardic literature and the shared chivalric ethic, a feeling that all Rajputs were peers, which created a common psychological climate even if it led to no political unity.”<sup>10</sup>

The villages in Rajputana also had their own political community of twice-born that wielded power and locally exercised responsibility. The Brahmins interpreted traditional legal texts as durbar vakils and acted as priests and astrologers and one-fifth land went to the Brahmins, temples and bards. The relative isolation that the Thar Desert provided to the region of Rajputana led to the rise of merchant classes- the Marwaris in the midst of the chaos of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who collected the tribute due to the durbar, and the revenue for *Khalsa* areas. Thus, the effective centralization could not be realized by the rulers due to the presence of caste based criteria of recruitment in the bureaucratic apparatus of states, inadequate means to control them and slow development of the administrative structure.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Stern in his work, *The Cat and the Lion: Jaipur State in the British Raj*<sup>12</sup> has talked about the political relationship between the British and the Jaipur state of Rajputana and Jaipur’s experiences of British imperialism. He argues that the major concern of the British was to maintain a stable and legitimate patron-client relationship between the company and the Durbar.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, he argues that the British wanted to achieve political centralization in the Rajputana, while at the same time checking the states from becoming “despotic” by enlisting support of the nobility in

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> In all states *Kayasthas*, as scribes, supplied state record keepers. The Rajputs ruled, the Brahmins and Vaishyas and Kayasths aided, advised and influenced them.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Stern, *The Cat and the Lion: Jaipur State in the British Raj* (New York: E J Brill, 1988).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

graduating the princes' powers. In case of disputes between the princes and the nobles the British assumed the role of *impartial* arbiter and decided on the basis of Rajputs' custom and usage. He asserts that:

By interfering in the Rajputs states' domestic politics as lord paramount *impartial* arbiter, minimally or critically, and on the ostensible demands of the Rajput warriors for justice, the British government would be able to redress constantly that political balance which it defined as vital to the maintenance of its interests in Rajputana; the balance between princely states and the nobility's capacities to check that power. The Rajput warriors, the British believed, would readily accept the imperial government's arbitration as legitimate and authoritative if it was according to the Rajput custom and usage.<sup>14</sup>

Stern therefore, argues that for this purpose they attempted to codify the customs and usage but ended in failure because of their misconceived notion of Rajputs feudalism and the mistaken assumption that the customs and usages are stable and consensual to be coded.

Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph in their work *Essays On Rajputana: Reflections on History, Culture and Administration* argued that the effects of British indirect rule on political order and society were flawed and limited in Rajputana. The British intervened in the domestic affairs directly and indirectly- settling succession disputes, initiating modern education for princes of states etc. The authors argue that British influence remained too irregular and undefined depending upon the outlook of the viceroy, his agents and the developments in the British India.

The influence of the British on the states depended upon the overall policy espoused by the governor-general and the respective qualities of the political agents and the princes. A hands-off policy toward the princely states followed the rebellion of 1857, which, frightened the British government away from strong intervention. This policy ended at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century when Lord Curzon began to impress the princes with their responsibilities....Lord Minto's easy going policy eased the pressures for reform and intervention that Curzon had applied,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

but lord Linlithgow's viceroyalty in the 1930's once again brought an emphasis on administrative modernization and reform, and hence greater intervention.<sup>15</sup>

On question on modernization, they argue that the Rajputana states had insulated themselves from the social and intellectual fervor that characterized the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and there did not come substantial changes in the field of economy, communication and education. There were few political associations and urbanization remained insignificant.<sup>16</sup> Although there emerged an awareness of political rights and liberties, that failed to translate them constitutionally.<sup>17</sup>

These works have deepened the understanding of the changing political status of Rajputana, due to the British intervention. The breakdown of the traditional monarchical political structure gave way to the institution of 'indirect rule' in Rajputana. The British regulated and guided their relations with the princes on the basis of their policy of indirect rule or 'Paramountcy' which resulted in transformation in the existing social and economic order as well.

## **2. Colonial Ethnography and its Project**

The British colonial regime in India, from early 19<sup>th</sup> century started to undertake projects that would help them in getting and keeping power in their hands. Knowledge about the natives' society, polity and culture became important tool for exercising power, in both British India and princely states. F .G. Bailey asserts that:

The man who correctly understands how a particular structure works can prevent it from working or make it work differently with much less effort than a man who doesn't know these things... The man who understands the working of any organization or institution can find out which roles are crucial to the maintenance of those structures, and among those roles which are the most vulnerable.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rudolph, *Essays On Rajputana*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> F. G. Bailey, *Strategems and Spoils* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), pp. 186-87, Cited in Stern, p. 23.

This section tries to understand the British motivations behind undertaking the ethnographic projects of collection of knowledge about the natives. The ethnographic work done in Rajasthan also forms a part of this larger quest for information. I argue that the knowledge, thus gathered provided detailed information about the hitherto unknown tracts of Rajasthan and communities inhabiting the region and the political exigencies of the time guided the British officials to overlook that diversity. This resulted in codification of knowledge about the Rajasthani culture and society and also led to ‘construction’ of a homogenized version of the region in which the ruling class of Rajputs occupied the dominant position.

Nicholas Dirks called the colonial state in India as the “ethnographic state”.<sup>19</sup> The colonial administrators-ethnographers and missionaries had encountered extraordinary variety in India. Their efforts of knowing the indigenous people focused upon understanding the local forms of landholding and agrarian management. Once this information was collected, further details about the daily life, food habits, cultural habits and customs of people came to be compiled in the form of Gazetteers, surveys, census reports and manuals.

The British undertook ethnographic projects in both directly and indirectly ruled parts of the Indian sub-continent and constructed an image of the colonial society and culture, in their effort to exercise power over these regions more effectively. It was a result of this effort that surveys and mapping was done to delineate boundaries,

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 43.

ethnographic projects were undertaken to define the indigenous culture and society and thereby constitute their ideas about the people and regions.<sup>20</sup>

Bernard Cohn in his work argues that the conquest of India was conquest of knowledge for which the colonial officials sought help from the local munshis, pundits, maulavis and other native informants. The proper execution of administrative, commercial and military tasks could be done when the officials were well versed with and had command of specialized Indian languages. Therefore, the gateway to the control over India was through language. This was also a process of exerting their own power and dominance over the natives by making the Indian forms of knowledge the object of European enquiry. Cohn concludes that the cumulative effect of this colonial exercise was objectification and reordering of Indian languages and customs.<sup>21</sup> The *Linguistic Survey of India* undertook the task of documentation and cataloguing of various Indian languages. As a result of this exercise, the nomenclature of 'Rajasthani' was invented to denote the language of Rajasthan and therefore give a cultural identity to the region.

Shahid Amin, in his introduction to the work, *A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life* by William Crooke, has described the pioneering systematization of colonial knowledge about the everyday life of the Hindustani peasant. Amin argues that as part of the larger colonial exercise of classificatory representation of colonial India, a glossary of Indian words was produced for carrying out everyday administrative and revenue-related duties. Therefore, such a glossary became an official necessity.

Criticizing Crooke's work, Amin argues that his work did not take into account the change in the peasants' lives and the glossary did not give any indication of

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<sup>20</sup>Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', In *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 16-58.



adoption of English words by the peasants. By taking into account only the physical world of peasants and categorizing the words in agricultural terms, Crooke dissected their lives to put “useful” information in order. Therefore, Amin concludes that Crooke compiled a detailed work to describe natives’ physical world, fragmenting it into various fields and undermining variations. However, Crooke perceived the peasants world as changeless and developed a homogenized version of their reality.<sup>22</sup>

Badri Narayan argues that the task of folklore collection was undertaken by government officials and natives played the role of agents. Moreover, the political motives guided their works and “the subjects they selected and the themes they pursued in their folkloric inquiry suggested that their attempt was largely to study the unique, the useful and the influential...folklores of dominant groups and of exotic and colourful communities predominated their collections.”<sup>23</sup> Narayan further argues that even for the nationalists, who started collecting folklore after 1917, the purpose was to rediscover Indian nation and therefore they also focused upon the dominant voices.

Gloria Raheja develops a similar argument and argues that the purpose of colonial officials was to domesticate the “native’s voice” by entextualisation of Indian folklore. Raheja further asserts that this was true especially for proverbs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and this formed part of their attempt to create the illusion of consent, for their rule in India.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William Crooke, *A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life* (ed.) Shahid Amin (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), Introduction.

<sup>23</sup> Badri Narayan, *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contested Memories and Dalit Political Discourse* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 2001), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Gloria Raheja, ‘The Illusion of Consent-Language, Caste and Colonial Rule in India’, In Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical history of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 117-152.

The British used various means to collect knowledge about the colonial subjects. Firstly, the colonial ethnographers collaborated with the native informants or the “ethnographers’ subaltern.”<sup>25</sup> However, the role of these informants changed over the period of time. Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink assert in their work that:

In late-eighteenth-century British India, the reign of orientalism was partly predicated on the necessity for Indian mediators to translate and comment upon Sanskrit texts. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, it was to be superseded by ethnology of India that, in emphasizing personal observation, greatly reduced the necessity-at least in theory-of such mediators.<sup>26</sup>

The colonial ethnographic projects constructed identities of the colonial subject in terms of their caste, religion, their relative ranking in the society and defined the community structures. Various ethnographic occasions helped in these colonial projects. An ethnographic occasion can be defined as “the situation of contact between ethnographer and those to be described, in which they coproduce the knowledge that is to be written down in terms of essences of the self and other.”<sup>27</sup> According to Peter Pels, war and military expedition were one such occasion that defined the region by settling the boundaries of a geographical area and its population. Such geographical and military expeditions depend upon the “horizontal relationships of negotiation and tactical exchange with indigenous informants or opponents, rather than the vertical ones of observation and discipline.”<sup>28</sup>

However, in case of military discipline, the policy of horizontal relationships got transformed into vertical ones by means of policing and observation. The horizontal relationship can be seen in tagging certain castes as “martial castes” and incorporating

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<sup>25</sup>Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, ‘Locating the Colonial Subjects of Anthropology’, In *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical history of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

them in the colonial army units. The legal relationships between the colonized and the British were grounded in the codification and textualization that resulted in the fixing of the local social order. Whether cultural, geographical, linguistic, physical, or political criteria were used, the common administrative need was to produce distinct groups to be ruled which inhabited a clearly defined and bordered territory. On the other hand, the missionaries' relationship with the potential converts was based on the Christian assimilation and not on ethnic difference. The missionaries were, therefore, less inclined towards a unified conception of essential otherness and often adapted to local customs.<sup>29</sup>

The imperial ethnography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Bernard Cohn also argues, was done out of the administrative needs of the colonial state and to symbolically strengthen the legitimacy of their rule in India. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the reasons to undertake such elaborate projects changed. Ethnography became an individualistic project i.e. it was done on the margins of the administration by a tiny minority of district officials who were “intellectually disposed to inquire into the native customs”.<sup>30</sup> This shift had occurred due to two reasons. Firstly, the field of anthropology had increasingly become professionalized in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, the shift took place because Indian Nationalism had created doubts in the minds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century imperial administrators about the permanence of British rule. As a result, they started questioning the self-assuring assumptions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnographers.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Morrisson, ‘Ethnographers Imperial: Anthropology and British Rule in India’, *History of Anthropology Newsletter*, Vol 8, Issue 1, September 1981, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Ethnography in Rajasthan

A number of geographical, ethnographic and political factors interact together to articulate a region's identity. Geographical factors become important because they can facilitate or hinder the impact of other social and political forces. This section seeks to understand the definition of Rajasthan as a bounded geographical, political and culture entity as constructed by the British officials. I argue that the various principalities in Rajasthan had carved out their individual spheres of rule and were constantly involved in disputes with each other over expanding their territorial possessions. Therefore, their idea of territory and region was more restricted to their principalities and could not possibly have concurred with the idea of Rajasthan that the British came to institute. The British demarcated the distinct and separate princely states to limit the "areal extent of operations".<sup>32</sup> This helped the officials in collection and organization of information about the region. However, these definitions remain imposed upon the inhabitants by the British.

The history and particularly the historiography of Rajasthan do not enjoy the same level of attention as other Indian states<sup>33</sup>. One major source that history of Rajasthan has till date is the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* written by James Tod. His construction of Rajasthan remained "the" Rajasthan. All the other historians who have worked on Rajasthan have only corrected Tod on few details, dates and facts, but the overall assumptions on which Tod based his narrative remain widely accepted by them.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Jason Frietag, *Serving Empire, Serving Nation: James Tod and the Rajputs of Rajasthan* (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

James Tod meticulously undertook various surveys in Rajputana and Central India between 1812 and 1817 and employed a number of assistant surveyors to traverse these then little known regions.<sup>35</sup>In the *Annals*, Tod gave the latitudinal and longitudinal dimensions of Rajputana to define the region. According to Tod,

This space comprehends nearly 8° of latitude and 9° of longitude, being from 22° to 30° north latitude, and 69° to 78° east longitude, embracing a superficial area of 350,000 square miles.<sup>36</sup>

Since the previous knowledge of Europeans, about the area was minimal, Tod's insights into the terrain made the region accessible to the officials for further enquiry and created an object of study to be known and administered.<sup>37</sup> This knowledge helped the British army and staff in suppressing the Pindaris<sup>38</sup> in 1817. Tod had supplied them with the valuable local knowledge and maps for assistance and described the geographical conditions and routes in case the army was to be mobilized from central India against the Sindh invaders.<sup>39</sup> In a letter written to John Malcolm on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1820, Tod gave the following description:

In all India there is not a more intricate and impassable country than this very southern frontier of Mewar, hills upon hills from no great distance of Neemutch itself to Serohie, with foot paths only frequented by bheels, the advance into Mewar therefore would defeat your plans and place impenetrable barriers between you and your object..Serohie can afford no provisions and is little better than a ruin..if my geography is not erroneous, even here you place mountains and jungles between you and the enemy, for Sirohie is on the extremity of the same difficult compound range which separates Marwar and Mewar..Both Sanchore and Beenmahl are on the high road from the chief cities in Guzzerat to Jalore and

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<sup>35</sup>James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or the Central and Western Rajputs States of India* (ed.) William Crooke, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. xxvi.

<sup>36</sup>*Annals*, Vol. 1, p. 2. The modern boundaries of the state are not materially different from the region that Tod covered in the *Annals*. The longitude and latitude measurements remain same till today.

<sup>37</sup>Freitag, *Serving Empire, Serving Nation*, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup>Pindaris were a body of lawless freebooters and of no single race. They were the adventurers who gained power during the decay of the Mughal Empire and had not been incorporated into the local armies. *Annals*, Vol. 1, p. xxvi.

<sup>39</sup> Western Rajputana States Agency Office, *Proceedings*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1805-1820, National Archives of India (hereafter, NAI).

the Marwar and will secure any quantity of provisions..I shall if operations take place send you any routes; I have detailed written accounts of every principal route through these deserts.<sup>40</sup>

To collect the information on the local history and about the Rajputs, Tod placed great emphasis on the local epics and ballads written by the poet Chandbardai and other bards. Tod appreciated the bards and the poets as the “primitive historians of mankind.”<sup>41</sup> However, he also duly noted “that they are confined almost exclusively to the martial exploits of their heroes, and to the rang-ran-bhum, or field of slaughter.”<sup>42</sup>

William Crooke in introduction to the *Annals* also said that “the poet may occasionally record facts of value, but in his zeal for the honor of the tribe which he represents, he is tempted to exaggerate victories, to minimize defeats.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the bardic literature “exhibits the facts, not as they really occurred, but as the writer and his contemporaries supposed that they occurred.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Crooke ascribed the distortions in Tod’s work to his over reliance on these sources. However, the legitimating factor of the text came from the fact that it was largely based on the native sources.

Subsequently, Tod drew similarities between the European and Rajputs’ feudalism and established the basis on which the political relations between British and the princely states of Rajputana were guided. The British wanted to create a political system that would serve their interests. The officials were concerned with maintaining the local order and check absolutism by princely states. Therefore, seeking guidance from Tod’s conception of Rajput feudalism, they tried to establish a hierarchical structure of

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<sup>40</sup>*Proceedings*, Letter no. 23, Vol. 1, No. 1, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1820, NAI.

<sup>41</sup>Tod, *Annals*, p. Iviii. In describing the Rajputs, Tod drew upon the Puranas and genealogical legends of the princes and thus various distortions crept in while ascribing the origins of their genealogies.

<sup>42</sup>Tod, *Annals*, p. Ix.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxx.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxx.

authority arising from loyalty. However, Stern argues that the basis of Rajputs polity was not what Tod had assumed and argued. It was the ties of clanship and caste that determined the political structure and behavior of Rajputs.<sup>45</sup>

I argue that more than the construction of the image of the Rajputs and Rajputana, what Tod achieved was the propagation of that image to Europeans and the native themselves. The material published in England took inspiration from Tod's work and classicized the history of Rajasthan, one among them being the *Rhymes of Rajputana* by G. H. Trevor. Trevor spoke glowingly of Tod's work and said that:

In that book he laid open from almost every known source, including the classics of Hindustan, local bards and tradition, a mine of information and romance regarding his beloved Rajputs.<sup>46</sup>

Tod's work popularized Rajasthan's history among the Europeans and the subsequent works based on his *Annals* generally glorified martial virtues of valor and adventure of Rajputs, in the way Tod exalted them. Therefore, Tod's work produced a discourse where the idea of Rajasthan concurred with all things Rajput- their values, virtues and history. Tod's work can be placed in the backdrop of relationship between the imperial power and the gathering, creation and structure of knowledge, to effectively maximize their revenue resources and legitimize their control over the native people. Therefore, information and knowledge about the Indian natives became a crucial instrument for this venture.

John Malcolm was an important diplomat, historian and agent of the Company who became in charge of the Malwa region. He wrote *Memoir of Central India, including Malwa and the Adjoining Provinces* (1832) which became another influential text that sought to set the stage for the case of indirect rule in India. Malcolm,

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<sup>45</sup> Stern, *The Cat and the Lion*, pp. 39-48.

<sup>46</sup>G. H. Trevor, *Rhymes of Rajputana* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), p. iii.

in undertaking this extensive work of recording the customs and usages of the natives, gave his officials notes of instructions where he instructed them about the importance of maintaining a kind and conciliatory conduct in dealing with the natives. These notes are guided by his preconceived notions about the natives' society and polity and the assumptions are already laid before undertaking the survey. He mentioned that:

One of my chief objects has been to impress in the most forcible manner the great benefits which are to be expected from a kind and conciliating manner, and a constant friendly intercourse with those under your direction and control...You are called upon to perform no easy task: to possess power, but seldom to exercise it; to see the errors, if not crimes, of superstitious bigotry, and the miseries of misrule, and yet forbear, lest you injure interests far greater than any within the sphere of your limited duties, and impede and embarrass, by a rash change and innovation that may bring local benefit, the slow but certain march of general improvement...the numerous tribes and nations, with all their various institutions and governments, may truly, be viewed as a vast and ancient fabric, neither without shape nor beauty, but of which many parts are in a dilapidated state.. We are now its possessors, and we must make ourselves completely masters of the frame of the structure to its minutest ornaments and defects.<sup>47</sup>

Malcolm saw Indian society as ancient and the rhetoric of “civilizing mission” is clearly visible in his instructions, although he feared reforming the traditional structures in a rash manner. Malcolm’s work romanticized the indigenous structure of the government and administration and argued against interference with it. Malcolm argued that the long established states of Rajputs derived their legitimacy for their rule from the ruled people and therefore, were best means for good governance and improvement of society.<sup>48</sup>

However, Malcolm not only constructed the history of the region, but also the models of administration and society. He constructed and put forward a model that demonstrated that the traditional structures of the Indian society were best when left

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<sup>47</sup>John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India Including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, Vol. 2 (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832), pp. 474-475.

<sup>48</sup>Jack Harrington, *Sir John Malcolm and the Creation of British India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 141.



untouched by direct British rule. Malcolm argued that the power and authority of the princes remained restricted by the villages and district officials and further strengthened the argument by adding that the land belonged to the cultivators and the King only had the right to tax the cultivators.<sup>49</sup> Malcolm further mentioned that the village life retained itself in the face of political upheaval as well:

But, fortunately, the bigotry of the Mohomedans and the rapacity of the Mahrattas, alike understood and valued those ancient institutions, which render every village in India as an independent and distinct community, ruled by its own officers within its own limits.<sup>50</sup>

Malcolm also provided a detailed description of the population inhabiting central India and Malwa<sup>51</sup> and classified it on the basis of their common traits and practices. He asserted that many of the inhabitants migrated from neighboring regions. In that he noted the Marwar or Jodhpur Brahmins who came as traders and lived in the Malwa region, but most of them were laborers and cultivators.<sup>52</sup> Talking of the Rajputs<sup>53</sup> who were placed next to the Brahmins in social hierarchy, Malcolm asserted that the “Udaipur family of Rajputs is considered the highest in reputation followed by the Rathors of Jodhpur, the Kutchwa of Jeypoor and lastly the Hara Rajas of Boondee and Kotah.”<sup>54</sup> Malcolm also exalted the Rajpootnis i.e the women of Rajput castes, by arguing that:

Family pride appears with them the chief motive of every action, and they are at all moments ready, not only to brave danger, but to sacrifice their lives to support it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>Malwa province during the colonial period included parts of present-day Madhya Pradesh and south-eastern Rajasthan.

<sup>52</sup>Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 122-123. Malcolm placed them in a hierarchy on the basis of their rule; the most ancient being the higher one in order.

<sup>53</sup> Malcolm mentioned the classification of the Rajputs into military Rajputs, those who were cultivators, those who were engaged in trade and those who moved from place to place and were called the Brinjarries and Lodanahs.

<sup>54</sup>Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

Malcolm further described in detail the nature and character of various other social classes, including the merchant classes of Banias and Shroffs down to the level of peasantry and various tribes. Malcolm gave credit to Tod for furnishing the information connected to the past history and the present condition of the Rajputs states. Therefore, his ideas and “facts” about the Rajputs directly derived from Tod’s observations.<sup>56</sup>

The motivation behind the construction of a structure of Indian native society, by Malcolm, was to propagate that image to the outsiders in order to legitimize their indirect control over such regions. Malcolm, being an administrator, clearly wanted to minimize the cost of administration on part of the British company. He emphasized the natives’ superstitious beliefs and gave a detailed description of the various groups inhabiting the central and Malwa region to highlight an ancient and traditional image of their society. Guided by this image, Malcolm forcefully pushed for the policy of staying out of the internal social and administrative structure of the natives. Thus, both Tod and Malcolm were guided by their motivations of being the company servants and thereby constructed and propagated certain assumptions or “facts” about the natives that would help them in controlling and regulating their relations with the regional rulers in the most effective way.

By the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ethnographic enquiry of the British had changed to understand and gather empirical and detailed information and knowledge about the native population. The ethnographic categories became more concrete and in the wake of the revolt of 1857, ‘caste’ emerged as one of the more prominent category

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

for that description.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, the subject matter of ethnology had become standardized. One of the most important works in this direction was M. A. Sherring's *Tribes and castes of Rajasthan* which is part one of volume III of *Hindu Tribes and Castes* (1872). Sherring was a protestant missionary who intended to give a detailed description of the castes inhabiting India and this work became part of that extensive project.

I argue that while describing the various castes in Rajputana, Sherring had codified the hierarchy among various social groups and classified the various castes by their geographical distribution and their occupation.<sup>58</sup> He stated that the “the Rajpoots are everywhere first in rank and influence, and next to them came the Brahmans.”<sup>59</sup> Further, Sherring maintained that the agricultural castes in Rajputana, which were manly and independent, enjoyed higher status than those in other provinces of British India.<sup>60</sup> Along with the description of various customs and practices of different classes, he also delineated a cultural and religious milieu by describing the sacred and celebrated places of Rajputana. This revealed the cultural and religious heterogeneity in Rajputana where temples, mosques, various shrines all existed together and revered equally.

In one of the reports sent to R. H. Keatinge, Agent to the Governor-General of Rajputana, A. N. Bruce, the Political Agent of Hawrootee,<sup>61</sup> had written that “an intimate acquaintance with the traditions, manners, customs and character of the

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<sup>57</sup> Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the Brahmans of Marwar were different from those of Mewar in their food habits, customs and occupation as well and had limited intercourse with each other.

<sup>59</sup>M. A. Sherring, *The Tribes and Castes of Rajasthan: Together with Description of the Sacred and Celebrated Places of Historical Value of Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975), p. 7.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>61</sup>Hawrootee region of Rajasthan lies in the north-east of Malwa and comprises of present day districts of Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar and Tonk.

various races of mankind scattered over vast continent of India is important”.<sup>62</sup> Bruce further asserted that:

to acquire an accurate knowledge of the people possessing diversity of tongue, creed and habit, we have many difficulties to encounter and overcome; our information would be of little worth to scientific research could we not, with some show of reason, account for the many and strange dissimilarities and customs which must necessarily exist..the task is laborious one.<sup>63</sup>

The British officials acknowledged that Rajasthani society possessed great diversity in terms of its castes, customs and habits. Bruce acknowledged that “nearly every state of Rajputana had a peculiar dialect or patois of its own and the Hara would barely be understood out of Harowtee, or the Marwaree out of Marwar.”<sup>64</sup> But the officials wanted to understand and put together that information, to account for these differences, in a scientific manner. In his report, Bruce clearly noted that:

The desire of the Asiatic society, I apprehend, is primarily to ascertain from local authorities a list of the various races, an account of their habits and peculiarities, and a brief historical sketch of their supposed origin, with a view to testing that information by a closer, a scientific, and more searching investigation hereafter.<sup>65</sup>

Sherring’s work, therefore, relied on empirical data for studying the Indian society. And, therefore, while examining and describing the Rajputana society, he drew his information largely from the district manuals, the settlement reports and the writings of James Tod on Rajasthan.<sup>66</sup> Sherring’s work became an important part of the larger project of the enumeration of the native population through Census after 1872, where caste came to occupy the central position in defining the people and became a fundamental unit of India’s social structure. Nicholas Dirks in his work stated that:

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<sup>62</sup> Ethnology of Rajputana, Home Department, File No. 84, 1868, p. 1, NAI.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Sherring, *The Tribes and Castes of Rajasthan*, p. vi. Sherring mentioned various sources in his footnotes.

Collection of the kind of empirical information assembled by Sherring, and sharing the increasing formalization of his information, soon became the centerpiece of an official colonial sociology of knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

The next important text that sought to construct, define and codify a cultural identity of Rajputana was G.A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*. Grierson was in the Indian administrative service and proposed to undertake the survey of the languages spoken in British India. This survey was a culmination of the machinery for data collection established by the British government.<sup>68</sup> This survey sought to cover the area extending from the west to east, Baluchistan, the North West frontier, Kashmir, Punjab, Bombay presidency, Rajputana extending till Orissa, Bengal and Assam. Grierson planned the work in two stages. The first stage consisted of making a rough preliminary catalogue of all the variety of forms of speech which was used in the area under survey. The second stage consisted of collecting specimens of all the various forms of speech so catalogued; and then revising the first rough catalogue with the help of these specimens.<sup>69</sup>

Grierson himself admitted that a lot of specimens of the languages were discarded by him due to the unavailability of their grammar or dictionaries. The whole process of editing and classifying the specimens led to “unarchiving” (to borrow from Gyanendra Pandey<sup>70</sup>) of various forms of speech and therefore, they were kept outside the scope of the British officials' project. In the first stage, Grierson instructed his officials to catalogue only those specimens which were spoken by the people in their

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<sup>67</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Autobiography of an Archive: A Scholar's Passage to India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 97.

<sup>68</sup>Prabodh B.Pandit, 'The Linguistic Survey of India - Perspectives on Language Use', In Sirarpi Ohannessian, Charles A Ferguson and Edgar C. Polome, *Language Surveys in Developing Nations: Papers and Reports on Sociolinguistic Surveys* (Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), pp. 71–85.

<sup>69</sup> G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Part 1, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Government of India Publication, 1927), pp. 17-18.

<sup>70</sup>Gyanendra Pandey, *Unarchived Histories: The 'Mad' and the "Trifling" in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (New York: Routledge, 2014), Introduction.

daily lives within their households and not the ones which people used in bazaars or publicly. This exercise created demarcation between the courtly language and the everyday form of speech. It also highlighted the fact that the natives spoke in more than one form and switched between language codes depending upon the situations. Grierson noted that:

The object is to learn what natives of India call the languages which they themselves speak.... I hope it will be clearly understood that the names which I want entered are the names of genuine local dialects. In some parts of India people are more or less bilingual. A man will speak one language in his own house and among his familiar friends, and another language, a kind of court language, when talking in the city bazaars, in a public court, or to a superior. It is the former language which I wish to have recorded.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, Grierson was not concerned with the situation of bilingualism or multilingualism in the natives' society and narrowly focused on the identification and classification of the Indian languages. In context of Rajputana, he invented the term "Rajasthani" to denote the language of Rajasthan. Grierson also asserted that:

Rajasthani means literally the language of Rajasthan, or Rajwara, the country of the Rajputs. The name, as connoting a language, has been invented for the purpose of this survey, in order to distinguish it from western Hindi on one hand and from Gujrati on the other...natives do not employ any general name for the language, but content themselves with referring to the various dialects, Marwari, Jaipuri, Malvi, and so forth.<sup>72</sup>

Grierson also noted that "the average Indian villager does not know that he has been speaking anything with a name attached to it..the language names have generally been invented by the English since the natives did not grasp the idea connoted by the word 'language' and only understood that connoted by dialect."<sup>73</sup> The census report of 1901 also noted that "the terms Rajasthani and Western Hindi, under which most of the

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<sup>71</sup>Government of India, *Language Monographs, Census of India*, Vol. I, Part XI-C (i) (Delhi: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1961), Cited in Prabodh, p. 75.

<sup>72</sup> Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. 9, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. 1.

vernaculars used by the inhabitants of Rajputana are grouped, are not known to the people who recognize as distinct language, the various tongues such as Marwari, Jaipuri, etc., which are classed by Mr. Grierson as dialects.”<sup>74</sup>

Grierson’s survey resulted in the demarcation of Rajasthan as a distinctive cultural region based on “Rajasthani” language. He further noted that:

On its East, Rajasthani is bound (going from north to south) by the Braj Bhasha and Bundeli dialects of the Western Hindi. On its south (from east to west), it has Bundeli, Marathi, Bhili and Gujarati.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, by demarcating such language boundaries and by providing a map for the same, he codified the cultural identity of the region and this influenced the subsequent conceptions of Rajasthan as a cultural region.<sup>76</sup> The surveying of the culture of the natives resulted in the fixing of various “languages” as objects of such classificatory projects.

The Italian Indologist and linguist L. P. Tessitori’s contribution in undertaking the research on Rajasthani language and literature is immense. He worked with the Asiatic Society of Bengal and was engaged in “translating, commenting and publishing the medieval chronicles and the bardic poems of Rajasthan.”<sup>77</sup> He visited Jodhpur- Bikaner during 1914-19 and extensively conducted historical and bardic surveys and collected epigraphs and manuscripts pertaining to the history of Rathors of the region. Like Grierson, he was also interested in various dialects of Rajasthan and on the basis of philological and historical grounds, abandoned the old nomenclature of ‘Old

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<sup>74</sup> *Census of India*, Vol. XXV, 1901, p. 107.

<sup>75</sup> Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Lodrick, *Idea of Rajasthan*, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Vijay Shankar Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India: Dr. Satya Prakash Felicitation Volume* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981), p. 32.

Gujarati' for new name 'Old Western Rajasthani'.<sup>78</sup> He argued that language was a tool for understanding the past of that region. "Undoubtedly, Rajputana found in him the most significant champion for the cause of Rajasthani language."<sup>79</sup>

In this section, a historical process of construction of Rajasthan as a region is outlined. Further, it describes the ways identities of the natives are constructed by analyzing the various ethnographic works. This process began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the British started signing various treaties with the individual princely states and established their indirect relationship with them. By creating such ethnographic occasions the officials thus delineated the political boundary of the present day Rajasthan. By the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the political demarcation of the region there began a process of delineation of Rajasthan as a cultural region as well with the growth of massive accumulation of data and information about the natives' society in terms of their caste and language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Upon their encounter with Rajasthan, the British had to deal with diversity not only at the level of the physiographic features and political structure of various principalities but also language, cultural practices, customs and habits. This resulted in transformation of the region at the levels of political and socio-cultural structures. At the political level, the pragmatically calculated policy of 'indirect rule' was considered most effective by the British in controlling this hitherto unknown region and people. This was devised to keep the princely states as allies of the British and use them against the Marathas and other indigenous enemies, in times of emergency.

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<sup>78</sup>Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



To concretize the political relations, treaties were signed between the individual princely states and the British. Various principalities had existed in Rajasthan prior to the British intervention in the region. But the states were constantly embroiled in disputes over territorial possessions and expansion and therefore, the geographic and political boundaries remained blurred. However, the treaties sought to delineate the territories of the states as separate units. There did not exist any coherent territory called “Rajputana” and Tod had invented this term to denote the region covered by the Rajputs-ruled states. Therefore, through the attempts and policies of the colonial state, a hitherto fluid and abstract notion of the region, in terms of its territoriality and geographic boundary, got reified.

Tod’s served in the East India Company’s army since 1798 and experienced every aspect of a soldier’s life.<sup>80</sup> This personal background, I argue, could have influenced his perceptions towards the Rajputs, resulting in glorification of the martial virtues of Rajputs and his sympathetic attitude towards them. Tod’s narrative played a dual role. It not only helped design the colonial policy towards the princely state of Rajputana, but also provided the native Rajput states an account of their past. It also played an important role in defining the geographical and political boundaries of the region. With further editions of *Annals* being published over time and its wide reception, the functions played by the text changed depending upon the interests of the British. Until now, the British engagement with India was preoccupied with the knowledge of Bengal and the Brahmanical traditions. Tod’s narrative, on the other hand, served the task of bringing the hitherto unknown and exotic people of India to the forefront.

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<sup>80</sup>James Tod, *Travels in Western India* (London: W.H Allen and Company, 1839), p. xix.

The colonial officials started the collection of knowledge about the region which resulted in the production of a corpus of data and information about its society and culture. At the socio-cultural level, therefore, the ethnographic projects served two purposes. Firstly, these projects highlighted the peculiarities of the Rajasthani society and culture. And secondly, they sought to present a homogenous “reality” of the natives and conceptualize a regional identity. For example, Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey*, although highlighted and acknowledged the various dialects spoken in the different regions of Rajasthan, but he also invented the term ‘Rajasthani’ to denote those dialects, thereby, using language as a tool to provide a homogenous cultural identity to the region.

One of the features of the Rajasthani society is that instead of Brahmins, the Rajputs, belonging to the *Kshatriya* varna, were accorded the highest position in the social order by Sherring. This could be because of the reason that Rajputs had, for long, exercised power and control over the region. Moreover, the Charans and Bhats as a class remained peculiar to the Rajputana states and enjoyed considerable power over the Rajputs. As John Malcolm also acknowledged that both these groups “boast of celestial origins; they are the priesthood to the Rajputs and it is to them that the Rajputs look for solace in adversity and for joy in prosperity.”<sup>81</sup>

The relationship of the Charans and Bhats with the ruling elites therefore, cannot be seen as one with vertical hierarchy. The inter-relations between various castes in Rajasthan remained one of horizontal inter-dependence. For example, the Charans and Bhats “give praise and fame to those who are liberal to them; while they abuse those who neglect or injure them, with satire, reproaching them with spurious birth and inherent

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<sup>81</sup>Ethnology of Rajputana, Home Department, File No. 84, 1868, p. 10, NAI.

meanness.”<sup>82</sup> The relations remained fluid in the sense that depending upon the situations different groups exercised power over each other and the society could not have been understood in a scientific hierarchical manner, the way British had planned to do through their ethnographic projects.

The British ethnographic enquiry had resulted in revelation of the diversity in the Rajasthani society and culture. But at the same time the officials attempted to classify those diverse groups, their practices and dialects for their scientific understanding. This led to the construction of concrete identities of the various social groups and emergence of a Rajput dominated imagination of the region.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 11.



## CHAPTER 2

### IDEA OF RAJASTHAN: UNDERSTANDING THE REGION THROUGH ITS HISTORY

#### 1. Introduction

The state of Rajasthan lies between 23°03' north to 32°12' north of latitudes and 69°30' east to 78°17' east of longitudes and is situated in the western part of India.<sup>1</sup> Its area is about 130,206.7 square miles and is rhombic in shape.<sup>2</sup> The State is situated in land-locked north-western part of India covering arid Great Indian Desert and parts of semi-arid climatic zone.<sup>3</sup> Various parts of Rajasthan region were known by different names. For example, the Bikaner and Jodhpur area was historically called '*Jangaal desh*'; Doongarpur and Banswara were called '*Bagad*'; Southern part of Jodhpur was called '*Gurjartra*'; Jaisalmer was known as '*Maad*' while Kota and Bundi were known by the name of '*Hadauti*'.<sup>4</sup> The first mention of the term "Rajasthan" appears in James Tod's 1829 publication, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*.

Rajasthan emerged as a political entity with well defined territorial boundary due to the region's engagement with the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The association of the region with Rajputs and their worldview was also the result of the colonial encounter. The State of Rajasthan was considered as an abode of Rajput rulers, the princes and the heroic warriors. Therefore, the colonial officials propagated this Rajput dominated imagination about the region to the outside world and to the indigenous people as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, Vol. XXI, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Census of India*, Vol. X, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> L. R. Bhalla, *Rajasthan Ek Vistrit Adhyayan* (Ajmer: Kuldeep Publications, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Hukum Chand Jain, '*Rajasthan Adhyayan-Part 1* (Jaipur: Rajasthan Pathyapustak Mandal, 2012), p.2.

This Chapter discusses the subsequent historical works on Rajasthan written by the Rajasthani historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These works are analyzed to understand the ways in which history of the region was imagined and written. The Chapter also seeks to understand the trend that is set in the history writing of the region, as a result of those works. I argue that the Rajasthani historians focused majorly upon the political history of the various princely states and remained influenced by the colonial perspectives about Rajasthan and Rajputs. The Chapter also focuses upon the way the ideas about the region and Rajputs get incorporated into the nationalist movement. I argue that the Rajput dominated imagination of Rajasthan gets strengthened and propagated due to the nationalist leaders' appeal to their past.

A region is conceptualized as historically continuous process which gets institutionalized through four stages: assumption of territorial shape, development of symbolic shape, development of institutional shape and finally establishment of region, as an entity, in the regional system and social consciousness of the society.<sup>5</sup> The institutions of a society- economic, political, legal, cultural and educational-remain important for the institutionalization of the region. The collective dimension of a region can be understood through its institutional practices and history. But a region acquires ultimate personal meanings through the practices of everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Ideas and imagination about a region arise and get concretized, as a result of human actions and social institutions, as forces influencing their emergence. This Chapter attempts to understand the role of the Rajasthani historians in reinforcing the Rajput dominated idea and

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<sup>5</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'The Institutionalization of Regions: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Emergence of Regions and the Constitution of Regional Identity', *Fennia* 164:1, 1986, pp. 105-146.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

appropriation of that imagination by the Indian national movement, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## **2. Charans and Bhats: Traditional Historians of Rajasthan**

Throughout most of its history, Rajasthan has been politically divided among a number of small, territorial states, ruled by Rajputs. One of the largest and most powerful of these states was Marwar, with its capital at Jodhpur. This region is situated in the arid and semi-arid parts of Rajasthan, thus remained mostly isolated. The discourse on nineteenth-century Rajasthan has for long remained focused upon the transformation of Rajput princes and their nobles into 'dependent allies' and 'subordinate cooperation' between the princes and the British Empire.<sup>7</sup> Marwar became a formal ally of the British Raj with the signing of the treaty in 1818.

Norman P. Ziegler talks about the various Marwari prose chronicles and different genres of literature which have come down from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and served as sources for the reconstruction of the history of Marwar and Rajasthan.<sup>8</sup> These sources are known in Rajasthan as Bata (vata), Khyata, and Vigat. Pidhiavali (series or line of generations) and Vamsavalis (line of descendants) are forms of genealogy and specialist castes, such as Charans and Bhats had been traditionally involved in their transmission.

*Batan* is “an inspirational biographical narrative which deals either with the life history of an important individual (such as the leader of a Rajput clan) or with particular episodes in his life which are seen to be significant.”<sup>9</sup> The recitation of these tales was traditionally done by the Charan caste which maintained hereditary relations

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<sup>7</sup> Madhu Sethia, 'British Paramountcy: Reaction and Response by the Nineteenth Century Poets of Rajasthan', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 33, No. 11/12 (Nov. - Dec., 2005), pp. 14-28.

<sup>8</sup> Norman P. Ziegler, 'The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Marwar: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India', *History in Africa*, Vol. 3 (1976), pp. 127-153.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

with the specific Rajput families. These recitations played important roles in Rajput society. They not only became the primary medium through which young Rajputs were traditionally educated, but also “brought them into the history of their families, lineages, and clans; schooled in the moral values of their fathers; and tutored in their future roles in society.”<sup>10</sup>

The *pidhiavalis* are traditionally maintained and transmitted by the *Bhats*-the genealogist castes, who are also attached to the Rajputs and have hereditary relations of service with their patrons. The genealogies of the Rajputs are also fully recited by the lower castes in Rajasthan including the *Raikas* or *Rebaris*- a caste of herders of camels, sheep and goats; the *Dharhi*- a caste of singers and players of musical instruments and the *Dholis*- a caste of drummers. *Khyat* is a form of literature which concerns itself with the history of specific Rajput clan and its branches. These include the collections of tales and genealogies of the concerned Rajputs clans, their origin and history. Similarly, *Vigat* are lists and descriptions of the names of rulers, their descendants, and stories about important events related to the history of a clan and are appended to sections of *batan*.

Ziegler argues that these chronicles served a dual purpose. Firstly, the chronicles justified claims to rank and position, on local level, among Rajputs themselves. And secondly, these sources provided evidence for outside authorities, through a collected and organized body of traditions. With regard to the role Charans, Ziegler argues that a Charan was not “an "objective" historian but a seer, a guardian of legend and a conserver of tradition.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Charans and the *Bhats* played important functional roles in the Rajasthani society- of maintaining the Rajputs’ rights,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 137.



ranks and legitimacy of their position and fulfilled the social function of preserving the social order and hierarchy of castes.

Madhu Sethia talks about the Charan poetry and its important place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical narrative of Rajasthan. She argues that the Charans were equated with the European bards and their major role was to sing in praise of their lords.<sup>12</sup> Charans glorified the Rajput ideals and popularized them through their works and remained the custodians and narrators of their legends.<sup>13</sup> As eminent historian K. R. Qanungo also noted that:

The Charans and the Rajputs in historical times are found inseparable like body and soul. The Charan was the esteemed and faithful companion of the Rajputs.<sup>14</sup>

The Charans had a “community system of education and training which was a combination of the family environment, self-study, expert guidance and formal schools and included the knowledge of grammar, language, literature, philosophy, history, astrology, mathematics as well as religious tradition.”<sup>15</sup> For example, Shayamladas, who wrote *Vir-Vinod* and rose to prominence in Mewar court, was a Charan and had knowledge of astrology, ayurveda, Mahabharat, Ramayan and took help from Arabic, Persian and English scholars for his work.<sup>16</sup>

Sethia argues that due to the British intervention, post 1818 major political and social changes took place in Rajasthan, and particularly in Jodhpur. As a result of these changes the Charans composed poetry with anti-British sentiments and reflected the

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<sup>12</sup> Sethia, *British Paramountcy*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ethnology of Rajputana*, Home Department, File No. 84, 1868, p. 11, NAI.

<sup>14</sup> K. R. Qanungo, *Studies in Rajput History* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1960), p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Sethia, *British Paramountcy*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Santosh Yadav, ‘Shyamlasdas Varnit 19<sup>th</sup> Shatabdi ke Rajasthan ki Samajik Sthiti- Ek Vishleshan’, In Dr. Pema Ram, *Some Aspects of Rajasthan History and Culture* (Banasthali: Classic Publication, 2002), pp. 254-260. Shyamal Das wrote the history of Rajasthan in four parts, spanning across 2716 pages.

fears and apprehensions of the local people. Suryamal Mishran<sup>17</sup> maintained that British rule implied loss of dharma i.e. faith and way of life. He also warned that no one would be able to maintain their land holdings and would convert to Christianity, if the British stayed in Rajasthan.<sup>18</sup> Another Charan named Bankidas looked down upon the Rajputs, unlike Tod, for having handing over their autonomous rights to the British.

Sethia also argues that Charans remained unaffected by the colonial rule in Rajasthan and maintained their traditional system. Since they had access to both the courts and the outside world, their poetry not only represented the ruling elites but also mirrored the life and conditions of common people. Therefore, their works remained important source for understanding the different aspects of history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Rajasthan.

Tanuja Kothiyal in her work argues that the works composed by Charans and Bhats had significant literary and historical value.<sup>19</sup> She said that before the annalistic prose forms were regarded as history, verse forms composed by the Charans remained important for documenting history in the Rajput-Charan world. However, with the new ways of writing history coming up as a result of British rule, the Charans' narratives became obsolete and were discredited.<sup>20</sup> Since these works were based "on traditions and legendary accounts and were composed under royal patronage, they were regional in character and focused upon the chronological narrative of the political events and military

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<sup>17</sup> Suryamal Mishran was a poet from Bundi, Rajasthan. He belonged to Charan caste and wrote *Vamsa Bhaskar*, a history of the Bundi state, under Maharao Ramsingh.

<sup>18</sup> Sethia, *British Paramountcy*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Tanuja Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives: A History of Mobility and Identity in the Great Indian Desert* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 228.

<sup>20</sup> Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives*, p. 230.

exploits of the patron and their ancestors.”<sup>21</sup> The life and activities of heroes like Pritviraj Chauhan, Gora Badal, Pratap, Padmini, who created history in Rajasthan, remained inspiration for the poets and bards of Rajasthan.<sup>22</sup> Trying to rescue the Charans’ works, Kothiyal argues that the Charans never claimed their works to be regarded as ‘history’ and did not base them on dispassionate facts. The ‘truth’ in their works had less to do with objective facts, but more with the social order and the ideals that they tried to preserve through their *duha* and *khyats*.<sup>23</sup>

Kothiyal further argues that during the colonial rule the task for valorizing the Rajputs was taken over by the British authors and administrators based on ‘pure information’ which further negated the narratives composed by Charans. Kothiyal added that the “Charan narratives were largely meant to be oral narratives, as they were not to be read as chronicles, but were to be recited with particular emotion and listened to with awe and reverence in socio-religious gatherings that were marked by rituals and etiquette.”<sup>24</sup> As a result of the European practice of basing history on pure information and objective facts and not on native emotion, the Charans’ narratives lost their value and therefore the Charan’s identity also transformed to that of a mere informant for the British officials.

### **3. Rajasthan as Imagined by Rajasthani Historians of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the individual Rajput states began to set up historical departments and museums to promote historical studies in Rajasthan. This resulted in the composition of a

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<sup>21</sup> Vijai Shankar Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India: Dr. Satya Prakash Felicitation Volume* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981), p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives*, p. 230.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

series of *Khyats*, *Kavyas* and literary accounts with historical imagination about the Rajputs. The Albert Hall Museum at Jaipur, in 1886 and Victoria Hall Museum at Udaipur, in 1890 were opened for public.

One of the major works documenting the history of Mewar was *Vir Vinod* written by Kaviraj Shyamaldas in four volumes. In 1875, Shyamaldas was appointed as the head of the historical department of Mewar state, by Maharana Sajjan Singh. Shyamaldas's work documented the activities of the rulers of Mewar along with the other Rajput states for which he was honoured by the Maharana of Mewar and conferred the titles of *Mahamahopadhyaya* and *Kaisar-i-Hind* by the British government.<sup>25</sup> *Vir Vinod* was written in prose style and remained a unique and standard work which was produced for the first time by a native scholar in Rajasthan, since it marked the transition from 'Charanic tradition of writing history' to that of 'scientific history writing'.<sup>26</sup>

The tradition of history writing in Rajasthan based on original source material had commenced with Colonel Tod and was later followed by Shyamaldas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shyamaldas remained acquainted with various contemporary colonial officers including A.G.G. Henry Lawrence, Political agent Walter and Impey.<sup>27</sup> He also used a variety of source material for writing *Vir Vinod* including gazetteers, James Tod's *Annals*, *Khyats* and traditional folktales. Therefore, his method of history writing was influenced by British method of documenting history on scientific basis. This exercise was continued further in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much more vigorously by a galaxy of historians like Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha (1863-1947), Pt. Bishweshwar Nath Reu (1890-1966),

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<sup>25</sup> Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Hukum Chand Jain, *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha: Historiography and Historical Exploration of Rajasthan* (Jodhpur: Book Treasure Publisher, 2011), p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> Pema Ram, *Some Aspects of Rajasthan History*, p. 255.

Jagdish Singh Gehlot (1903-1958), Dasaratha Sharma (1903-1976) and Gopinath Sharma (1909-1996).<sup>28</sup>

Gaurishankar Ojha was a pioneer among the Rajasthani historians who gave a vision to the historiography of Rajasthan. The Government of India conferred the honorary title of *Mahamahopadhyaya* and *Rai Bahadur* on him.<sup>29</sup> Ojha was a renowned scholar of Paleography, a famous litterateur of Hindi and a great archaeologist and laid the foundation of history writing in Rajasthan by giving it a definite form. Ojha could have received much greater recognition, had he chosen to write in English than Hindi. But he wanted his words to “reach the teeming millions of India who could not read in English.”<sup>30</sup> Ojha remained in the service of Mewar state (Udaipur) and assisted Shyamaldas in the final stages of completion of *Vir Vinod* and was also appointed the assistant secretary of the historical department at Mewar.<sup>31</sup>

Ojha’s close association with the British officials shaped his ideas and vision towards Rajasthan’s past. He remained in contact with Lord Curzon when he came to visit Udaipur in 1902 and was further appointed the first curator of the Ajmer Museum by Lord Minto in 1908. He assisted Grierson in preparing the report on dialects of Udaipur and Sirohi for the *Linguistic Survey of India*, and he helped in compiling the *Imperial Gazetteer of Rajasthan*, and the *Gazette* of Mewar, Jaisalmer and Sirohi.<sup>32</sup>

One of Ojha’s major works was the *History of Rajputana*, published in 1926. He dedicated this work to Tod, whom he considered the true friend of Rajputs,

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<sup>28</sup> Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Dasaratha Sharma, ‘Mahamahopādhyāyā Dr. Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 28, No. 1/2 (January-April 1947), pp. 161-163.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>31</sup> Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas* (Ajmer: Vaidik Yantralaya, 1911), Preface, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Jain, *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha*, p. 8.

father of Rajputs's history and protector of their glory.<sup>33</sup> Ojha laid down his idea of history in the beginning of the book and asserted that the history of a group makes them eternal and gives an idea about the social, political and religious construct of their society.<sup>34</sup> Ojha set the tone of the work by arguing that people in India, since earliest times had witnessed foreign invasions and fought innumerable battles against them. Therefore, the virtues of valor and warriorship are deeply embedded in its culture and history.<sup>35</sup> He stated that his purpose of writing was to establish the chronological narrative of these events and people of Rajasthan, where one or the other part of the region remained under the control of the invaders throughout its history.<sup>36</sup>

Ojha published *Solankion ka Itihas*, *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas* and similarly produced a well planned series of state-wise dynastic history of Rajasthan. In *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas*, published in 1911, he mentioned that his interest in history of Rajputs began when he read the histories of Egypt, Greece, Rome, China along with Tod's *Annals* and Alexander Kinloch Forbes's *Rasmala*.<sup>37</sup>

Ojha became interested in the Rajputs' world and readily admitted, while writing *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas* that his purpose for writing about the Rajputs' past was to keep them alive in people's imagination. He referred to a Rajasthani proverb to support his argument that the discipline of History is needed to attest the advancement and progress of the every caste. "*Naam geetdon ya bheetdon se hi rehta hai*"- meaning that

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<sup>33</sup> Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *The History of Rajputana*, Vol. 1 (Ajmer: Vaidik Yantralaya, 1926), p. i.

<sup>34</sup> Ojha, *The History of Rajputana*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ojha, *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas*, Preface, pp. 3-4. *Rasmala* is a compilation of literary activities of Forbes in Gujarat consisting of history and folk literature of Gujarat in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

the glory of only those remain eternal whose character or history is written in historical narratives or whose palaces, temples or forts remain established.<sup>38</sup>

Ojha divided this work into eight parts which included the geographical description of the state, ancient dynasties, Chauhan dynasty, From Maharao Lumba to Maharao Man Singh, Maharao Surtan, Maharao Rajsingh to Jagat Singh, Maharo Bairisal to Maharo Ummed Singh and final part was about Maharo Kesari Singh.<sup>39</sup> The eight fold division of the work is entirely based on the divisions of political dynasties of the state and Ojha gave a detailed description of the various rulers and their political rule. Ojha did not devote more than four-five lines for writing about the social and cultural aspects of the state. He simply mentioned the names of various castes inhabiting the region, without providing any detail about their customs, practices and information about their everyday life.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Ojha's description about the cultural, social and religious milieu of the state remained inadequate as his focus remained the dynastic rule, administrative setup of various rulers and their association with the British Political Agents.

In *Udaipur Rajya Ka Itihas*, Ojha linked the history of the region with the heroism, glory, sacred sacrifice of Rajputs and their love for freedom.<sup>41</sup> His source for undertaking the task of writing Mewar's history was Muhnot Nainsi's *Khyat*, Kaviraj Shyamaldas's *Vir Vinod* and Tod's *Annals*.<sup>42</sup> Although Ojha gave due credit to Tod's history of Mewar, he also tried to fill the gaps which he thought were lacking in Tod's work.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Preface, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> This is given in the content list of the book.

<sup>40</sup> Ojha, *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *Udaipur Rajya Ka Itihas-I* (Ajmer: Vaidik Yantralaya, 1928), Preface, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Preface, pp. 8-9.

For example, when writing about Maharana Udai Singh of Mewar, Ojha mentioned an episode where he was saved by Pannadhari, who sacrificed her own son in his place.<sup>43</sup> Ojha stated that the age of Pannadhari's son was not six years, as mentioned by Tod, but 15 years old.<sup>44</sup> Another instance is mentioned by Ojha in his separate booklet on Maharana Pratap titled *Vir Shiromani Maharana Pratap* published in 1928, where he tried to dispel certain myths and doubts about Maharana Pratap and corrected the errors in Tod's work. However, Ojha aimed to dispel only those erroneous claims that were related to the dates, names, places or factual details in Tod's work. Ojha asserted that:

Tod had missed several important points while writing about Maharana Pratap and penned some fanciful things about Pratap. When Pratap was hemmed in by the royal army, he had to leave his meals five times and, due to scarcity of water, had to escape to Sindh. But he left the idea when minister Bhamashah offered all his property to him. However, pained by his daughter's cry for food, he approached Akbar for alleviating his pain and show mercy upon him. All these things are found baseless and I have tried to rectify such erroneous claims of Tod so that the truly revered life and glowing character of Maharana may be presented to people.<sup>45</sup>

Ojha remained under the influence of Tod only in the sense that he followed Tod's 'scientific' method of writing history and based his works on the Rajputs, like Tod. However, Ojha disagreed with Tod on a number of issues, including the theory about origin of Rajputs. Tod argued that the Rajputs were from the stock of Sakas and Scythians. However, since Ojha was a 'native' and vernacular historian, he sought to ascribe indigenous the origins to the Rajputs. Ojha argued that the Rajputs belonged to the lineage of Aryans and were *Kshatriya* by caste.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ojha, *Udaipur Rajya Ka Itihas*, p. 401.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *Vir Shiromani Maharana Pratap* (Ajmer: Vaidik Yantralaya, 1928), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-81.



Therefore, Ojha did not write an alternative narrative of Rajasthan which would differ from the earlier Charanic accounts of the Rajputs. Although he used the local and indigenous materials on an unparalleled scale and also discovered the various inscriptions, he remained preoccupied with the onerous project of writing about the political and dynastic history of Rajasthan.<sup>47</sup> Ojha's object of study remained Rajputs and documenting and reviving their glorious past. Except mentioning brief accounts of geographical description, climate, culture, places of worship, in various volumes of history of particular princely states, he did not adequately address the cultural, economic and social aspects of Rajasthan.

Another historian of equal importance was Pt. Bisheshwar Nath Reu, a Sanskritist and well versed in epigraphy and disciple of Gaurishankar Ojha. Reu was also conferred the title of *Mahamahopadhyaya* and was called *Sahityacharya*.<sup>48</sup> He was appointed as an assistant in the bardic chronicle department of Jodhpur state in 1910 and also headed the historical department.<sup>49</sup> He also became the superintendent of Archaeological Department and Sumer Public Library, Jodhpur.<sup>50</sup> Reu assisted Pt. Ramkaran Asopa, a highly revered scholar, in collecting and deciphering the inscriptions of Marwar and also helped the Italian Linguist Tessitori when he came to Jodhpur for his research work.<sup>51</sup> Reu took on the task of materializing the project of documenting the "authentic history" of Jodhpur for which he used a variety of materials including the

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<sup>47</sup> Ojha, *The History of Rajputana*, pp. 25-28.

<sup>48</sup> Pt. Bisheshwar Nath Reu, *Glories of Marwar and the Glorious Rathors* (Jodhpur: Archeological Department, 1943).

<sup>49</sup> Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> Pt. Bisheshwar Nath Reu, *History of the Rashtrakutas* (Jodhpur: Archaeological Department, 1933).

<sup>51</sup> Jain, *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha*, p. 44.

epigraphs, indigenous literature of *Khyats*, Sanskrit, Arabic and English works along with other archival sources.<sup>52</sup>

One of Reu's famous works was *History of Rashtrakutas* which was published in 1933 under the order of the Jodhpur Darbar.<sup>53</sup> The work contained the "history of early Rashtrakutas (Rathodas) and their well known branch, the Gahadavalas of Kanauj up to the migration of Rao Siha towards Marwar."<sup>54</sup> Reu remained the court historian of Marwar and published various works related to their political order and tried to bring out the grandeur of Marwar. This was illustrated in his work *Glories of Marwar and the Glorious Rathors*, a collection of his research papers, published in 1943. His efforts are duly acknowledged by Maharaj Kumar Hanwant Singh, heir apparent of Jodhpur when he wrote a foreword to his work and said that "Mr. Reu has done a great service to the state by his exhaustive and patient labour in the field of historical research and we owe him a deep debt of gratitude."<sup>55</sup>

Reu followed Ojha in his methods and extensively used original source material including archaeological, archival and literary works and laboriously tried to establish the facts with the source of information.<sup>56</sup> However, Reu tried to conceal those facts which could harm the prestige of Marwar rulers.<sup>57</sup> He can be best called a regional historian, who focused on Marwar and set a trend of writing only about the political history of the state.

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<sup>52</sup> Reu, *History of the Rashtrakutas*, p. i

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Reu, *Glories of Marwar*, Foreword.

<sup>56</sup> Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 38

<sup>57</sup> Jain, *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha*, p. 45.

Two most prominent modern historians of Rajasthan were Dasharatha Sharma and Gopinath Sharma, both disciples of Ojha. Their works provide a departure point from the political and dynastic histories of the states and began a trend of writing about the social and cultural aspects of Rajasthan's history. Dasharatha Sharma's work *Early Chauhan Dynasties* was an illustrative example of that endeavor. He argues that "there is no better theme for history than the determined struggle of a brave people for the maintenance of its liberty, religion and culture."<sup>58</sup> K. M. Panikkar held this work in high regard and praised Sharma for using every source available including inscriptions, bardic chronicles, *prashastikavyas* and Jaina literature which resulted in writing a more "accurate and impartial history."<sup>59</sup> Sharma wrote the history of of the Chauhans and dispelled various superstitions of the foreign scholars when he argued that India did not fall an easy prey to the Muslim onslaught and that the Chauhan rulers, even after the defeat of Prithiviraja, continued to pose determined resistance to Muslim "invaders".<sup>60</sup>

However, moving beyond the political developments and improving upon the themes of his predecessors, Sharma gave "the first systematic account of the religious, social, economic, literary and educational conditions of Chauhan dominion."<sup>61</sup> He divided the work into two broad categories- Part one dealt with the Political history and Part two dealt with Chauhan administration and life under Chauhan dominion. The second section dealt with the administrative setup of the rulers, their revenue structure and the social life of people under their rule. It also described the various religions that were followed by the rulers and people during that period. Sharma mentioned the

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<sup>58</sup> Dasharatha Sharma, *Early Chauhan Dynasties* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1959), p. ix

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

contribution of various Jain *acharyas* during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and argued that Jainism had “either favour or the active and steady support of a number of Chauhan rulers and their ministers.”<sup>62</sup> The second part of the work also mentioned the various castes inhabiting the Chauhan dominion and discussed their literary and educational developments. Therefore, *Early Chauhan Dynasties* can be considered as foundational in terms of exploring the social, economic and cultural aspects of Rajasthan to a great extent.

However, Gopinath Sharma became the pioneer in highlighting the social and economic aspects of Rajasthan’s history and diverting the attention of historians in post-Ojha period from the political and dynastic histories. *Rajasthan Studies* published in 1970 is a compilation of Gopinath Sharma’s research articles that he contributed to various Research Journals. These articles dealt with a variety of themes including the effect of geographical features of Rajasthan on its society and culture, Mughal impact on the costumes, dresses, ornaments and diet in Rajasthan, growth and development of various religious sects, emergence of bhakti cult in Rajasthan, literary and educational institutions, and development of Rajasthani paintings.<sup>63</sup>

Gopinath Sharma’s work *Rajasthan ka Sanskritic Itihas* is one of the most important works for understanding the various facets of the cultural history of Rajasthan. Sharma tried to present those aspects of cultural history of the region which were influenced by the ideological and religious movements and social customs and practices.<sup>64</sup> Sharma stated that Rajasthan remained the land of assimilation of foreigners

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>63</sup> Gopinath Sharma, *Rajasthan Studies* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Publishers, 1970), Preface.

<sup>64</sup> Gopinath Sharma, *Rajasthan ka Sanskritic Itihas* (Jaipur: Rajasthan Hindi Granth Akademi, 1989), Preface.

who came from time to time and their cultural traits got integrated with this region's culture.<sup>65</sup> He also sought to include the features of folk-literature, folk dance and classical literature of Rajasthan to acquaint the reader with the region's soul.<sup>66</sup>

Both Dasharatha Sharma and Gopinath Sharma were associated with the Government of Rajasthan in the post independence period. One of the interesting aspects of the Indian historiography during this period was the attention given to regional history.<sup>67</sup> Publication of various works on Rajasthan's history and culture was also an effort in this direction. Dasharatha Sharma edited the voluminous work titled *Rajasthan Through The Ages*, volume one and Gopinath Sharma edited the second volume of the same series. This was sponsored by the Rajasthan Government and published by the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner in 1966, in three volumes. It proved to be a comprehensive history of Rajasthan, meant for the general readers, a successor to the previous works of Tod and Ojha.

Acknowledging the importance of the work, the then President Rajendra Prasad said that "the history given in these pages is not merely a conglomeration of events in chronological order but considerable pains have been taken to include within its purview the common people of the region, their life and the changing panorama of their socio-economic conditions."<sup>68</sup> He further added that "it is the chapters and parts dealing with the people, their ways, customs and special characteristics, which make a fascinating reading since they furnish a glimpse of the conditions under which the common man

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Preface.

<sup>67</sup> B. G. Gokhale, 'Rajasthan through the Ages by Dasharatha Sharma', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1969), pp. 642-643.

<sup>68</sup> Dasharatha Sharma, *Rajasthan Through The Ages*, Vol. 1 (Bikaner: Rajasthan State Archives, 1966), p. 5.

flourished or decayed, with his hopes and aspirations, with his foibles and frailties, which affected his happiness and well-being and molded the destiny of his society.”<sup>69</sup> The then Chief minister Mohanlal Sukhadia also found the value of this comprehensive work in its ability to provide “an analysis of the development of society and its culture” for understanding of history.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, a clear shift in the interests of the scholars and also the state, from political history to exploring the various aspects of society and culture of Rajasthan was visible during the post independence period.<sup>71</sup>

A number of research institutes were established by the Rajasthan State Government after independence. One such institute, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute was set up at Jodhpur in 1950 by the government of Rajasthan. This institute has preserved the various manuscripts of princely states and helped in development of historical studies in the region.<sup>72</sup> Other institutes included Rajasthani Research Institute Jodhpur, set up in 1955; S. D. M. Institute of Oriental Research Jodhpur, set up in 1958 and Sadul Rajasthani Research Institute Bikaner, set up in 1957. All these institutes encouraged literary and historical studies in Rajasthan in the post independence era and various works with political, social and cultural themes about Rajasthan were published. The episodes and images from Rajputs history moved into the Indian nationalist historiography and served as the rhetoric for nation building project after 1947.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> M. S. Jain, *Rajasthan Through The Ages*, Vol. 3 (Bikaner: Rajasthan State Archives, 1996), Preface.

<sup>72</sup> Srivastava, *Cultural Contours of India*, p. 35.

<sup>73</sup> Jason Freitag, *Serving Empire, Serving Nation: James Tod and the Rajputs of Rajasthan* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 192.

#### 4. Nationalist Construction of Rajasthan

With discoveries of sources like inscriptions, relics and wide availability of literature in regional languages, the hitherto less explored areas like regional studies have come into focus. The emphasis on regional histories becomes important as along with compiling and preserving the local culture and traditional practices, they also help in reconstruction of national histories.<sup>74</sup> This is true with regard to Rajasthan's history and culture as well. Image of glorious and chivalrous Rajputana played a significant role in the history of the Indian national movement and subsequent building of Indian nation.

A number of journals and newspaper were published from Rajasthan during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which appealed to the Rajputs' past and awaken them to join the national movement against the British. One of the journals was *The Young Rajasthan*, published from Beawar, Ajmer from 1929 onwards, and became the leading nationalist weekly of the Indian princely states. In 1929, Indian National Congress appealed to Rajasthan by reminding it of her glorious and patriotic past. One of the reports, dated 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1929 the appeal is made in following words:

But what is Rajasthan doing? Alas, the answer is very saddening. Where once men were born who spurned at the choicest enjoyments of life to uphold the honor of the motherland and fought battles of matchless valor consecrating every inch of the ground with their blood; leaving the proud past aside even in her present degradation; Rajputana possesses mettle enough to fulfill her quota in the national program. Heroism is her legacy, self sacrifice the crowning trait of her traditional character and concentrated wealth her modern acquirement.<sup>75</sup>

Songs and couplets were written to appeal to the common people and revive the lost glory of Rajasthan. Rajasthan was considered as preserving the pride of Indian nation.

One such song was:

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<sup>74</sup> Pema Ram, *Some Aspects of Rajasthan History*, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Balwant Rai Mehta, 'Rise! Young Rajasthan', *Young Rajasthan*, No. 2, Vol. 1, 1929, p. 15.

*O soye Rajasthan jaag;*  
*O soye Rajasthan jaag, lekar maaru ke gaan jaag;*  
*le johar ke armaan jaag; o soye bharat ke abhiman jaag.*<sup>76</sup>

(O sleeping Rajasthan, awaken;  
O sleeping Rajasthan, awaken, by singing songs of the land;  
By cherishing the desire of *johar*; O sleeping India's pride  
awaken.)

Another song that was composed with similar sentiments was:

*Bharat ka pyara, aankon ka tara*  
*Chamkta sitara, unatti ka sahara,*  
*Ye hai Rajasthan, Virsthan!*<sup>77</sup>

In an article titled *Hero Worship*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1929 the author appealed to the Rajputs of Rajasthan to support the national movement, by invoking the image of virtuous Maharana Pratap in the following manner:

Maharana Pratap was the highest embodiment of the virtues which sum up Rajput character as exhibited in the days of its glory. Valor, physical strength, love of country, chivalry, skillful leadership, high-mindedness and unflinchingly facing danger found their highest expression in this great Rajputs, whose name will continue to shine in the annals of his race as long as virtue is valued..his achievement was unique, for all around him, there was demoralization and disunion. Single-handed, he fought and fought successfully, the greatest political danger of that confronted Mewar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century..however, it is a pity that his own descendants who rule Mewar at present, do not appear fully to appreciate the glory of Maharana Pratap..it is hoped that leaders of the Sisodia Rajputs will soon become alive to their duty towards their great ancestor and commemorate his immortal service..to provide perennial source of inspiration to his countrymen and add to the greatness and glory of Mewar, the centre of Rajputana, justly styled as the 'land of chivalry'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Bhurasingh Rathore, 'Rajasthan ka Aadarsh' *Kshatra Dharma Sandhesh*, No. 2, Vol. 1, 1943, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> 'Hero Worship', *The Young Rajasthan*, No. 14, Vol. 1, 1929, pp. 8-10.



The image of Maharana Pratap was used as a national symbol by the nationalist leaders to arouse the masses against the foreign rule of British. Just as Pratap fought with all his might for his country against the Mughals, the leaders sought to use him as a symbol for invoking the enthusiasm and courage of the people. This becomes clear from the following excerpt from one of the reports:

Pandit Kshemanand Rahat, the Secretary of the Rajasthani Hindi Sammelan, deserves the thanks of the whole country for setting afoot the movement for the observance of Pratap's birthday as an annual national celebration and the erection of Pratap's statue and the pilgrimage fair at Haldighati, the sacred valley hallowed by the blood of Pratap and his fellow martyrs.. it must be checked that the movement's nationalist initiators should be on their guard to avoid any problem.. Pratap must be seen as a national hero who fought against the foreign aggressor, for his countrymen.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, I argue that in this way the region along with its historical image and figures get imported onto the national level and the regional rulers are posed as saviour of the whole country. The appropriation of the Rajputs figures as symbols of national pride by the nationalist movement further reinforced the Rajputs dominated imagination of Rajasthan and propagated Rajasthan's glorious and chivalrous image.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Chapter looked at the imagination of Rajasthan as envisaged by the Rajasthani historians of the region. I argued that Tod's writing on Rajasthan served as the background which influenced the Rajasthani historians' methods of writing history. The Rajasthani historians, apart from having used a number of source materials, based their works and drew their assumptions from the colonial officials' perception about the region. I also argued that in the process of appealing to the Rajasthani people, for their support in the national movement against British, the Indian leaders reinforced a Rajput

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

dominated imagination of the region and appropriated the regional symbols from Rajput history to increase people's participation.

The first section of the chapter gave a background to the Charans and Bhats who were court historians or the traditional historians of the various Rajput principalities from the medieval period onwards till the region's encounter with the colonial rule. It also tried to understand the ways in which their roles changed from the court historians of the states to that of mere informants under the British influence. As a result of British rule, a new era began in the field of historical researches in Rajasthan and new ways of writing history and preserving the Rajputs' past emerged. The indigenous writers were also affected by the trend of documenting 'scientific' history when Kaviraj Shyamaldas wrote the historical account of Mewar *Vir Vinod* in the form, reminiscent of Tod's *Annals*.<sup>80</sup> The Charans remained mere informants for the British authors in the context when new objective histories of Rajasthan and various Rajput states were written.

The themes, subjects and features which constitute history of any society reflect the ways in which that region is imagined and constructed. The Chapter, therefore, focused on the dominant themes and ideas that preoccupied the minds of the Rajasthani scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which prompted them to write about the region's past. Shayamaldas and Ojha stood as pioneers in setting a trend in history writing in Rajasthan that focused upon the dynastic histories of various princely states. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus of historical researches in Rajasthan became the social and cultural aspects of the region which were best exemplified by historians like Dasharatha Sharma and Gopinath Sharma.

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<sup>80</sup> Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives*, p. 231.

I argued that even if there was a shift in the subject matter of historical researches in Rajasthan, the tendency was still to keep the Rajputs, the focus of study. The cultural history of Rajasthan also focused upon the Rajputs' cultural practices and customs. In the true sense, this shift did not mark a shift from elite history to people's history in Rajasthan. The Rajputs, as ruling class, remained the dominant object of historical research.

This imagination about Rajasthan gets further boost due to the nationalist leaders' efforts of awakening the Rajasthani people to fight against the British. The leaders had adopted the strategy of using the images of regional heroic figures, whose bravery and courage remained unparalleled in the glorious history of Rajasthan. They appealed to the Rajputs by reminding them of their fallen status under the British and asked them to revive their past, which was full of sacrifices, warfare and bloodshed, for freedom of their country from the Mughals.

This Chapter has explored the way Rajasthani historians viewed and wrote about the region's history and how it became synonymous with Rajputs' magnificent past. They explored those sources which were patronized by the state and presented a statist view of the region, its communities and culture. Therefore the interpretation of a region's history and culture, arising out of the study of such sources, was traditionally understood within the concept of the nation state. Moreover, the region along with its historical image and figures get incorporated into the nationalist discourse and Rajputs figures are appropriated, as symbols of national pride, by the nationalist movement. This resulted in reinforcing the Rajput dominated idea about Rajasthan and tied the imagination of the region with the idea of 'land of Rajas'.



## CHAPTER 3

### RE-IMAGINING RAJASTHAN: INTERPRETING CULTURE THROUGH ORAL TRADITIONS

#### 1. Introduction

Rajasthan is known to have one of the most complex societies with a rich variety of customs, folk traditions, history, art and culture. The dedicated efforts to collect and document this vast spectrum of oral traditions and building an alternative archive began in the post independence era. The project actualized with the establishment of Rupayan Sansthan in 1960 by renowned folklorist Komal Kothari and eminent storyteller and writer Vijaydan Detha. Their aim was to culturally map, document and understand Rajasthan from people's perspective. Both attempted to offer a local perspective on social groups of the region and thereby, a history from below which brought into question various established narratives of society and people. This was done in order to look beyond the restricted version of region and culture which had developed because of the colonial perceptions during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and to provide an alternative understanding of Rajasthan.

This Chapter tries to present a re-imagination of Rajasthan's culture and communities through an investigation of the published sources pertaining to oral traditions. The focus is mainly on the published dictionaries of proverbs and information gathered from interviews, conducted with people who remained associated with the western region of Marwar during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These sources become important in understanding the everyday experiences of the hitherto little known communities and people and their engagements and association with the region.

The Chapter is mainly concerned with an analysis of the Rajasthani proverbs from a socio-cultural standpoint. More importantly, it deals with the ways in which peoples' engagements with the region and culture are articulated in proverbs. Proverbs related to history, historical figures, geography of the region, seasons, agriculture, communities and castes and women offer an insight into various aspects of the region and its culture. It provides an understanding of the heterogeneous strands running in the Rajasthani society in terms of the questions relating to people's perception of the culture, societal structure, family, kinship, marriage and division of labor.

I argue that the idea of region and culture is determined in multiple ways with inherent subjectivities involved in their constructions. These subjectivities are due to the different ways in which people associate themselves with the space that they inhabit, which determines the heterogeneity of cultural practices and diverse traditions within one bounded region. This understanding fractures the idea of homogenous 'Rajasthan' with its unified Rajput culture that is developed by the official accounts. I argue that as opposed to the colonial and official imagination, people's construction of the idea of region and culture remains flexible and for them, boundaries of a region are porous and hazy.

Folk tradition and oral narratives become the most important sources for understanding the social and cultural construct of any community whose histories remain "unarchived". Such histories familiarize us with the idea of heterogeneity and multiplicity of perspectives. In such a context, where these communities never speak openly of their lives, it is only through a cultural study through oral sources that their lives, experiences,

desires and aspirations can be known to some extent.<sup>1</sup> These sources include folktales, folk songs, popular sayings, proverbs, myths, epics etc. The Chapter focuses upon the proverbial speech since this is a speech genre that is used in rural northern India as a form of everyday moral commentary.<sup>2</sup>

Ashis Nandy in his thought provoking work *History's Forgotten Doubles* asserts that there are a number of ways in which the 'ahistorical' societies reconstruct their past and make sense of their present and future. He argued that the aim of historical oriented societies is to "bare the past completely, on the basis of neatly articulated frame of reference...since history cannot be done without ordering its data."<sup>3</sup> However, he asserted that there cannot be one true or objective past and there are competing versions of the past. In contrast, there are societies where myths, memories, popular culture and folk traditions play a crucial role in reading the past. Such societies present the possibility of multiple reconstructions of the past.

Badri Narayan in his important work, *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contesting Memories and Dalit Political Discourse*, argues that contestations are an inherent part of every society and pose a challenge to the narrative of domination within that society. He tries to unearth these contestations by exploring the collective memory of people, using myth as a tool. The myths become a catalyst in evoking memories and helps in the construction of identities of different groups. In this way, such

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<sup>1</sup> Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Goodwin Raheja, 'Limits of Patriliney: Kinship, Gender and Women's Speech Practices in Rural North India', In *Gender, Kinship and Power: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary History*, Mary Jo Maynes, Ann Waltner (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 149-175.

<sup>3</sup> Ashis Nandy, 'History's Forgotten Doubles', *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May, 1995), pp. 44-66.

groups raise questions about the dominant structures and unravel the multiplicity of narratives present within the society and remembered pasts.

An interesting study of exploring people's perspectives of history and past is Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar's *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power and Memory in Rajasthan*. The work differed from other accounts of past in Rajasthan in the sense that it dealt with the "conditions and events from the viewpoints of subjects, not rulers."<sup>4</sup> The work explores the peoples' memories of everyday life based on their testimonies, about the radical political and environmental changes that took place in Rajasthan from 1930s to 1950s. Their work does not claim to "weigh speakers' interpretations against supposed actuality, rather layer multiple versions to achieve a textured, contoured narrative density."<sup>5</sup> The analysis of proverbs, used by people, throws light on the multiplicity of perspectives about past and lived experiences inherent within Rajasthan's society and culture.

Folklorist Komal Kothari's aim was to "marginalize the over-represented Rajput hagiography surrounding the royal families and warriors" and instead he travelled through the length and breadth of Rajasthan to survey the lesser known musical communities of Langas and Manganiyars and their musical traditions.<sup>6</sup> Kothari had distinguished himself in the folk music of Rajasthan and argued that music has been integral part of the Thar region and the reason for this feature is the geographical conditions of the area with long dry months of the harsh desert summer, where the

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power and Memory in Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan-An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 9.



farmers do not have enough farming to do.<sup>7</sup> Kothari became a pioneer in this area by focusing on the lives of two traditional Muslim musical communities- the Langas and Manganiyars.

Kothari defined the region of Rajasthan on the basis of three agricultural zones: the *bajra* zone (pearl millet), the *jawar* zone (sorghum) and the *makka* zone (maize) and used these zones to explore the materiality of the everyday life and explain the mapping of various oral traditions in Rajasthan.<sup>8</sup> Kothari explained the interrelation between geography and oral epics mediated through the musical instruments. He argued that the musical instruments and oral epics claim a particular geographical region in Rajasthan. For example, the *kamaycha*, a bowed string instrument, is strongly associated with the grass growing pasture regions in Rajasthan, while in other parts region this instrument is not known.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, Kothari pointed out the ways in which one could learn about the geography of the region through the oral traditions. Kothari also tried to align the oral culture with the material culture of Rajasthan and provided an insight into the anxieties and everyday lives of the marginalized communities.

## **2. Proverbs in Society**

For understanding the relevance, nature and usage of proverbs Wolfgang Mieder's works are very relevant. In his book, *Proverb: A Handbook*, he discusses a whole range of proverbial concerns including definition, meanings, dissemination, form, structure, usage and context of proverbs. Mieder asserted that proverbs have been part of oral and written

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<sup>7</sup> Komal Kothari, *Monograph on Langas: A Folk Musician Caste of Rajasthan* (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Institute of Folklore, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Bharucha, *Rajasthan-An Oral History*, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

communication since pre-literate times and they have not ceased to be of importance even in the modern times. He says that new proverbs are added on with time as the old ones go out of use, since they are a reflection of the socio-cultural milieu and change in the latter also leads to corresponding change in the former.<sup>10</sup>

Prem Chowdhry's work on the women in Haryana is an excellent work that deals with the usage of proverbs to explore questions relating to family, kinship, marriage and sexuality from 1880 to 1990. The author has tried to situate the gender and power relations and the subsequent changes in these relations within the socio-economic and cultural milieu during this time. She used a range of sources from archival material to fieldwork involving oral sources which included interviews, use of folktales, folksongs, proverbs and popular sayings. She tried to explore the proverbial speech of the marginalized sections of society i.e. the women, to understand their worldview in a homogenized peasant culture where sanctioned practices that came to control lives of these rural women.

Before delving deeper it is important to understand what proverbs are and what functions they play in society. It is difficult to define proverb in a specific way because of its concise form. Wolfgang Mieder too argued that no such definition is possible so as to encompass all the proverbs. However, acknowledging the problems, he defined:

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Mieder, *Proverbs*, p. 3.

Proverbs are based on the human experiences and observations of everyday life and a source of effective communication and therefore become a lens through which the socio-cultural milieu of any society can be investigated. Proverbs are a safe index of the lives, mode of living, current thoughts, the intellectual and social status, surroundings, and in fact everything else that goes to make up the social life of people.<sup>12</sup>

According to Mineke Schipper, proverbs can be described “as short pithy sayings, ingeniously embodying an admitted truth or common belief” and emphasized “its concise fixed artistic form; its evaluative and conservative function in society and its authoritative validity.”<sup>13</sup> Apart from this, she further asserted that collective social acceptance of the proverbs strengthens their authority and truthfulness and they function not in isolation but in a complex social and cultural context. Folklore and proverbs also emerge as important tools for exercising social control, justifying institutions and certain beliefs and attitudes.<sup>14</sup> In defining proverbs two aspects come to light: structural i.e. how they are and functional i.e. what they do.

Apart from the external features of proverbs, there are certain stylistic features internal to them that add to their rhetorical efficacy. These include ridicule, humor, parody, sarcasm, derision, and exaggeration which are effectively employed by the lower castes and especially women in Rajasthan in their ordinary conversations to present their own perspectives on society, kinship and power relations within communities.<sup>15</sup> They are not only instructive but full of satire. They are also metaphorical

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<sup>12</sup> John Christian, *Behar Proverbs* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1891), p. viii.

<sup>13</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs and Sayings on Women* (London: Allison and Busby Books, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> William R. Bascom, ‘Four Functions of Folklore’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 67, No. 266 (Oct. - Dec., 1954), pp. 333-349.

<sup>15</sup> Raheja, *Limits of Patriliney*, p. 153.

in nature by virtue of which they allow the speaker to break into sensitive matters in a very indirect manner.

Kwesi Yankah in his article *Proverb Rhetoric and African Judicial Processes: The Untold Story* also argued that the “rhetorical force cannot be separated from the efficacy of the argument it embellishes.”<sup>16</sup> He examined the use of proverb rhetoric in the African judicial arbitration and concluded that the proverbs used in the court embellish the core arguments and they cannot be considered as solely accountable for the events and judgments of the courts. Infact, the proverbial rhetoric is “enmeshed with the rhetoric of evidence and traditional law”<sup>17</sup> in African tribal society.

Kenneth Burke explained that proverbs are “designed for consolation or vengeance, for admonition or exhortation, for foretelling” in such a way that “they become *strategies* for dealing with *situations*. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them. Another name for strategies might be *attitudes*.”<sup>18</sup>

Vijaydan Detha was a pioneer in the field of folk traditions of Rajasthan. Detha was a Charan by caste and was born and brought up in the village of Borunda, in Jodhpur.<sup>19</sup> He was actively involved in the collection of folk tales and folk songs in his village and published them in 14 volumes work titled *Bataan ri Phulwari* and *Geeton ki Phulwari* respectively. Detha tried to explore and express the dreams and realities of the

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<sup>16</sup> Kwesi Yankah, ‘Proverb Rhetoric and African Judicial Processes: The Untold Story’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 99, No. 393 (Jul. - Sep., 1986), pp. 280-303.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Burke, ‘Literature as Equipment For Living’, In *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 293-304.

<sup>19</sup> Vijaydan Detha, *Geeton ki Phulwari* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2003), p. 17.

people of Rajasthan through investigation of their folk traditions. He took up the task of listening to the folk tales and writing them on the literary and creative basis.<sup>20</sup>

Christi Merrill worked along with Kailash Kabir to translate Detha's stories in English and introduce his work to Indians and outsiders. She said that his stories remained "politically engaged and certainly mirthful."<sup>21</sup> According to her, Detha decided to translate the local *boli*, that is the spoken idiom, of Rajasthan into written, literary form in an effort to "give voice to a subaltern version of Rajasthani."<sup>22</sup> He wrote down the stories as he heard them and decided not to write them "in Hindi, the newly minted national language that the people of Rajasthan were officially purported to speak, but in the rich local idiom people actually told the stories in".<sup>23</sup> Merrill described Detha's excitement at having encountered such vibrant folk culture in Rajasthan in the following words:

the stories were everywhere, vibrating in the air; his pen couldn't move fast enough to record them all...He tried writing out the stories exactly as he heard them; he was so excited to discover such a vibrant but sadly overlooked tradition in Rajasthan that he could hardly sleep at night, could hardly stop writing.<sup>24</sup>

These stories were written in Rajasthani language and Detha connected the meaning and purpose of these traditional stories with the struggles and problems of contemporary life.<sup>25</sup> Detha's narratives revolved around the abuse in marriage, anti-patriarchal and feminist elements along with tropes of caste-based discrimination and it questioned the entrenched forms of injustice in a very playful and captivating way. Some of his

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Christi A. Merrill, *Riddles of Belonging: India in Translation and Other Tales of Possession* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

popularly known stories are strikingly feminist, promoting same-sex love between two women.

Detha has also worked on Rajasthani proverbs and published his *Rajasthani-Hindi Kahavat Kosh* in eight volumes in 2001, the first volume being published in 1977. Detha asserted that the inherent contradictions of practical life get reflected through these philosophical-formulae of the folk. Proverbs derive their essence from such contradictions of life and he said that the same proverb can have two different meanings depending upon the context.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, in order to make the meaning of a proverb intelligible, it must be seen and understood in its context.

For writing and documenting the proverbs, Detha first made various slips of the proverbs collected by the Rupayan Sansthan, along with their various differing versions. This compilation came to nearly 60,000 slips. Once these slips were ready, they were taken to the local people and the process of cross checking the proverbs and adding new ones began. The importance of this extensive process lies in the fact that the context in which particular proverbs were spoken or used were mentioned on these slips and the name of the speaker was also written along with it.<sup>27</sup>

Having looked at the definitions, theoretical aspects of proverbs and their usage and functions played in society, the following sections will deal with the ways in which people articulate their perceptions about the region and its culture in their everyday proverbial speech.

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<sup>26</sup> Vijaydan Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh: A Dictionary of Rajasthani Proverbs*, Vol. 1 (Borunda: Sabal Publications, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

### **3. Engaging with Culture: Understanding People’s Perspective through Proverbs.**

The Marwar region of Rajasthan is an area which is mostly covered by the Thar Desert and it is the largest in extent, of all the Rajasthan States.<sup>28</sup> According to folklorist Komal Kothari, this region is a culmination of “colonial cartographic experiments, drawn from seminal work by James Tod, which presented Rajasthan in relation to the Rajputs elite.”<sup>29</sup> The mainstay of the economy in Marwar is agriculture and animal husbandry.<sup>30</sup> About 70 per cent of the people are directly dependent on farming for livelihood and during normal year, which are unfortunately not frequent, the region raises nearly all of its own food, about 82 percent of its crops being food crops.<sup>31</sup> However, periodic failure of agriculture, rains and frequent droughts leading to famines is a recurring feature of this arid zone.<sup>32</sup> Attesting this situation in the desert region, one of the administrative reports on Marwar stated that:

The greater part of the soil is mere desert and where agriculture, almost the sole industry of the people, is possible, it is rendered precarious by a scanty and capricious rainfall and a deficient and defective water supply in the soil, there being no perennial rivers in the state.<sup>33</sup>

People developed strategies to deal with these material conditions and memories of their everyday engagement with this region found place in the rich folk sayings.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Rajputana Gazetteer*, Vol. II, 1879, p. 248.

<sup>29</sup> Rupayan Sansthan Jodhpur, *Integrated Institutional Development Plan 2018-22*, p.6, retrieved from [www. sahapedia.org](http://www.sahapedia.org).

<sup>30</sup> S. P. Malhotra, *Socio-Economic Structure of Population in Arid Rajasthan* (Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur), p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Census of India*, Vol. X, 1951, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> L. P. Bharara, ‘Indigenous Knowledge in Control of Drought and Desertification in Arid Zone of Rajasthan’, In Sheo Kumar Lal, Umed Raj Nahar, *Development of Underdeveloped Regions: A Case of Arid Region* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), p. 121.

<sup>33</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Marwar State for the year 1915-16* (Jodhpur: Marwar State Press, 1917), Vol. XXXII, p. 1, NAI.

## Agriculture

Based on the daily experiences in the area people developed a plethora of proverbs, which became part of their collective memory, about rains and agricultural operations. For example, the traditional wisdom related to agriculture is reflected in their proverbs and is transmitted through generations to attest to their importance in peoples' lives.

*Khat pare to khet, Nahin to Kero-ret*<sup>34</sup>- it means without fertilizer or manure, an agricultural field is nothing but a heap of sand.

*Khat aur paani. Ke kare binani*- it means that agricultural produce will be good only when there is enough fertilizer and water, god can do nothing.<sup>35</sup>

*Khet huve toh gaon se aathuna hi huve*- it means that agricultural fields should be located on the western side of the village.<sup>36</sup>

One of the interviewees reported that in the rural areas, women used this proverb- *tero khet aaguno hove* i.e. your field should lie in the east of the village- as a common way to curse other women so that while going in the morning and coming back in the evening from the fields, the sun always faces them.<sup>37</sup> This proverb reflects women's involvement in agricultural operations throughout the day and also tells us about their experiences in the hot and arid conditions of Thar. One of the proverbs attesting the permanence of this life condition in this region is: "*Sooraj sei thaud ek so tape*"-i.e the sun heats up everywhere in the same way.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> D. R Ahuja, *Folklore of Rajasthan* (New Delhi: National Book Trust India, 1980), p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 55, Proverb no. 484.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57, Proverb no. 501.

<sup>37</sup> This information is given by a 50 year old respondent, Suman Choudhary who spent most of her life within the rural area of Rajasthan. The interview was conducted in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 14127.



## Rains

Local communities in Rajasthan in the Western Desert region have faced scarcity of water since times immemorial and have also coped over the years with this problem, which is more of a condition of their lives in this region. Describing the situation of water scarcity in Jodhpur Colonel Archibald Adams, the administrative medical officer in Rajputana who surveyed the region for 18 years, said that:

Jodhpur did not possess sufficient water storage space for 12 months' provision, and thus the inhabitants were compelled to go long distances to the wells, mostly outside the city walls, for the quantity necessary for their requirements. The water in the tanks having become exhausted, the wells adjacent soon ceased to give a sufficiency to the crowds who swarmed to them often fighting fiercely in their endeavors to help themselves to a "ghara" of water. The consequence was that the women had to suffer much toil and hardship in bringing water from great distances, or they had to pay exorbitantly for it to the "bhishtis", who brought it in on camel or bullocks for sale.<sup>39</sup>

People developed a relationship between rainfall and various natural elements like wind, clouds, wind direction and month. They devised such connections based on the repeated behavioral changes in these elements over specific period of time and their observations are confirmed and passed on from one generation to the next. The following proverbs attest to these relations.

*Aandhi aai toh meh bi aasi-* it means that rains come along with storms.<sup>40</sup>

*Badal kar garmi kare, jad barsan ki aas*<sup>41</sup>- when the sky heats up, once the clouds spread across, then one hopes for rains.

*Moriya chodya o mhara indar raja, dugraan o koyal ne chodya hariya bagh o-*  
the peacock left the hills and the *koyal* left the garden, since there is no rain and

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<sup>39</sup> Col. Archibald Adams, *The Western Rajputana States- A Medico-Topographical and General Account of Marwar, Sirohi and Jaisalmer* (London: Limited York House, 1899), p. 117, NAI.

<sup>40</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 1, Proverb no. 525.

<sup>41</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 153, Proverb no. 1434.

greenery; Inder Raja order the clouds to bring showers of cool rains to our region.<sup>42</sup>

There are also proverbs which reflect peoples' concerns related to rains, irrigation and importance of water for their existence.

*Paani ri peek dumaar mein dekho* - the importance of water is felt when there is scarcity.<sup>43</sup>

*Sau kosan beej khivein, unsu kisau sneh,; Tisna toh jad bhaagsi, aangan barse meh-* it means that there is no craving for the lightening that happens 100 *kos* far, the desire will be fulfilled when it rains at home.<sup>44</sup>

*Paani, Paala Paadshah uttar su aave-* it means that water (rain), winter and king all come from the north.<sup>45</sup>

The last proverb is an articulation of the historical experience of the people of foreign invaders who came from north of western Rajasthan. The life of these people is closely tied to rainfall which determines the availability of food and a good harvest. This is amply reflected in the proverb- "*Meh baba aayo, kachar ne mateera layo*"- it means when rains pour, the region is full of edible fruits.<sup>46</sup>

The cultural practices of the rural communities in this region are determined by the rainfall pattern and various festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm depending upon the quality of monsoon. For example, one of the practices is when married women

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<sup>42</sup>Kanhaiyasingh Bhati, 'Gramya Geet', *Kshatra Dharma Sandesh*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (1942), p. 15. Inder is worshipped as god of rains.

<sup>43</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 7036.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Proverb no. 14347. Kos is a local term for measurement of distance. 1 kos is equivalent to approximately 2 kms.

<sup>45</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 7005. Also in Sahal, p. 140, Proverb no. 1314.

<sup>46</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 11617, Kachar and Mateera are the indigenous variety of watermelon in this region.

are brought to their natal home, by their brothers, for the festival of *Shravani Teej*. This festival is about peoples' association with nature.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, when monsoon season strikes and there is inadequate rainfall, peoples' disappointment is reflected in this proverb: "*Bhai ne melhi, o mhara inder raja, benoli o duniya ne melhi ghar ki naar*"- brothers have sent their sisters to their in-laws home and the husbands have sent their wives.<sup>48</sup>

### **Seasons and Droughts**

Regarding famine of 1868-69, which is still remembered as a most terrible one for Marwar as well as many other parts of India, it is reported that:

week after week the same weather passed... till the fierce October sun burnt up altogether what remained, leaving Marwar an arid and withered expanse... two mighty streams of human beings and cattle poured out of the region however, thousands of Marwar emigrants died in these countries to which they went and innumerable herds of cattle perished. It is estimated that Marwar alone suffered a loss of 323,000 souls and 200,000 head of cattle during this terrible famine. Among the lower castes- Grasias, Minas and the Bhils, the famine had pressed very heavily. For some after the famine they earned their livelihood by collecting grass and fodder for cattle, and used to increase their precarious meals by adding thereto, a large proportion of the bark of the khejri tree, or the barbed seed of the *gokroo*, ground to a fine flour.<sup>49</sup>

People have been living in balance with their natural surroundings in the arid region of Rajasthan since centuries. They have developed various adjustment mechanism based on their generations of observations and experiences including the traditionally perceived indicators of drought prediction.<sup>50</sup> These indicators become warning signals for the farmers to keep them mentally prepared for facing the oncoming drought in the area and

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Anchi Devi. The interview was conducted in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Bhati, 'Gramya Geet', *Kshatra Dharma Sandesh*, p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> Adams, *The Western Rajputana States*, pp. 144-149, NAI.

<sup>50</sup> This information is given by one of the interviewees, Anil Lamba, who has an experience of 11 years of interaction with the inhabitants in this region. The interview was conducted in Jodhpur, Rajasthan on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

govern their behavior.<sup>51</sup> For example, a proverb indicates the conditions leading to famine:

*Sawan pehli panchami, je baje bahu baya;*

*Kaal pare sab des mein, minakh minakh nai khaya-*

If a strong wind blows on fifth day of Savan month, then it's a sign that massive famine will strike the country where man will eat another man.<sup>52</sup>

The relationship of people of the Western Desert region (used synonymously as Thar) with drought is represented in the folk culture through proverbs. Some of the proverbs that deal explicitly with the situation of droughts are:

*Khen, kodh, khansi dusi, do hathan kirtar; Maran, marag mokla, meh bina mat*

*mar-* meaning that TB, leprosy, cough and cold, you may give us with both hands;

we can be killed in many ways, but don't kill us without rain.<sup>53</sup>

This proverb not only tells us about the drought prone condition, but also a great deal about the prevalence of life threatening diseases like TB and leprosy in this region.

Another proverb attesting the similar view is:

*Sau sandiya, sau karahala, put, niputi hoe; Mehadla to buthan hi bhala, honi ho*

*so hoe-* a hundred she-camels, a hundred camels, all left childless, what is

destined to be will be, even so a few drops of rain would be a blessing.<sup>54</sup>

The above mentioned collection of proverbs related to rains, droughts and seasons illustrates that people try to rationalize various coincidences such as the wind direction,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 210, Proverb no. 1992

<sup>53</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan an Oral Tradition: Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 81

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

cloud formations, animal behavior based on their age old practices, as part of their survival strategies in the drought-prone region of Thar.

Komal Kothari, while talking about the drought and its vivid memories that people, had said that Rajasthan was afflicted with a severe famine (of 1899-1900) which is identified as the 'Chhapanna', meaning 'fifty-six' according to the Samvat Indian calendar year.<sup>55</sup> This famine extended to the areas as vast as Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and other neighboring states of Rajasthan and those who survived this recalled their terrible experiences of that time. One of the proverbs recounting the 'Chhapanna' famine is:

*Chhapanei aur chhinvei mein bachgya ve abe ni mare* i.e those who have survived the famines of 'chhapana' and 'chiyanbe' will not die now.<sup>56</sup>

An official topographical account written by Colonel Archibald Adams, the medical officer of Jodhpur, also noted the famine ridden conditions in this region. Famines resulted in the massive dislocation of the population from Jodhpur and other adjoining areas during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

famines in the thinly populated districts of western Rajputana are not severe on the inhabitants... Failure of crops and grass is so common in western desert, that people are semi-nomadic in their habits. When the monsoon fails, they leave their homes, with their herds and flocks, to find pasture before the animals became too impoverished to make the long journeys into kotah, Malwa and sindh, which they have frequently to do on account of the capriciousness of the rainfall. Also, like the harvest-men of the west of Ireland, many of the laboring classes in these parts migrate to the Indus and opium fields of kotah and Malwa. In this way they tide over frequent bad seasons and accumulate money for their marriages and funeral feasts.<sup>57</sup>

Kothari further remembered the stories about the famine and the ways people survived and helped each other. He narrated one story about a Rajput husband and wife who had

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<sup>55</sup> Bharucha, *Rajasthan an Oral Tradition*, p. 81.

<sup>56</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 2, Proverb no. 4667. Chiyambe, (literally ninety-six) famine is identified with the great Bengal famine of 1943 according to Samvat Indian calendar year.

<sup>57</sup> Adams, *The Western Rajputana States*, p. 153, NAI.

left their village during the severe drought. However, facing acute crisis the husband left his wife near a sand dune alone in night and fled. The woman wandered in search for food and water and reached a village of low caste *Bhambhis*. They provided her with shelter and taught her stitching work so that she could earn her living just as they did. When a year later her husband returned at the same *dhora* (sand dune), and traced the whereabouts of his wife, he ridiculed the *Bhambhis* as low castes. His wife then confronted him that those people had saved her life when he had fled and she decided to stay back with them. Kothari said that many other stories were part of people's memory and reflected the survival strategies of the ordinary folk. Therefore, their memory needed to be tapped in order to deepen the sense of history.<sup>58</sup>

### **Plants and Environment**

Wild plants and vegetables remain an important source of food for these people in the areas prone to water scarcity and drought. Rural people in Rajasthan have a profound knowledge about the usage of famine foods. Alternative food consumption is common in rural arid areas of Rajasthan. Local people know about their importance and their contribution to their daily diet and these plants have found place in the proverbs as well.

*Sangar fog thali ko mevo-* it means for people of the desert, sangar and phog are the only dry fruits.<sup>59</sup>

This above mentioned proverb attests to the importance of the two plants of Sangar - *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri) and phog- *Calligonum Polygonoides* (an indigenous shrub whose flowers are consumed as food), in the desert region. This plant exerts cooling

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<sup>58</sup> Bharucha, *Rajasthan an Oral Tradition*, p. 82.

<sup>59</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 206, Proverb no. 1953.

effect and is good for health.<sup>60</sup> In the western desert leaves and seeds of the *khejri* tree are largely used as vegetable food and meal is made from “bhurat” grass seed (*cenchrus catharticus*).<sup>61</sup> These wild plants serve as an alternative source of food for survival during famines when the staple food is in short supply. *P. cineraria* holds a very important place in the economy of Rajasthan’s arid zone and is called the ‘King tree of Indian Desert’.<sup>62</sup> The dry pods of Sangari reduce the quest of water in summer months and generally the farmers eat this in dry periods.<sup>63</sup> The Luni River drains parts of Marwar and melons and singhara nut (*trapa natans*) are grown in great quantity in the river bed during the dry seasons.<sup>64</sup>

Local peoples’ interpretations and understanding of environmental changes is intertwined with their broader worldview. The people of the region closely observed their immediate environment and behavioral patterns of the various plants and animals inhabiting that region. Their relationship with the elements that compose their immediate landscape is well articulated through their proverbs. It is generally observed that women of this area remain accustomed to difficult topography and severe climatic conditions where basic health amenities are not easily accessible to them. They remain busy from dawn to dusk and are more thoughtful towards practicing their traditional wisdom in curing basic ailments at various life stages. Women’s traditional wisdom pertaining to therapeutic uses of the arid plants was identified in proverbs. The following

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<sup>60</sup> Madhu Goyal and S. K. Sharma, ‘Traditional wisdom and value addition prospects of arid foods of desert region of North West India’, *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, Vol. 8 (4), October 2009, pp. 581-585.

<sup>61</sup> Adams, *The Western Rajputana States*, p. 157, NAI.

<sup>62</sup>V.P. Tewari, ‘Some important wild plants yielding alternative foods for nutritional security in arid region of Rajasthan’, *Journal of Plant Chemistry and Ecophysiology*, 2016; 1(1): 1004, pp. 1-5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *The Rajputana Gazetteer*, Vol. II, 1879, p. 254.

proverb deals with experience of local people in curing diseases with the neem tree which possess great medicinal properties.

*Neemb narayan neenanu rog kate* - neem can cure ninety-nine diseases.<sup>65</sup>

A lot of fruits and plants with their features and characteristics find mention in the proverbial speech of the local people which comments upon their general life conditions.

For example:

*Aam nimbu aur banniyo, galo bhinchya ras deve* - Like aam (mango) and Nimbu (lemon) a baniya (grocer) gives money only on squeezing his neck.<sup>66</sup>

*Aam fale neecho nave, errand akasan jaye*<sup>67</sup> - when the mango tree bears fruits it weighs down due to them, but the errand tree doesn't.

This proverb is used to comment upon people in situations when a good man turns humble after becoming prosperous just like mango fruits, however, a bad man becomes proud like the fruits of an errand tree.

#### **4. Social Relations through Proverbs**

##### **Caste system**

The caste system in Rajasthani society is deeply entrenched which has made its social structure very complex. Proverbs related to castes in Rajasthan, therefore, often capture these complexities inherent within the social order. Dialectics of the self and other are articulated through the proverbs in which either two or more castes are compared, a person belonging to one caste is criticized, or a typical characteristic of caste is marked.

These characteristics are either real or imagined but are attributed to the particular castes

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<sup>65</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 7593.

<sup>66</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 1, Proverb no. 480.

<sup>67</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 18, Proverb no. 147. Scientific name for errand tree is *Ricinus communis* and it generally grows in desert region since it requires less amount of water for growth.



by the common folk based on their engagement with them and their age old experiences with the other caste groups. The depiction of caste through proverbs is often insulting and derogatory. They attest to the greed, selfishness and authoritarianism of the upper castes of Brahmin, Rajputs and Banias. The lower castes generally employ the tools of mockery and gentle and harsh sarcasm to criticize and ridicule the upper castes. For example, the following two proverbs attest to Brahmins' greed:

*Baniyo khat mein to baman that main-* meaning that when a Bania falls sick, this will be beneficial for the Brahmin as he will be called to perform puja for his sake.<sup>68</sup>

*Baman haathi chadho bi maange-* a Brahmin begs even if riding on an elephant.<sup>69</sup>

The following proverb represents the solidarity within the castes of Barber and Brahmin who associate and engage with the people of their own castes. This can also be seen as testifying to the clear demarcation among various caste groups pertaining to their social conduct.

*Nai baman kutto, jaat dekh hu hu karto-* it means that a Barber, Brahmin and a dog would relate to their own kinds.<sup>70</sup>

Detha, during the process of collecting and documenting the proverbs, also noted the contextual stories from which those proverbs were derived. A lot of such proverbs deal with caste and peoples' experiences in caste ridden social order. One such proverb and its contextual story is:

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<sup>68</sup> Ahuja, *Folklore of Rajasthan*, p. 205.

<sup>69</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 156, Proverb no. 1473.

<sup>70</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 129, Proverb no. 1208.

*Sethan thari churi hate padgi, ke dopha aa toh kalam hai, ke mhare gale toh aa ij phiri-* sir, your knife fell down, you fool this is my pen, but it ran down my throat.<sup>71</sup>

The story, from which this proverb originated, deals with a Bania and a client who suffered due to him. The Bania was going to his work with his pen stuck behind his ear. One of his suffering clients was trailing behind him in old tattered dhoti and shabby *pagdi* (turban). He had no cloth on his body apart from that. Suddenly he heard the sound of something falling from the Bania's things. He thought this to be his moral duty and called out the Bania, 'sir! Your knife fell down.' The Bania looked back with anxiety and said with amazement, 'knife? Which knife? What do I have to do with knife?' On this, the innocent man pointed at the pen and said with natural instinct, 'here it lies'. Smiling ironically, the Bania said, 'you fool, this is my pen, my pen.' The man spoke with a choked throat, 'but it ran down my throat, sir'. The Bania said nothing at this, picked up his pen and went away. This story and the proverb both point towards the ways in which the common people were being exploited by the upper castes.

Another proverb expressing similar sentiments of people is: "*Thakur toh kanvale mandhyodo ei khoto*" - a thakur is bad even when cloaked on the door frame.<sup>72</sup> This proverb is employed to despise the high caste Thakurs in the rural society when they exploit the common people and extract everything from them since they possess the power and means to control them. The proverbial treatment of castes can be seen as one where the content is based more on the observations of the characteristics of each caste rather than any interest in maligning the group. Since caste distinctions were based on

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<sup>71</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 8, p. 312.

<sup>72</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 8, p. 119.

division of labor, the proverbs also commented upon their occupational obligations and the exploitation of people arising out of them.<sup>73</sup> The caste proverbs identified the peculiar behavior of various castes to criticize and ridicule them as well as to establish clear cut distinctions between low and high castes.

However, proverbs also reflect the love and affection among various groups of people in rural society, who stayed together in harmony. One such proverb that attests the peaceful co-existence of people is:

*Kya barman, kya baniya, kya syed kya sheikh, gyan karne jogiya, sab ka aatam ek-* whether one is a brahmin, bania, saiyyid or sheikh; there is no difference in their souls, if we see them with wisdom.<sup>74</sup>

### **Women and Society**

There are a range of proverbs related to women and their representation and their assessment reveals the ways in which gender and power relations are articulated within Rajasthani society. Instead of representing the “reality” of what women were or are, proverbs reflect ideals and common patterns in ideas about women that people developed over a period of time. However, proverbs also symbolize women as condoning their “ideal” image and celebrating their defiant role. They assert themselves and reject the encoded normative behavioral patterns imposed upon them.

Rajasthani society can be characterized as patriarchal in nature and the features of that social order are amply captured by the proverbial sayings. For example,

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<sup>73</sup> Lynne Ronesi, ‘Mightier Than The Sword: A Look at Proverbial Prejudice’, *Proverbium* 17(2000), pp. 329-347.

<sup>74</sup> S. Inayat A. Zaidi, ‘Folklore, Ordinary People and Making of the Indian Nation’, In (ed.) Surinder Singh and I. D. Gaur, *Popular Literature and Pre-modern Societies in South Asia* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley India, 2008), pp. 257-270.

few of the proverbs where the patriarchal edifice of the society is constructed and reinforced by demeaning women are:

*Lugayi paanv ki jooti hovey*<sup>75</sup> – a woman is equaled to shoe in this proverb,

*Lugai aur ghodi paga su i chale*<sup>76</sup> - a woman and horse are made to walk with feet.

There remains a gendered division of labor in Rajasthani society where women are primarily confined within the house and men have the liberty of movement. For example, this is illustrated by this proverb:

*lugai hal mate haath ne diye, biju haaru kare* - a woman does not lay her hands on the plough, but does everything else.<sup>77</sup>

Plough is associated with agricultural activity. Although women do work in fields in Rajasthan, the task of ploughing is primarily done by men<sup>78</sup>. Her major task is to toil inside the spaces of the house. For example:

*Badli main din na dise, phuar baidhi pise*- illuminating the fact that native women in rural north India grind the grain early in the morning.<sup>79</sup>

All these instances show the confinement of female labor to only the tasks considered feminine and restricted inside spaces of house. A proverb in this regard is noteworthy which enjoins a man to fieldwork is *Mardan kheti*- agrarian work for men<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 6, Proverb no. 14850. This is widely used by people in Rajasthan.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Proverb no. 14857.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Proverb no. 14875.

<sup>78</sup> This is not to discount the fact that women work in fields along with men. Although outwardly a public space, in reality it is an extension of private space since they are often shrouded in *gunghat* (veil). A proverb can be cited here to illustrate this. *Lugai ri marjaad ghunhaton*- a woman's morality, modesty, nature, character and her entire existence are dependent upon her veil. This is the ubiquitous feature of rural north india including Haryana. See Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 153, Proverb no. 1437.

<sup>80</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Proverb no. 10687.

Focusing upon the speech practices of women embedded in their everyday talk, we can see how their representations of gender and power propose alternative model of the social world and can be seen as resistance to the dominant discourse of gender and power relations and thus produces a fault line within that.<sup>81</sup> The patriarchal ideology of *kanyadan* in Rajasthani society instructs a woman to desert her loyalties and affection to her natal kin and see herself as belonging to her husband's kin. This ideology is criticized in the following proverbs. In other words, this is a critique of what the in-laws' expect of a woman upon her marriage: 'May the house of my mother-in-law (*sasural*) be ruined, she who always creates enmity, May my natal house (*pihar*) prosper, as long as the world endures'.<sup>82</sup>

*Khaay dhani ko, geet gave beere ka*<sup>83</sup>-this is said of a hindu women who lives on her husband's earning but eulogizes her brother.

*Chidpide suhag su randapo hi chokho*<sup>84</sup>- it's better to remain without a husband than to have an incapable and indolent one.

The investigation of these proverbs shows that rural women who remain doubly subjugated within society do not remain mute and their concerns and aspirations are also articulated through the proverbs. Therefore, even if at the level of practices and bodies they may seem to be controlled by the dominant conventions and codes, but at the inner emotional level they remain unrestrained and continue to cherish their desires.

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<sup>81</sup>Susan Gal, 'Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender', In (ed.) Micaela di Leonardo, *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 175-203.

<sup>82</sup> Raheja, *Limits of Patriliney*, p. 159.

<sup>83</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 55, Proverb no.487.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 83, Proverb no. 744.

The analysis of these proverbs related to caste, inter-relations between various castes and women therefore helps understand the heterogeneous discourses and complexities inherent within the Rajasthani society.

### **A History of Proverbs**

To understand the construction of culture, it is important to understand the social actions of people through the examination of their folklore.<sup>85</sup> In a particular social milieu, time and space the folklore remained an important source for maintaining a privileged status of elite groups in society.<sup>86</sup> In Rajasthan, the Charans, Bhats, Manganiyars and other such groups who were patronized by the Rajputs had developed narratives of bravery and valor to eulogize their patrons and generated mentalities that sought to legitimize their rule. There are a range of proverbs that originated from such historical narratives about ruling dynasties and historical personages. Following are the proverbs that are etched in popular imagination about the characteristics of the Rajput elites. These proverbs unravel the way in which Rajput rulers and elites are remembered by people where they have always been seen as brave, chivalrous and powerful.

*Rajput ri mooch sadavant unchi*<sup>87</sup>- the moustache of a Rajput always remains high.

*Rajput re muhnde, muein re hi aangli na deeje*<sup>88</sup>- even when a Rajput dies, you should not poke your finger in his mouth.

The following two proverbs eulogize Rana Kumbha of Mewar and describe the reign of Raja Man Singh of Marwar respectively:

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<sup>85</sup> Zaidi, *Folklore, Ordinary People and Making of the Indian Nation*, p. 257.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>87</sup> Detha, *Rajasthani Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, Vol. 5, Proverb no. 12174.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* Proverb no. 12175.

*Kal pare toh Kumbha dhaani, Meh barse to mazoori ihani-* the subjects of Rana Kumbha say that if a famine strikes their country, he will provide relief to them and if it rains well, then there will be enough employment for everyone.<sup>89</sup>

*Bajri ka sogra, mothan ki daar; Akre ki jhonpri, phogan ki bar; Dekhi Raja Man Singh teri Marwar-* this proverb describes the condition under which the people lived during the reign of Raja Man Singh of Marwar; they ate bread made from bajra flour and dal made of moth; lived in huts made of *akra* with fences of phog. Bajra and moth are the staple food stuffs of the poorer classes.<sup>90</sup> These conditions define the very existence of the locals in the desert area.<sup>91</sup>

Such proverbs not only eulogize and construct stories of individuals and their dynasties, but also play a crucial role in generating attitudes and mentalities that establish and accept the superiority of the ruling class which is projected as benevolent, brave and wise.

Rajputs were the ruling elites in all the regions of Rajasthan, for centuries, before the abolition of jagirdari system.<sup>92</sup> A jagirdar was a “Rajput thakur or lord, who held villages as a grant from his chief and who performed the service of lending his troops for the chief.”<sup>93</sup> Later on, another group of jagirdars emerged who were granted land grants for their specific services, like the Charans, Bhats and Kayasthas. However, it was the group of Rajput elites and jagirdars who remained most powerful and constituted the class of aristocracy in Rajasthan. They were considered the “above the masses and

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<sup>89</sup> Ahuja, *Folklore of Rajasthan*, p. 143.

<sup>90</sup> Adams, *The Western Rajputana States*, p. 99, NAI. Akra is an indigenous shrub which grows in the desert region of Marwar.

<sup>91</sup> Information gathered from the interviews conducted with people who lived in the border areas of Jodhpur in the 1990s. One of the respondents talked about their everyday lives and culture in a detailed manner.

<sup>92</sup> C. L. Sharma, *Ruling Elites of Rajasthan: A Changing Profile* (New Delhi: M D Publications, 1993).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

models for imitation.”<sup>94</sup> One of the proverbs attesting this status of these elites and associating them with possession of land is:

*Rajpoot ri jaat jamin*<sup>95</sup>- land is the caste of Rajputs.

The unrestrained power of the Rajput jagirdars also led to “proliferation of predatory exploitations, often petty but cumulatively oppressive.”<sup>96</sup> This proverb is also used in the sense of marking that exploitation by the Rajput Thakurs when they forcibly snatch the land of others.

However, people articulated the changing socio-economic conditions of the state after independence in their proverbial speech. In the post independence context jagirdari system was abolished and the ex-rulers and ex-jagirdars lost their status of authority and power. Their status-withdrawal, in the new social environment of post-independence period, is also attested in the proverbs. One such proverb is:

*Rajpooti dhoran mein ralgi, upar chadh gayi ret*<sup>97</sup>- Rajpooti got lost in the sand-dunes, got piled under the sand.

This proverb reflects peoples’ perception of the Rajput caste, whose social and economic status had undergone a major transformation as a result of the implementation of the Jagir Resumption Act after independence. This attests to the fact that people remained alert to such transformations in the Rajasthani society which found place in their proverbial speech. This also resulted in the changing conception of Rajasthan from the Rajput dominated colonial imagination to the emergence of multiple groups vying for power and status in society and polity.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 160, Proverb no. 1806.

<sup>96</sup> Gold and Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows*, p. 213.

<sup>97</sup> Sahal, *Rajasthani Kahawatein*, p. 160, Proverb no. 1807.



## **5. Conclusion**

This Chapter tried to understand the association of indigenous people with the region and culture of Rajasthan in their everyday lives. This is done by analyzing the Rajasthani proverbs, which remain a mode of expression for these people for articulating their perceptions, aspirations and experiences. The way people related with the geographical features, environmental conditions and their immediate landscape and resources became part of their memory, passed into their folk tradition and defined their cultural practices.

The rich collection of folk tradition, conveyed through proverbs, has helped in exploring the traditional wisdom and observations of local rural communities through their everyday engagement with the region. These experiences and observations have helped in sustaining the human population amidst the extremities of nature in the Thar region. The analysis of proverbs, used by people, throws light on the multiplicity of perspectives about the past and lived experiences inherent within Rajasthan's society and culture. Proverbs are an index of peoples' lives and a source of effective communication. They are based on the human experiences and observations of everyday life and emerge as important tools for exercising social control, justifying institutions and certain beliefs and attitudes. They also constantly allude to the changing conceptions of the region, geography and territory in popular perceptions.

People remember and live with events and conditions of past in varied ways. This is understood when we examine the cultural construction of region. The Thar region is characterized by scarcity of water, frequent droughts and famines, permanence of high temperatures and inadequacy of basic necessities of life. These material conditions of the Western Rajasthan region forced indigenous population to migrate to the other areas, as

part of their adaptive survival strategies. All these conditions become part of peoples' imagination and remain important determinants that constitute their identity. This thesis argues that the way people perceived the region and their mode of living were, therefore, determined by these historic dislocations which further resulted in the development of different cultural practices of these communities.

For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that the local communities in the Marwar region remained dependent on the Kharif crops, but more importantly on their cattle for survival. Cattle serves as an important symbol and species of their economy and there are numerous historic figures which are deified as folk gods by the local population as 'cattle-savers'.<sup>98</sup> More importantly, since the local population is migrating, their perception of boundary remains hazy and flexible. They do not associate with the officially bounded space of Rajasthan, but identify with their immediate surroundings. My 'informant' further added that the local people did not associate themselves much with Jaipur as they did with the adjoining region of Palanpur and Kutch area in Gujrata. This could be due to the fact that at one point Marwar extended to Sirohi, Palanpur and the Rann of Kutch.<sup>99</sup>

This thesis argues that the idea of their immediate region and a cultural identity emerging from association with their inhabited space remained far removed from the official colonial idea of Rajasthan and its high Rajput culture. People developed attitudes and strategies to deal with the material conditions in the region and these strategies get reflected in their proverbial wisdom and are transmitted through generations which form their cultural identity and practices.

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<sup>98</sup> Pabuji, Biggaji, Veer Fattaji, Gogaji and Tejaji are all worshipped for they died while saving the cattle.

<sup>99</sup> *The Rajputana Gazetteer*, Vol. II, 1879, p. 228.

The analysis of the proverbs related to social order and relations within the society revealed the heterogeneous strands running within the Rajasthani society. The examination of proverbs unravels the many voices of lower castes and especially women. The lower castes criticized the exploitative behaviors of the elites, and the upper castes remained the oppressors in peoples' imagination and stories. On the other hand, women also asserted themselves against the patriarchal edifice of society to articulate their aspirations and experiences through proverbs.

People's imagination of Rajasthan, who live with the material realities of the Western Desert region, is based on the memories of their lived experiences in this area and influences the way they perceive culture. I argue that their cultural identity and practices are determined by their immediate surroundings and one can understand the inherent subjectivities in the construction of region and culture by people. Thus, exploring people's perspectives and stories, by analyzing their oral traditions, can lend a more nuanced understanding of region, culture and peoples' relation with both.



## CONCLUSION

The thesis has made an attempt to understand the region and culture of Rajasthan by exploring the ways in which the idea of Rajasthan was conceptualized. This is done by understanding the construction of region through colonial perceptions and exploring the history of Rajasthan. The thesis has further tried to understand the multiplicity of narratives about the region and its culture by investigating the oral traditions of the local people. Therefore, a variety of source material is used for undertaking this task. The study has helped in the understanding of the popular culture of Rajasthan and the ways in which people associate themselves with the region.

The state of Rajasthan came into existence on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1948 when the princely states of Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli joined together. However, various other states continued to join the union and the process of formation of the Rajasthan, in its present form completed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956. It was in 1824, that Colonel James Tod used the word 'Rajasthan' for the first time to denote the portion occupied by the erstwhile princely states of the region. He referred to this region as the 'abode of Rajas' and defined its geographical boundaries.

In the First Chapter, I argued that the colonial construction of the region resulted in producing a well defined coherent territory of Rajasthan; emergence of Rajput dominated imagination of the region and finally, a "homogenous reality" of Rajasthani people was presented. Before the advent of the British rule, there was no coherent territory called "Rajasthan" and this name was the British invention. I argued that the princely states were constantly embroiled in disputes over territorial possessions and expansion and, therefore, the geographic and political boundaries remained blurred. It

was because of the treaties that were signed between the British and the various principalities that resulted in delineation of territories of the states as separate units. I argued that the states' idea of territory and region was more restricted to their principalities and could not possibly have concurred with the idea of Rajasthan that the British came to institute. However, a hitherto fluid and abstract notion of the region, in terms of its territoriality and geographic boundary, got reified as a result of the colonial intervention.

Rajasthan emerged as a political entity with well defined territorial boundary due to the region's engagement with the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The region further came to be identified with the ethics and virtues of Rajputs, who remained the ruling class in Rajasthan. James Tod is credited with having established this relationship between the region and the Rajputs. The imagination of Rajasthan became synonymous with the Rajputs worldview. Rajputs' valor, chivalry, honor, their art and architecture, all became defining features of Rajasthan which was propagated by Tod and followed by other British officials, through their ethnographic works. These official accounts, to a large extent, fixed identities of individuals and groups and eventually the information gathered through such projects remained distant from peoples' perspectives and lives.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the British ethnographic projects, Rajasthan came to be understood in socio-cultural terms. I argued that the ethnographic projects highlighted the peculiarities of the Rajasthani society and culture. And the British presented a homogenous "reality" of the natives and conceptualized a regional identity, in their effort to scientifically understand the socio-

cultural diversity. However, the social relations remained fluid in the sense that depending upon the situation different groups exercised power over each other and the society could not have been understood in a scientific hierarchical manner.

In the Second Chapter, I argued that Tod's writing on Rajasthan served as the background which influenced the Rajasthani historians' methods of writing history. In Rajasthan, Charans and Bhats remained the court historians of the various Rajput principalities, from the medieval period onwards till the region's encounter with the colonial rule. However, the indigenous historians were affected by the trend of documenting 'scientific' history, under the British rule. Further, the role of Charans and Bhats changed from being traditional historians to mere informants when new objective histories of Rajasthan and various Rajput states came to be written.

The themes and content, which constitute history of any society, reflects the way the region is imagined and constructed. I argued that the Rajasthani historians, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, remained occupied with ideas about Rajputs and their glorious political rule. Therefore, works of various Rajasthani historians set a trend in history writing of Rajasthan that focused upon the dynastic histories of various princely states. Although, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus of historical researches in Rajasthan became the social and cultural aspects of the region, the focus again remained upon the high caste Rajputs. I also argued that the ideas about the region and Rajputs get incorporated into the nationalist movement and the Rajput dominated imagination of Rajasthan gets strengthened and propagated due to the nationalist leaders' appeal to their past.

In the Third Chapter, I argued that a shift takes places in the 1960s in the study of the region through the efforts of eminent folklorists Komal Kothari and Vijaydan

Detha. They shift the focus from the political and dynastic history to the hitherto little known communities in Rajasthan and establish an alternative archive in the form of Rupayan Sansthan. The works of Kothari and Detha developed a rich understanding of the region and its popular culture. Their aim was to culturally map, document and understand Rajasthan from people's perspective. Both attempted to offer a local perspective on social groups of the region and thereby, a history from below which brought into question various established narratives of the its society and people. For this purpose they documented the folk traditions of people including folk tales, folk songs, proverbs and oral epics. Therefore, both Kothari and Detha contributed towards building an alternative archive of folk culture of Rajasthan.

The oral sources, especially the published works on proverbs, are examined to present a reimagination of Rajasthan's culture and communities. Proverbs related to history, historical figures, geography of the region, seasons, agriculture, communities and castes and women offer an insight into various aspects of the region and its culture. These are examined from a socio-cultural standpoint to understand people's engagements with the region and culture. In a context, where historically the local people's voices remained subjected to the official histories, the investigation of their proverbial speech offered understanding of the social and cultural practices of their society.

The Marwar region of Rajasthan, the area of study of the thesis, falls under the extreme arid and desertic climatic conditions where the mainstay of the economy is agriculture and animal husbandry. People developed strategies to deal with these material conditions and their everyday engagement with this region such as the



traditional wisdom based on their experience, their concerns and anxieties all found place in the rich folk sayings. The relationship between pastoralism and agriculture is reflected in their proverbial wisdom related to them.

People developed a relationship between rainfall and various natural elements like wind, clouds, wind direction, month etc. and these observations are confirmed and passed on from one generation to the next. To deal with situations of drought they developed indicators to predict the droughts based on their traditional wisdom and experience in the region. Such strategies and stories of survival remain embedded in peoples' memory. Therefore, their relationship with the elements that compose their immediate landscape is well articulated through their proverbs.

Proverbs also throw light on the social relations within the Rajasthani society and reflect the experiences and aspirations of various sections of the hierarchal social order. Proverbs related to castes in Rajasthan often capture these complexities inherent within the social order. They talk about the various characteristics of the particular castes and often represent them in insulting and derogatory manner. Lower castes generally employ the tools of mockery and gentle and harsh sarcasm to criticize and ridicule the upper castes.

The analysis of proverbs, used by people, throws light on the multiplicity of perspectives about past, inherent within Rajasthan's society and culture. I argued that the way people perceived the region and their mode of living were determined by the historic dislocations, arising due to the material conditions of the region, which further resulted in the development of different cultural practices of these communities. I also argued that people's imagination of Rajasthan is based on the memories of their lived experiences in

this area and their cultural identity and practices are determined by their immediate surroundings. I have attempted to explore the multiple ways in which idea of Rajasthan was constructed and argued that Rajasthan is not just the 'land of Rajas' but an abode of socio-cultural diversity. This thesis is, therefore, an attempt towards documenting people's history of the region which points towards a shift in the way Rajasthan is understood in popular accounts.

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