

# Our Cultural Heritage

Bansidhar Maheshwari

(Translated from Gujarati to English by Ketan C. Maheshwari)



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# Chapter 1

## The Origin of the Maheshwari Community

Authentic historical literature about the origin of the Maheshwari community is not available. The sole source of information available is in the form of a book “Itihas Kalpdram Maheshwari Kulbhushan” authored by late Shivkaranji Darak of Mundwa. Based on the book, following is the description of the origins of the Maheshwari community:

Suryawanshi King Khadgalsen of Chauhan dynasty was ruling over Khandelanagar state. He was very kind and just king. People lived happily and peacefully in his kingdom. He was always worried of not having a son.

One day the king had invited Brahmins and paid great honour to them. The Brahmins were very happy with the king’s courtesy and asked him for a boon. The king then expressed his desire for a son. Brahmins said, “if you worship Lord Shiva, you will be blessed with a very brave and adventurous son, but do not allow him to go towards the north and take bath in the Surya-kund there until he turns 16 years old”. If the prince respects brahmins, he will become a great king else will be reborn in the same kingdom. Hence being blessed by the brahmins, the king rewarded them with fine clothes and jewelry and respectfully saw them off. The king worshipped God Shiva and was blessed with the boon.

King Khadgalsen had 24 queens. After some time, one of the queens, Champawati gave birth to a baby boy. The king was very happy and named the prince as Sujan Kunwar. The prince learned horse-riding, weapons etc. by the age 7 years. When he reached the age of 12, enemies were afraid of him. The king was quite satisfied with his work. He was careful not to let the prince go towards the North.

Once a Jain sadhu came and preached the prince about Jain religion luring him

into anti-Shiva beliefs and showed the faults of brahmins. At the age of 14, the prince opposed Shiva and started practicing Jain religion. He campaigned the Jain religion in East, West and South and banished idol worshipping. He used to harass Brahmins and broke their sacred threads (*janoi*). He forbade all religious activities including yajna and hawana. Out of the King's fear, he never went towards the North direction, but who can stop the destiny.

Once he went towards the North to the Suryakund with his 72 officers. He had grown angry when he saw 6 Rishis performing a yajna. He ordered his officers to destroy the yajna and harassed the rishis. Seeing this the rishis cursed them to become stone-like. So the prince including all his officers and horses became stone-like. This news spread very quickly in all directions.

The King and citizens became worried after hearing this news. King Khadgalsen died of the shock. 16 of his queens became *sati* with him. With no protector of the kingdom, neighbouring enemies attacked the state. They divided the state into many regions and merged them into their own states.

Even as this happened, the prince's widow and 72 officer's widows cried and went to the rishis. They humbly requested and begged for the lives of their husbands. Seeing this rishi went soft. However, they said they are not capable enough of revert the curse. They advised the ladies to go to a nearby cave and worship God Shiva so that the curse can be taken off. All the ladies went to a cave and religiously meditated for appeasement of God Shiva.

After some time, God Shiva and Parvatiji came around the place where the prince and officers were lying stone-like. Parvatiji asked what happened and Shivji told the whole history.

At this time the prince's queen and the officer's wives fell on the feet of Parvatiji and expressed their plight. Seeing this, Parvatiji requested Shivji of taking off the curse. God taken off the curse and freed them of the stone-like state giving them a new life. Everybody fell on the God's feet.

As the prince became conscious, his mind filled with lust seeing Parvatiji's beauty. Seeing this Parvatiji cursed the prince like this: "O bad man! you will always beg for food and your all coming generations shall beg for food"! These people were called "jaaga" (bhat) later on.

The 72 officers said: "O God! Now we do not have a place to live. What should we do now"? So Shivji informed them, that they quit their Kshatriya religion in a previous birth so now they are liable to accept the Vaishya religion. Go to the Suryakund and have bath. As they bathed, their sword became pen, sword-case became stick and shields became weighing balance. All officers became Vaishya. As God Mahesh gave them lesson, they were called "**Maheshwari**" Vaishya.

When rishis came to know that everybody has been freed of curse, they asked God: “O God! how will our incomplete Yajna will be completed”? Hence God preached to the officers that now onwards these rishis are your guru and you accept them as such. God told the rishis that they do not have anything as of now but when they have some occasion in their home they will give you material things to the best of their capabilities. You should teach them to follow their religion. Rishi accepted them as their pupils and each rishi accepted 12 pupils. Following is their description: (1) Parik from Parashar rishi (2) Dadma from Dadhichi rishi (3) Adigol from Gautam rishi (4) Khandelwal from Kharik rishi (5) Sukuwal from Sukumarg rishi (6) Saraswat brahmin/purohit from Sarasur rishi.

After some time of leaving Khandela all settled in Didwana. From these 72 officers, 72 *nukhs* (*clans*) came into existence and from these *nukhs*, depending upon the business, *peta-nukhs* came into existence.

This day was the ninth day of *Jeth-sud* month. This day is celebrated as “**Mahesh Navami**” in all over India by Maheshwaris. Maheshwari community is progressing continuously.





## Chapter 2

# Amazing Life-Journey of the Maheshwari Community

The story of quitting the Kshatriya caste and accepting the pen and weighing-balance by the King's officers is as courageous and amazing as of the life-journey of the Maheshwari community.

The origin of Maheshwari community is Marwad region but being a deserted region and as lack of enough rains they had to face droughts year after year. Such a situation made the life of Maheshwari families very difficult. In such conditions, life became a challenge for them and they decided to face it with exceptional courage. They made small groups and went out of their region in order to search for their bread-butter and employment.

So, some went to Mewad and others to Jaipur via Ajmer. Yet others went to Bikaner, crossing Jodhpur border to Pokhran, falaudi, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Sindh, Kutchch, Jamnagar etc. places.

According to some Historians, families from Jaisalmer migrated and settled in Gujarat in the 13th century A.D.. Families from Mewad went ahead towards Maharashtra via Gujarat, families from Jaipur went towards Delhi, and that of Bikaner moved to Calcutta after crossing many many borders. People from Marwar also went to Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra. These migrations continued for a long time and many family went and settled in Bengal and current Bangladesh as well. People from Jodhpur region went towards Bihar, Assam and then to Utkal-Assam and Nagaland. Some of the Maheshwaris from the Purania district of Bihar started going to the weekly market at Viratnagar (currently Nepalgunj in Nepal) and got settled there.

One group of Jaisalmer went to Malwa in Central India and Vidarbha via east Madhya

Pradesh's Gondwana (Jabalpur etc.) and another group went and settled in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Aligarh, Kaasgunj, Meerut and Saharanpur. Such was the journey of the community and went on to spread in a large part of the country, setting up an example of courage like other Vaishya communities of Rajasthan.

For the above mentioned expansion, apart from livelihood, the safety and security was also a reason. Muslim era – from Allauddin Khilji to Aurangzeb – from around year 1300 A.D. till year 1700 A.D. – 400 years and Maratha civil war were also responsible for such migrations.

Today Maheshwari community has settled not only in India but have crossed international borders as well. Considering today's transportation and communication facilities, it is not very much surprising that people migrate to different countries but imagining how our ancestors used to protect their families from thieves-dacoits and enemies using those primitive tools gives goose-bumps to the most courageous of today's people. We can but only imagine how by foot, camel and ox-carts, they migrated to unknown regions, mixed with strange people, adapted their unknown language and customs and demonstrated great courage. Such people with their self-courage and firm determination accepted and faced all kinds of adversities and eventually reached on top successfully.

Today we are tasting sweet consequences of our ancestors holy courage. It is very satisfying that even today we remain firm in different situations and face various challenges in order to keep the name of our community high and have a bright future. Fresh instances of this courage is our migrations during the 1947 partition and then 1971 war and migrations between 1988-92.

Currently, many Maheshwaris live outside of India of which following are main countries:

America, Canada and Britain	Approx. 150 to 200 families
Nepal	Approx. 200 to 250 families
Bangladesh	Approx. 300 to 400 families
Sindh (Pakistan)	Approx. 600 to 700 families

In the evolution of Maheshwari community it is important to note that they started with 72 branches that have increased because of various reasons and now they are approximately 80.

Depending upon the contemporary requirements, keeping away from the fame, using wisdom and farsighted decision-making is still a lesson for the new generation as much as it is a requirement of the future.

## Chapter 3

# Migration from Marwar to Thar

As mentioned in earlier chapter, the Maheshwari community migrated from Jaisalmer to different parts of India between A.D. 1300 and A.D. 1700 because of different causes. Main reasons for these migrations might be Muslim tyranny, Maratha civil war and continuous drought etc.. ( Only those who had to leave their age-old home and country can know the pain and agony they had to undergo!)

While migrating, where to go was a question. A safe and known place would be a natural choice. Royal states of Jaisalmer and Amarkot (Umarkot) were connected through marriage relationships as the following examples shows:

1. Jaisalmer's king Chachakdev first married Umarkot's princess of King Roopsingh in the year A.D. 1197.
2. King Lakhansingh married in Umarkot in the year A.D. 1270.
3. King Jaysingh married Jadawkunwar, daughter of Umarkot's Sodha Naharsang Amarsang.

Since the establishment of Jaisalmer in the year V.S.<sup>1</sup> 1212 (A.D. 1155) until V.S. 1915 (A.D. 1858) the financial officers were Maheshwaris. So Maheshwaris were also main among the service people of the state governance. While in war, handling rations etc., staying together during wedding ceremonies and in business and royal administration, Maheshwaris used to enjoy the positions of "ghadvai", "choudhary" and "mun'hata". So Umarkot was familiar to Maheshwaris.

In those days, rows of camels (caravan) with many camels used to transport the luggage and goods from the Jaisalmer state. Such rows went to Umarkot via Ratokot

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<sup>1</sup>Vikram Samvat, a hindu lunar calendar

towards south (Ratokot was a big city in Thar-Parkar district near the Marwar border. This city was destroyed later.). Another route went through rohdi to sakhkhar. So, that was a known route as well. Both these routes were called *Trade Routes*. Depending upon the situation, familiarity and opportunity, people used one of these routes for migrations. These times were approximately between the years A.D. 1736 and A.D. 1755.

In this way, Maheshwaris settled in the state of Sodha's in Umarkot. Those who travelled on a different route settled in places like Bukera, Tando Alahyaar, Tando Aadam, Sehwan, Badin etc. There were around 300 Maheshwari families in Sehwan at that time (there are none today). Maheshwaris living in Sindh used to speak Thari with an influence of the Sindhi language.

Maheshwaris were strictly vegetarian. Even onion and garlic were considered uneatable. So they could not live with the non-vegetarian culture of Sindh. Apart from that, Marwar was a dry region. On the otherhand, the Sindhu river basin was not comfortable because of high humidity and mosquitoes. So they marched forward to Thar desert in search of alternatives. Though Thar was similar to Marwar, they liked it because there was no political tension as was prevalent in Marwar. In such conditions they started looking for their relatives and family members in those areas including the Kutch region. Some families that came along Sindh and nearby Mithi and Bagal region were called Sindhi. In 1736 AD, when Mian NoorMohammed attacked Umarkot, Sodhas spread across Thar. With them Maheshwaris too settled in different villages in Thar. These families settled in Dahali, Chhod, Bagal, Chhachharo, Nabisar, Chhelhar etc.. In 1875 A.D., there was heavy rains in this region and a lot of domesticated animals died in floods. Because of this several Maheshwaris went to the high and dried sandy regions of Thar. Thus, people from same "Akaah" (extended family) settled in one place and in the time of political stability started searching for their families and hence the populations of these places increased.

Along with Maheshwaris, other community people like Pushkarna Brahmin, Saraswat, Shrimali Brahmin, Maali, Sonara, Sutar, Darji, Kumhar etc also got settled.

These migrant Maheshwaris were known by the places they migrated. For example people from Kutch were called "Kutchchi", people from Thar were called "Thari or Dhati" and people from Jamnagar who came from Nagor (in Marwar) were called "Nagori".

This way, Maheshwaris got settled and started developing their business and employment. Gradually they built homes and started marriage etc. rituals. In Thar's various villages 16 out of 72 Maheshwari clans (As described earlier) settled as follows:

Rathi, Kela (sarada), Kadva, Hadkut, Gigal, Chandak, Bhutada, Baththar, Malhar,

Masania (Baheti), Panpaliya, Lohia, Kachoria, Kasumbia, Malpani, Laghad. Kela's are called "Ghurya" in Thar and "Maandan" in Kutchch.

Additional to Thar Villages, some villages in Marwar, such as Sundaro, Mahajalar, Khuhadi, Jaysindar, and Lilmu (These villages are in Indian Territory now) were also associated with giving daughters hand in marriage. Whereas other villages of Marwar were only related with general friendship.



## Chapter 4

# Brief Geography and History of Thar

South East of Sindh is the TharParkar district. Two parts of this district were sandy and dry. Third part was flat and hence accessed by Sindhu river's canal for irrigation. So this part was prosperous. In the East end of the sandy area was the Karunzar Hill.

Sanskrit word for dry land is “sthal”. From sthal to thal and eventually name Thar emerged for this region. The “great desert of Thar” is mostly Thar and TharParkar district's Dhat region and some nearby land is basically all called “Thar”. It is pronounced as *Thaar* in English which is wrong. Real pronunciation of the word is **Thar**.

In the east of Thar desert is the Aravalli mountain range, in the west the Khairpur kingdom followed by the prosperous region. In South Kutch and in North are the Southern Borders of Punjab-Haryana. The population of this region is sparse because of arid land and large mounds of sand. Large cities are less and villages are far apart from each other.

Many centuries ago, there was sea in some parts of Rajasthan and the Desert of Kutch. This sea was connected to the Cambay. In those days one of the branches of the Sindhu river, called “Haakdo Nadi” emerging from Punjab's *Panchnad* area, flowed through Bahawalpur's east and near Umarkot before submerging into the sea near the desert of Kutch. At that time there was a big port called Parinagar and big ships used to sail along. Eventually by the sea movement or earthquakes the Haakdo river stopped flowing and the Sindhu river also changed its course to the west. After that the whole region became a dry and arid desert.

To reach NagarParkar, Kutch desert had to be crossed (lit. “*par kari ukarvu*”).

From this phrase, the name of this town was “parkar”. NagarParkar is situated at the base of Karunzar Hill. “Thar” + “Parkar” = TharParkar is the name of district.

The mounds of sand were called “**Dheba**” or “**Bhitt**” in Thar. The side that gets sunshine at the time of sunrise was called “**Tirkol**” and the otherside of the mound was called “**Gochchar**”. The place where these two Bhitt meets was called “**bukkad**”. The upper part was called “**Mathaari**” and the end part is called “**Pochchando**”. Large plain between bhitt’s was called “**Dohar**”, which was suitable for habitation. Villages used to get established here, well used to get dug and farming took place in rains. Small Bhitt’s were called “**Daro**”. This is where the names “Mohan-Jo-Daro” and “Kahu-Jo-Daro” comes from.

There were around 40 big sand mounds between Kantyo and Umarkot spanning around 20 miles. Largest mounds were in the Mithi Tehsil. Because of these mounds there was no river in Thar and there was no vehicles with wheels moving around.

Based on its geology, Thar’s area were given different names like Kha’ad, Kantho, Parkar, Vat, Samroti, Vango, Maherano, Naro, Achchoter and Dhat. “Dhat” was the main central part of Thar. This included some parts of Umarkot, Chhachhro and Mithi Tehsils. Because of this the whole Thar was known as Dhat and the Maheshwaris there and elsewhere were known distinctly as Dhati Maheshwaris. Some people called them “Thari” Maheshwaris.

TharParkar district lies between  $24^{\circ} - 13'$  to  $25^{\circ} - 22'$  north latitudes and  $68^{\circ} - 40'$  to  $71^{\circ} - 11'$  east longitude. Its total surface area was 13690 square miles out of which 8496 square miles was arid sandy and hilly terrain. The fertile land cover was 5194 square miles.

In the east were the Gujarat and Rajasthan states, Sanghad district in the North, Hyderabad district in the west and the desert of Kutch was in the south direction.

The district was divided into three divisions for administrative purposes:

1. Mirpur-Khas Subdivision: The land was completely under irrigation here. There were railways and roads.
2. Naro Subdivision: Because of umarkot’s arid and sandy region here there was no irrigation. Railway line went to Jodhpur through new Chhod and gadhado.
3. Thar Subdivision: This was completely arid and sandy terrain. In the east was the hilly region. There was no facility of irrigation. There were no roads. Agriculture completely depended upon rains.

In Thar subdivision, Mithi, Diplo, Chhachhro and NagarParkar Tehsils were located where a Tehsildar (Mamlatdar) was appointed. Mithi also had a Deputy Collector



and Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dy.S.P.). Until A.D. 1906 the headquarter of the district was Umarkot which was moved to Mirpur-Khas in 1907. Since A.D. 1992, the main TharParkar district has been modified with addition of some more parts from the Thar Subdivision and the headquarter has been moved to Mithi.

Let us now focus on Thar's history. Thar's ancient history is not available. Umarkot, NagarParkar etc. were ancient cities. Parinagar was a big port. Jainism was spread in NagarParkar and Viravah. Boudhdh and Jain temples were also there. Godi's famous Jain temple was also there.

Prior to that Thar was ruled by Parmar Rajputs (a princely caste). After that came the Sumra Rajputs. In A.D. 1125 Sodha Rajputs conquered the Ratokot area and gradually till A.D. 1226 moved towards Parkar after conquering Umarkot. In those days the human settlement was negligible in the Thar's Dhat area. Thieves and Dacoits used to take shelter here.

After that Bheels arrived to live in Thar. These warrior communities owned land, dug wells and established their own villages. Started agriculture.

From A.D. 1330 till A.D. 1439 Sumaras and then till A.D. 1609 Sodhas ruled Thar. After that until A.D. 1736, Thar was under Sindh rulers and directly under Delhi rule intermittently. Ocassionally Sodhas declared themselves rulers. In A.D. 1736 when Kalhoda stormed Umarkot and acquired it, all Sodhas spread out across the region.

Approximately between A.D. 1936 till A.D. 1755, from Marwar, Maheshwaris, Brahmins, Sonara, Naai, Chaaran, Suthar, Maali, Koli, Bajir, Meghwaal etc. Hindu communities, who came previously because of Sodhas, also came again in the small villages of Thar.

From A.D. 1782 Talpur obtained Thar from Kalhodas and ruled it for 61 years. They built a lot of forts for safety reasons. In A.D. 1843 British occupied Sindh and then the British rule began and they established the TharParkar district.

From A.D. 1844 till A.D. 1856, out of People's wish, Thar's some area – Parkar and Kantho-Balihari, Diplo, Mithi, Islamkot, Singaro, fithapur, viravah, Adhigam, Mamchero, Bahrano, Chudio and Sakarvero etc. villages were under Kutchtch assistant political agent who used to reside in Kutchtch-Bhuj.

These political agents sometimes in Monsoon, lived in the bungalows built in Mithi. In place of this bundalow, later was the residence of Mr. Maheshwari Uttamchand Khetaram Bachani (near the Muralidhar temple and opposite Dayaram's Dharamshala). It is in ruins now.

At the time of independence of India from the British, it was decided to partition the country. After hearing that the Sindh region will go to Pakistan, Sindh's TharParkar

district's head and known people met in Mirpurkhas and decided that the "Lower-Sindh" region where the Hindu population is more should be merged with *Hindustan*. This was opposed by the "Upper-Sindh's" hindus which were relatively less in number. Still the proposal was sent to the government. But unfortunately, before anything could be done about this proposal, the British government already signed and stamped the orders of partition and the prepared maps. Because of this, Thar's Maheshwaris and Hindus decided to leave their homes and villages and come to India through Migration (called "Ladpalaan" in local language).

## Chapter 5

# Infrastructural Necessities of the Community

### 5.1 Dhatki (Thari) Language

Many languages are spoken in India. Every region has a different language or should we say regions are made languagewise. Thing every person who uses to express his feelings is dialect. Inter-human relationships are different at different places and depends upon geography, business and community. And so is the dialect. Still dialect maintains the characteristics of its place of origin. How-ever one tries to hide but in the time of trouble one would send a call of distress in his own dialect.

It is said that every 12 miles the language changes. So the language at one end of a region might be considerably different than that of the other end, and sometimes it becomes even difficult to understand. Based on such languages, it is decided what part the speaker comes from. For example: In Gujarat, people from Kutch, Saurashtra, Mahesana, Surat etc. have distinct and identifiable accent and style of speaking.

Formal language means a language for general purposes, administration, education and social interaction. In that way, dialect is specific to a particular region but a language spans the whole country. Indian constitution has officiated several languages. After this introduction, let us see about the Thari/Dhatki language.

Thar Desert (The Great Indian Desert) is considered to be spread across South edge of Punjab to the west of Rajasthan to the Khairpur district till the south of TharParkar District upto the Great Rann of Kutch. Maheshwaris migrated from that region to the TharParkar region of Sindh and the dialect they spoke was so called Thari from the Thar Desert. People settled in the “Dhat” region called their

dialect “Dhatki”. As per the Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. XVI, page 781:

DHATKI, a dialect of Rajasthani is spoken in south-eastern TharParkar District.

As per the 1931 census of India (Bombay Presidency):

Thari/Dhatki is regarded linguistically as a dialect of Sindhi but enumerated as a separate language in census. For this procedure, there is a clear authority as THARI is recognised in Sindh as a distinct from Sindhi and has an area of its own.

George Gearson authored linguistic survey of India indicates that:

The language of TharParkar and Jaiselmer is mostly standard Marwadi. It has a mixture of Sindhi and Gujarati to a little extent only.

According to Shri Bherumal Maherchand Advani Authored “*Sindhi Boli ji Tarikh*”, “A new kind of language has been formed by a combination of Sindhi, Marwadi, and Gujarati. It is called Dhatki means language considered to be spoken in Dhat. This mixed dialect is considered an alternate to Rajasthani but is very close to Gujarati.”

According to what is indicated in the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, CUTCH, Feb, 1880, Chapter III, Population: Traers, page 50 & 51, “Maheshwaris arrived in Kutchtch approximately 500 years ago via Nagor–Thar and settled in the Abdasa Talluka. They spoke Thar-Gujarati language, used to put on turban like the Baniyas of Thar ... etc”. (Note: In the above writing, the mention of Thar is used in the sense of *Greater-Thar* means the Great Indian Desert area and not the ‘Thar’ TharParkar area where Maheshwaris settled late. In around A.D. 1300, Maheshwaris spoke “Thar-Gujarati” language which is likely to be a mixture of Thar’s Marwari and Kutchtch’s Gujarati.)

The dialect Maheshwaris brought from Marwar and the one spoken in dhat went under the influence of the dialects spoken in the surrounding region resulting in many gradual changes. These surrounding languages includes Gujarati in the east, Kutchtchi in the South Sindhi in the west and Rajasthani (Marwadi) in the North. Like this, variations of basic dialect resulted in Dhatki language.

For some years Thar was under the administration of Kutchtch state’s “political agent”, so the official language was Gujarati. This was also an influential factor on the Thari dialect.

In the school’s of Thar, initially Gujarati, then Gujarati and Sindhi and later on in approximately A.D. 1940, only Sindhi was taught. Apart from that the Baniyas of

Thari Dialect	Tandai Dialect	Gujarati
Kahaan dyo	Chavan dyo	Kaheva dyo
leela gabhbhaa	aala kapda	bheena lugda
mi sambhalyo	mu budho	me sambhalyu

Table 5.1: Differences between Thari, Tandai and Gujarati

Dhatki in Mithi	Dhatki in Gadhado
Paase mahin betho ahe	godhina betho ahe
puthyan aaye to	larinan aaye to
Dheba	Dhora
Tadha	Weri

Table 5.2: Differences between Dhatki dialect as spoken in Mithi and Gadhado Villages

Thar used to write “Modi” Gujarati (basic Gujarati characters without additional accents) in their books. This Gujarati was called “Vaniki” Gujarati.

When Maheshwaris migrated from Marwar they came from Jaiselmer to Umarnkot via Ratokot. After that they started living in Thar according to their convenience and started speaking Dhatki. But those who came from a different route from Jaiselmer via Sakhkhar to Sindh region, then Sahevan, Tando Allahyaar, Tando Adam, Badin etc. places or came after some time had influence of Sindhi language on their dialect. Maheshwaris living in Tando Allahyaar and Tando Adam were called “Tandai” and their dialect has clear influence of Sindhi. Table 5.1 throws some light on this fact: In the same way the dialect spoken in one end of Thar is different than that of the other end. This is shown in the table 5.2. In the towns of Thar, Dhatki language was spoken by Maheshwaris, Brahmins, Bhojak, Shrimalis, Khattris, Malis, Sonaras, Rajputs (Sodha), Meghwal, Bheels, Bajeeer etc.. But Lohanas and Muslims used to speak Sindhi however, they could comprehend Dhatki. In some villages, Muslims also used to speak Dhatki. Looking at these details, we can opine that: (1) Thari/Dhatki was basically spoken in Marwad which was brought by Maheshwaris and other communities during their migration. (2) Due to the influence of regional languages from all sides, there is some mixture. (3) Dhat’s region that was closer to the other region’s have more influence of their respective dialect. (4) School’s language of teaching influenced the dialect. (5) Because of an increase in service class people, urban dialect differed from their rural counterparts.

Now let’s see the technical and linguistic details of the Thari/Dhatki language: According to Census of India-1911, Vol. 7, Bombay Presidency, page 168: Distribution

Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati	Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati
Ankh	Akh	Aankh	gaa	gaun	gaay
kann	kan	kaan	meens	meenh	bhains
nakk	nak	naak	vachhchhdo	gabho	vachchdo
dant	dandh	daant	chhoiyo	aadmi	purush
doodh	kheer	dudh	dosi	mai	stree
dahi	dahi	dahin	hek	hik	ek
makhkhan	makhan	maakhan	bu	ba	be
gehun	kanak	ghau	tann	te	tran
mung	mund	mag	char	char	char
saag	bhaaji	shaak	panch	panj	paanch
chhah	jhan	chhas	dus	duh	dus
baap	piu	baap	meh	baarish	varsad
ma	amaa	maa	kirniyu	chhatti	chhatri
dikro	putt	dikro	kanglo	lagad	patang

Table 5.3: Some words in Dhatki and their counterparts in Sindhi and Gujarati

of Total Population by Languages:

Family : Indo-European

Sub-Family : Aryan

Branch : Indian

Sub-Branch : Sanskritic

Group : North-Western

Language or Dialect : Thareli (Thari/Dhatki)

Total Population in TharParkar District = 3,95,235

Population Speaking Thari/Dhatki = 1,16,664

Male=64,794, Female=51,870

Total=1,16,664 ie. about 30% of the district. Now let us compare some Dhatki words with Sindhi and Gujarati (table 5.1).

Some examples of sentences are shown in table 5.4. As seen in tables 5.1 and 5.4, the Dhatki language has been influenced by Gujarati somewhere and Sindhi elsewhere. Some dhatki words have been written in short form of Gujarati words. Means removing the ‘kaano’ accent.

As per Thar’s traditions and because of affection with each other, peopl’s names were also shortened. We see some samples as presented in table 5.5. Articles appearing in Sindhi eg. jo, ja, ji and Gujarati eg. no, na, ni are replaced by marwadi style **ro**, **ra**, **ri**. For example:

Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati
tahjo naam ki ahe?	thunjo nalo chha aahe?	taru naam shu chhe?
maanh jo naam Mohan aahe	Mhunjo nalo Mohan aahe.	Maru naam Mohan chhe.
tu kith jaain to?	tu kithe vanji to?	tu kyan jaay chhe?
hun jaan mahin jaaun to.	maan jag me vanja tho.	hun jaanma jaun chhu.
taahje roti khaani ahe?	tokhe maani khappe?	tare jamvu chhe?
hun dhaapyal ahaan	mukhe dho aahe	hun dharai gayo chhu.
hek raja hanto.	hikdo raja ho.	ek raja hato.
ue re bu raane hante	tehnkhe ba raanyu huyu.	tene be rani hati.
hek rajkumar hanto	hikdo rajkumar ho.	ek rajkumar hato.
rajkumar vaddo thyo.	rajkumar vaddo thyo.	rajkumar moto thayo.
ooe ra lagan lya.	hunji shaadi kai,	tena lagna levana.

Table 5.4: Some sentences in Dhatki and their counterparts in Sindhi and Gujarati

Man's Full Name	Shortened Name	Woman's Full Name	Shortened Name
Ambaram	Ambo	Savitri	Saabi
Sukhdev	Sukho	Jashoda	Jassi
Maherchand	Mahero	Aasha	Aasi
Bhagwandas	Bhagu	Nirmala	Narmi
Hiralal	Hiro	Jaywanti	Jeti
Jethanand	Jetho	Draupadi	Dhuppi
Nandlal	Nandu	Rukshmani	Rukhi

Table 5.5: Some Full Names in Dhatki and their Shortened Forms

Sindhi: hi chhatti keh ji aahe?

Gujarati: aa chhatri koni chhe?

**Dhatki: e kirniyu ke ro ahe?**

Dhatki have male and female gender but no neutral gender. Sindhi's 'aahe' is 'ahe' in Dhatki and its 'tho' is 'to'. Examples shown in table 5.4.

There is no systematic literature available of Dhatki/Thari dialect. The language being colloquial, it transferred orally from generation to generation in the form of traditional songs, wedding songs, *sawayas*, *dhamalas*, *shlokas*, festival songs, puzzles/riddles, proverbs etc.. These were spoken on occasions but are increasingly getting less spoken. Recently we heard that in Pakistan's Sindh state, "The Sindhi Adabi Board" tried to integrate, maintain and publish a collection of such sparse literature. In that publication's preface some such samples are provided. *sawayas*, *dhamalas* etc belong to the "*pushtimargiya*" genre and so the Maheshwaris of Marwad must be belonging to that genre.

To include the Dhatki language in the Indian constitution, A Maheshwari Member of Parliament put forth a proposal in the Indian Parliament in A.D. 1992-93 but it was not accepted by the parliament.

## 5.2 Water

Water is a primary need for humans, animals and plants. Thar being an arid land there was no river and it was not possible to bring up any canals. Here rainwater was the basis of life. Rainwater seeped into the soil was brought up by digging wells. In the ancient times, there was a river called "hakdo" that used to flow across the Thar which disappeared because of natural causes like earthquake. Because of this the water table went low in the north-east and up in the south. In Thar, the depth of a well is measured in terms of "puras". The length from the toe of a man (Purush) till the finger of elongated hand was considered to be one Puras. This is approximately six feet. The depth of well has been registered as shown in table 5.6 in different places.

Wells were known as "tadha" or "tad". Digging well was considered to be holy work. If a person funds to dig and build a well then the name of the well and the place was called after that person. For example, "Meghe ro Tadho", "Dane ro Tadho" etc..

Wells used to fetch water with different tastes. Different tastes had their names eg. **Kharo, Charko, Baalo, Kasaro, Ugro, Mitho**. If sweet water was not available, people made it do with the slightly salty water or the water with other tastes.



Area	Well Depth in Puras
Samroti (Near Diplo)	5
Parkar (NagarParkar Talluk)	10 to 15
Kantho (North of Nagar and South of Chhachhro)	15 to 35
Dhat (area between Mithi, chhachhro and Umarkot)	40
chhachhro, islamkot, mithi	20
Bhorillo	30
Kantyo	20
Chelhaar	35
gadhado	60

Table 5.6: Depth of wells in Puras in the Thar Region

Wells being in the arid and sandy land in Thar, they were used to be built using special bricks. Such bricks were known as “nav-terahi” bricks. Such bricks were very useful in the circular built-up of the wells. Sometimes wells were also built in square shapes. Waters in the wells being deep, they were not used for agriculture but sometimes, vegetables were grown around the wells.

To fetch water from the wells coloured leather “**kos**” were used. They were tied through thick rope or leather to a pulley and pulled by animals like camels, ox or donkey. The water was filled into place called “**avada**”. The end that was put into the well was called “**saaran**”. It used to be approximately as long as the depth of the well itself. Two people used to operate the kos. One the person who orders the camel to pull (called “khilio-khilivaro”) and the person who held the kos. While the camel pulled the pulley, the person holding the kos used to shout “**hau hau pachcha, mel pachcha**”. On hearing this the khilio used to stop the camel and pulled out the **nail** between the rope and kos in order to release the strain on the kos. This resulted into water being flown into the avada. The *paaniharis* used to fetch water from here and the unused water used to go into drain. One such turn was called “*vaaro kaadhyo*” and the people used to fetch water and operate the kos belonged to the Maali community.

Around the Gadhado town where waters were deep, two camels were employed to fetch water. When one camel reaches half way the nail was pulled out and the saran was re-tied to another camel and it used to pull the rest of the way. Thus, the length of saaran was half of the depth of the well.

Some “**vaishnu**” (Vaishnav) who have dislike for leather used canvas bags called “**chalsi**” for kos and cotton or “**akolia**” (cotton-like rope made up from “aaklo” plant’s pulp) ropes for fetching the water. They used to do it themselves and the water was called “**bhrahma jal**”.

While the kos is worked, the women of village came to fetch water. Women put the pot of water on their head and used **“Sindhuni”** to support the pot. They used to put different types of pots (**“gaggar-morio”**) on sindhuni. These sindhuni’s were decorated with mirrorwork, beads and beautiful embroideries. The behind of the sindhuni had its decorated tail called **“chhugo”** or **“chhedo”**. Parents used to gift sindhuni to their married daughters as **“dahej”** (dowry). Poor people used earthen pots. Rich men’s ladies did not go to the well to fetch water. They ordered the **“pakhal”**. The leather pakhal could carry eight pots of water that used to be brought by people called **“pakhali”**. The water was emptied in the household pots and the remaining water was put into **“hodi”** or cement tanks.

Between Chhachhro and Gadhado, there were shallow wells which were called **“veri”** or **“par”**. The depth of water in such veris depended upon the rains. Normally, water was found at the depth of 5 to 15 puras. Like tadha’s, such veris and pars were known by the names of people who built it. For example, jesse-ro-par, khime-ro-par, waghe-ri-veri, kumbhe-ri-veri, etc.. Some women also had built such tadhas like rupi-ri-veri, maanbaai-ro-tadho. In Mitthi, girls school teacher coming from Saurashtra were called baaisaheb. She also built one tadho and it was called baaisaheb-ro-tadho. The taste of water of such veris was similar to **palar** water.

In some villages, big tanks called **hod** were built for drinking or water for livestock. Some big tanks were built to store palar water also.

If some bucket or pot fell into a deep well, it was searched using the reflection of mirror (called **mirio**). The lost item was pulled out using **“billi”**, a hooked device made of iron and tied to a long rope. Sometimes the maali himself, used to tie himself to rope and went into the well to fetch the thing.

In monsoon, water used to get logged into small lakes in villages and was used for livestock and washing clothes. Such lakes were called **“tarai”** in Thar. Many towns had such water and its storage capacity was measured in terms of how many months the water will remain.

Name of the Town	Name of Tarai	Month Capacity
Mithi	nandhi, wadi tarai	3-4 months
Chelhar	ranasar ri tarai	5-6 months
Chelhar	Chhichhi ri tarai	3-4 months
gadhado	pandhiyari ri tarai	6 months
khiysar	-	4 months
chhachhro	2 mile dur tarai	3 months

The depth of water in lakes was measures in terms of **“gode jitto”** (upto knees), **“chel jitto”** (upto waist), **“kulhe jitto”** (upto shoulders), **“mathode taar”** (a man would drown), **“othi bod”** (a camel would drown - 2-3 mathoda).

Lakes built by people around Gadhado and Bagal were called “**Garua**”. Rainwater was collected in such garuas. Such garuas were also known by the people who built them. Such as Manakia-ro-garuo, lalania-ro-garuo, vahua-ro-garo etc.. Garua’s water was very sweet. There was a “**chhipo**” lake in Chhachhro where boys and men used to go for bath.

Because of problems associated with depth of well and water fetching, girl’s parents hesitated to marry their daughters to such villages. Even in folk songs daughters tell their parents not to marry them in villages where the wells are deep.

In Maheshwaris, unmarried girls never used to go to fetch water. When in-laws sent married woman to fetch water for the first time, they decorated the pot with white paint (called “**sehdi**”) and used to make red colored swastikas on the pots. Good decorated sindhunis were given and auspicious time was chosen to send the daughter-in-law to fetch water. This was called “**vahuari na pani uthiyari**”.

Wells gave water and hence prosperity to people but at the same time some unfortunate man or woman fed up of life used to jump into these wells (“**tipo deita**”) and commit suicide. Such wells were little used afterwards.

## 5.3 Food

It is a matter of pride that having been arrived from Marwar centuries ago and living amongst various communities in different region with the non-vegetarian eating habits, Maheshwari community practiced vegetarianism.

Ironsmiths, “Khatiri”, “Maali”, “Bajeer”, Goldsmiths, “Meghwaal”, “Bheel”, “Koli” and Islamic people had always been non-vegetarians but when Saaraswat brahmins Shuddh started consuming non-vegetarian food, at that time only brahmins of Pushkar, Maheshwaris, Bhojak and Shreemali brahmins stayed strict vegetarians.

Jains used to live in Nagarparkar. Except there at none of the places in Thar had Jains(Oswal) habited. None of the Maheshwaris lived in Nagarparkar. This prevented the influence of Jainism on Maheshwari community and the brahmins of Pushkar along with the Maheshwaris considered garlic and onion as non-consumable. The reason behind this could be that these communities being the followers of Vishnuism had limitation in the consumption of such Tamasik food.

Securing food by farming on their own fields, consuming milk, curd, butter milk, ghee from their own cattles(cows and buffaloes) in enough quantities, these people used to survive on simple but nutritious food. Almost at each Maheshwari’s house, there used to be milk-producing livestock. They used to own one or more cows. Some Maheshwaris used to keep buffaloes too apart from cows. People of other

communities used to keep goats.

To produce flour of grains, every household possessed flour mill using which woman used to grind the grains by themselves. While grinding the flour of Pearl millets (**bajri**), eating the fresh flour termed as **Baat** stuck to the **pulley** of flour mill used to give an immense pleasure. The women of the house used to have a good knowledge of all the parts of flour mill such as the **pulley**, **Makdi**, **kheel**, **kar**, **patli** etc.

The coarse, fine or medium texture of flour could be obtained by adjusting the height of nail. In 1944-45 at Mithi, Bhagchand Lohana installed a flour mill using diesel as fuel but none of the Maheshwaris used to go to his mill to grind their grains. In case of increased need of flour, two women used to sit face-to-face and grind the flour together using the flour mill.

With the help of a small flour mill also called as “ghantulo”, whole green grams used to be grinded to produce lentils and further grinded and peeled to produce **kormo** which was soaked in water and then kneaded in the wheat flour with spices to prepare special and delicious chapatis commonly known as **tikli**.

**The staple food of Maheshwaris:** For the breakfast, kids used to eat the roti of bajri prepared a night before with curd. In winter, the bajri rotis were warmed on coal-stove (angithi) and then crushed into pieces to mix with curd. Home made butter used to be spread on the roti of bajri which was called as Makhan-chakki and offered as breakfast to little kids. Adults did not use to eat breakfast.

Before eating their lunch, women used to offer first part of their meal to the fire. Separate chapatis for cows and dogs were prepared. (At the dawn, feed/grains for birds used to be sprinkled at the places meant for it and these places were called as hola-ro-chowk.

The lunch usually consisted of roti of bajri and thick chapatis of wheat flour, **rabdi** (curry of gram flour and curd), cooked vegetables, curd and buttermilk etc. **Khichdi** (boiled rice and lentil mix), **rabdi** and roti of bajri used to be the dishes for dinner. To prepare khichdi, rice and green grams (green lentils with peels) were mixed and then cooked. (As rice grew costlier, sometimes the proportion of rice in khichdi was kept less than that of green grams). In warm ghee, first cumin seeds and then the blend of buttermilk and gram flour were added to boil in medium fire to prepare the **rabdi**. It got cooked very quickly.

**“Lentil and rabdi had a fight, lentils consider itself superior, In less time rabdi gets cooked, never gets less in quantity.”**

## 5.4 Clothing

There is an old proverb in Gujarati “desh tevo vesh”. But, Maheshwaris did not do any changes to the dressing styles they brought to Thar from Marwar. There were different dresses for children, women and men. Following is their description:

**Small Children:** “**Jhablo**” and “**potro**” (a square piece of cloth without any stitches).

**Young Boys:** “**cholo**” (shirt), “**suthan**”, patloon (pyjama with tying thread), **dhotli**, cap, shorts, **waistcoat**, coat, in feet, leather slippers made by local cobbler. In winter, sweater, monkey cap, muffler etc. was worn.

**Unmarried Girls:** **Puthio**, ghaghro and after some age “odhan”. Later some girls also used to wear Frocks and Patloon. On hands, **kafur** (rubber)/aaj upto elbow, **Bilhia** or bangles ( made of ivory) which was also called **Mahiyar**.

**Men:** **Puthio**, **Dhotio**, **Potio** (turban), **Cholo**/shirt and in winters **baggal-bandi**. Elderly people put on blankets on shoulders. While studying English, students and employed people used to wear half sleeve shirts. In case of full-sleeve, they had double-cuff buttons, suits (without blazer), blazer and occassionally neck-tie and hat were worn. Socks in legs, and to keep socks inplace, an elastic belt with hooks was tied. Some employed men also used to wear Dhoti and **Patko** (a kind of turban). Dhoti used to be worn with double **laang** (the end to be tucked behind). In case of a relative’s death the dhotli used to be plated and one laang was tucked on the front instead of back. During the wedding of a men, the plates were kept untucked. For bathing, baafta (a thick cotton) **Anguchcho** (towel) was used. Some people used dhoti to dry their body and used to wear the same dhoti. Dhoti was changed every day and used to be put in to laundry. Cloth-stitched baniyan with a deep pocket near the belly was used to keep money safe. To keep money, a long plastic bag with threads on both side to tie were used. Such plastic bags were called **Vasni**. These Vasni’s were tied along the waist.

**Married Women:** Used to wear **zabbo** and **kurti**. Used to wear “gherdar ghaghras” (chaniyu or heavy flared skirt). Women used clothes type like chhint, gujj, cheero, kutchchi utlus, pent, kundhi etc.. To sew flared skirts, cloth was cut into plates or hook shape and for the tying thread a “chheen” used to be made around the waist area. Such skirts were made of upto 200 plates sometimes. Newly

wed girls used to wear skirts with a special type of hand made tying threads made up of embroidered fabric and had two coins tied at either ends. For covering head, they used a 3 feet cotton cloth which was also used to cover face (ghoonghat). There were several names for such cloth such as **laherio**, **sadahu**, **pomcho**, **divtho** etc. In winters they used warm marino (a pink shawl). On almost all these clothes, they used to put artistic clothwork such as **maakhi**, **klawat**, **goto**, **mukko**, **surmo**, **sattaar**, **tildi**, silk embroideries, diamonds etc. In the event of a death, ladies used to put a fold of their odhan behind the head. This practice was called to do “pachcho pallo”. In hands, they used to wear kafur (rubber) or ajj (ivory), these usually covered the whole hands from sholder to elbow and sometimes upto wrist. On feet they used to wear local jootis or “sapatas”.

**Widows:** Widows used to wear kanchali (a plain gown upto waist) and sleeves upto wrist. These were called “lambiye baahe”. Used to have black or red cloth as scarves. The bangles and other things from the arms were completely removed. Elderly women used to wear ghaghra made of “fillingiai” hand-colored by the local khatri, ghand etc. Some cloth used to be imported from gadhado that was also used.

Boys and men’s dresses such as cholo, shirts, trouser etc. were made of baafta cloth which was taken as a big piece and 3-4 pairs were sewn. These pairs used to be very durable and got better on each wash. These were normally sufficient for an entire year. They were also economical. Later, a Japanese cloth was also used which was called “kelo”. One pair of shirt-pyjama used to cost 1 Rupee. After the arrival of “Hirakh” type of cloth in the markets, clothes became whiter. Malmal and popplin was also used to sew shirts. Later China made double Horse Boski clothes also got popular. This cloth was used to sew shirt as well as used as turban. For trousers, “duff” cloth was preferred as it was smooth, durable and whiter.

Government workers used to sew shirts with detachable collors so that the collors for durability. If the trousers worn from hips, it was a fashion to fix it with fancy patch of cloth. Trouser’s sleeves were doubled. For shirts check pattern was popular and for pyjamas, belt was used. Men’s dhoti (a type of loincloth) was thick, with a red border and used to be imported from Patan, which was called “Pattani Dhoti”. The whole piece was roughly 8 yard so one dhoti was 4 yard. Later on mill produced thin cloth dhoti also became popular.

For Turbans, clothes from Jodhpur was used. Elderly men wore white turbans. Fathers of marrying couples used to wear pink turbans. Boys used to sew silky trouser of a fabric called pent. Handkerchiefs were hardly used. Bushcoats were not very popular. In the year 1946 when first RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or National Volunteer Organization) branch opened in Mithi, as a uniform of swayam-

sevak (volunteer), khaki shorts, white shirts and warm black caps were used while attending the branch.

Tailors were there in the villages but some sewing work was also done by women at home. Boys shirts were hand sewn by them. Sewing machines were not common at homes. Coat's and short's buttons were made of embroidered thread or by covering cloth over two layers of alluminium pieces. In olden times, women used to use a weaving wheel ("arrat") to weave cotton to make threads, make cloth and color it. This kind of cloth was called "gharecho" and was used to sew ghaghras. Such wheels were very large and are still seen in some homes.

Old girls and women started to make tablecloth, covers, handkerchief, scarf borders etc. using "aar"(ankodi). Woollen sweaters were also made of "sua" a kind of big, thick and non-sharp needle. These sweaters had different kinds of embedded designs and patterns. Gloves and caps for kids were also made of wool at home.

Women used to wash their cloth at home or at the local lakes. For washing hair or clothes, some places had suitable soil that was used. There were no washermen in Thar. Only in Mithi there was one family of Chhipa (washerman) but Maheshwaris hardly gave their clothes for washing or ironing. Some government employed people used the services of washermen.

Women used to do embroiderry on red "hulwaan" cloth. After removing some threads from the cloth they used silky thread to make designs. Such embroidered clothes were called **Bokani** or **Patko** which was worn in weddings.

## 5.5 Jewelry-Makeup

Gold and silver jewelry was used to be called "**Toll**" by Thari people. Maheshwari women were very much fond of jewelry. Jewelry popular in Marwar was also worn by people in Thar. Rich Maheshwari man looked poor by his dressing but even an ordinary Maheshwari woman looked rich with all the ornaments.

Keeping gold and silver in homes in the form of jewelry was not only the decor for home but also the prestige. In difficult times, these jewelry was useful so elders always kept that in mind while buying these. Gold was valued at 15 to 20 Rupees per Tola (11.66 grams) and silver at 50 to 60 Rupees per sher (80 Tolas). But with limited income, the purchasing power was less.

Different jewelry of gold and silver was made by local goldsmiths. Later, employed people used to go to Mirpurkhas to order their jewelry. Now let us see the details of commonly used women's and men's jewelry:

### 5.5.1 Golden Jewelry

**Men:** Rings, *chhalla* or *varnos* on fingers, on wrist, solid, 24 carat, approximately 20 tola *kado* or bracelet. Boys used to wear *tugalia*, *murki* in ears. Elderly men used to wear *loong* (earflower) or gold laced *gokhru* in ears. Used to put shirt's golden button with a chain. Used to tie lockets and pendants in their neck. On wedding, the groom used to wear heavy (approximately 20 tolas), necklaces.

**Women:** There were no ornaments for small children. Only black beads woven into golden strings which were called *najaria*. Used to put on silver anklet in legs and *kadholiya* in hands after they learn to walk. School girls used to wear *ali-borlo* in hair. Used to wear *buli* in nose, rings in fingers and earrings in ears. Unwed girls used to wear *bilhias* (bangles) on hand that were called *mahiya*. When a girl weds, she use to wear a lot of jewelry. People used to say: “**tolaa uu saththe chchadi ahhe**” More details on women's golden jewelry:

- **Forehead:** Ali-borlo, during wedding, *aad* and *tildi*.
- **Nose:** Nose-stud, *siri*, *koko*. Elderly women used to wear *Bhogli*. At the time of wedding, *nath* or window. Used to pierce in the middle of the nose and wear *buli*.
- **Ears:** Earring, small and big eardrops, *durgala* or durgala-eardrops with lace. The upper part of ear was used to pierce at three places and small leaf shaped ornament used to be worn called *pan'di*.
- **Teeth:** Some women used to cover one or two teeth with a golden sheet or only put a stud in a tooth.
- **Neck:** “Dohri” (with 3,5, or 7 folds), “kamthlo” (which was made of golden gini/coin or by moulding )

## 5.6 Residence

Maheshwari people basically migrated from Marwar and gradually settled in Thar's towns and villages. Their residences were all scattered and unsteady for a while after (usually changed the residence twice or thrice) which they settled at a place. This long period could be considered to be about 50 or more years (Transitional Migration Period). (**Note:** Since the partition in AD. 1947 till today the migration is still on.) As and when the family or clan's people gathered they started making huts and temporary housings with hay and clay etc. This was followed by acquiring



land cheaply in large area. People who migrated earlier called out on their relatives and when a sizeable number of people gathered, they made more permanent and structured, strong residential societies.

Thar has a very little rain which leads to the building of special types of residences. Specially since people were poor and lead a simple life, they started using the locally available material to build houses.

People started making their own bricks by digging up the clay or buy from the brick-makers. These bricks were thin, broad and long. Such cooked brick's samples could still be found from the ruins of "ghadhi". After that for convenience, standard sized bricks of size 12"  $\times$  6"  $\times$  3" were made in large quantities. When possible, bricks from old ruins were used to build new homes. For construction, outside the home a pit was dug and in there clay **gaar** was made using which bricks were laid. To plaster the walls, strong gaar was used. To prepare strong gaar **drabh-murat** (a type of grass) mixed with barley's hey, horse pr donkey's feces and salt-clay was wetted for 7-8 days. After that this wet mixture was crushed and used as a plaster. This was colored with white clay or with **sehdi**, used to do **pochi**.

Later on when bricks were made by kilns the bricks were cooked in those kilns and were used by the wealthy. However, some people used strong cooked bricks on the outside of the house while softer raw bricks were used inside the house for frugality and also such construction used to stay cool in summers.

Normally outside of the house a compound wall was erected so that some animal or outsider can not come in and also the privacy of home was maintained. The main door of house used to be kept broad and high so that domestic animals can come in. If the house is at a higher level than the land, steps were made outside. Inside the compounds some home had covered platforms called **jhelo**. If there is no jhelo then there was **velho** or veranda where domestic animals were tied in a corner. Further down, the main house started where there was an **osri** or **chhajari** followed by the room. Size of rooms were big. the kitchen was on the right or left corner of osri or sometimes separate kitchen (**randhnu**) were made. Large room was called **dohlo** which was used as a living room. Erecting walls a place was reserved for bath but there were no bathrooms. No latrines were constructed in homes. The innermost smallest room was used as a store room which was used to store valuables and small stuff.

As a part of main home, one room was made in a corner whose one door opened inside the home and the other one opened outside to the street. This room was called **ottak**. Elderly of the home used to sit here on a wooden cott. Guests also used to stay here so that the honor and privacy of the women of the home were maintained. Outside of the ottak also 2-4 cotts used to be there in the evenings-nights.

To hang things, colored wooden nails were nailed into the walls. Pigeon holes were

made in the walls called **jaara** and cupboards with doors were also made. Inside the cupboard, in a corner, a secret wallet was made in which a small pot used to be fitted at the time of construction. The wall had a brick which was not stuck in the wall behind which this secret wallet was made. These pots were used to store jewelry and such valuables. Cash and other valuables were sometimes put in clay pots which were covered by cloth and dug into landpits. These places were marked by some secret signs. There were no banks in Thar. Terraces were kept almost flat. For terrace construction, wooden rafters called **sohitar** were used as support to flat wooden battens. These battens were made up of lightweight wood such as **kirad** and **khabad**. On top a type of grass called **Sania**, **murat** or **kip** were spread or sometimes carpet made up of palm tree leaves were spread. On top of that dry clay was spread for 2 to 3 inches followed by a plaster of strong clay. For plaster, wooden or iron made **madho** tool was used. Terrace constructed in such a way used to keep cool in summers. Terrace was given slight slope which was usually invisible to naked eye. At the end of this slope was a drain to drain out rain water. These drains were made up of thin iron plates and were called **parnal**. Some people also used G.C.I. (Galvanised Corrugated Iron) terraces made up of iron sheets. After first world war, that is in about the year 1920, iron beams, girders and T-sections were available cheap. Such girders with T-sections were used in place of sohitors. 3" × 5" I-Beam were laid on which an inverse 'T' shaped 1" × 1.5" were used and in the middle squares of bricks called **choka** were laid. 12" × 12" × 2" sized chokas were laid and the seams were sealed with plaster. On top, sanias were put and **rago** was made to construct the terrace.

Main ottak, dohla or near the main room's roof, a square pit was made on which **baajigar** was made. It's three sides were covered and the side with the direction of wind was uncovered. The square part could be covered with a cover. This enabled light and air-flow in the room. This pit had horizontal rods in the middle and a cover could be pulled to cover it when desired.

In the basement of the home, a mixer of equal parts of sand and cowdung was prepared and spread on the floor. This was called **bhargola**. Members from the household and children from the neighbor were called over to do step on it (left-right) for it to settle down. This was called **otto champta**. For this a lot of fresh cowdung is required for which people used to reserve the whole village's cattles for a night so that somebody else can't take any cowdung. If there is cowdung lying somewhere and there is a line around it in the sand then nobody would touch it considering it was reserved. After the stepping process, it was left to dry before using the floor. When there is wear and tear on such floor because of regular usage, every third or fourth day a plaster of cowdung was done which was called **dhor dini**. This was done daily in the kitchen to keep it neat.

On the doortops of less strong houses a thick wooden plank was kept as a lintel.

In the houses made up of bricks, the doortops were made up of brick archs which looked aesthetic and were convenient. The lower panel of door frame was called **tharkhan** while the upper frame was called **barsakh**. The frame itself was called **chokhat**. Outside of the house a semi-hard otto was made but if it was convenient a hard otto was made by laying bricks horizontally and vertically and filling seams with plaster. This otto was called **thalho**. To store water in home, tanks made up of bricks and cement were also included later on.

There was a common conception that until the Temple's rooftop is not made, no Maheshwari can make his home's rooftop. In Mithi village, there was one such two-storied girl's highschool. One Maheshwari brother constructed such two-storied house and in a few days his wife died at a very young age. However, this could also be a coincidence.

In Thar, almost everybody had their own small or big homes. Nobody rented house. If some one needed or if someone comes to a town for job purpose, he used to get a house to live for time being. Travelers who came from outside, for them, every town had a Maheshwari Guest house called **Dharmshala**. For the building of such dharmshalas, some Maheshwari might have donated land or it could be a combined effort of the Maheshwari **panchayat** or it could have been completely built by one individual. This Dharmshala was generally known by the individual who built it. The Dharmshala usually had an accompanying well built as well.

As mentioned earlier, women used to bath in the walls erected at the vedaha while the men either used to bath behind a plank of wood or went to the well. After the bath, they used to wash their clothes and return with the bucketfull of water with themselves.

Latrines were rarely built inside the house. Men used to go 2-3 of them together into the woods with a pot full of water. While returning they cleaned the pot with sand. After coming home they used to wash the hands and the pot with clean water. Women went to the outskirts of villages behind the bushes. Later on in Mithi, government built a compound outside the town protected by barbed bushes which was called **kuhi**. Women used to go in a group of 3-4 for latrine.

To assist in construction of houses, Meghwal or Bajir labors were easily available. They were paid a few annas or a rupee per day for their labor. They were also given Bajri Roti and buttermilk to eat for lunch.

Before the festival of Diwali, walls of home were whitewashed and painted with white clay. Both sides of doors were painted pictures using Sehadi.

Schools, Hospitals, government offices, Government Rest Houses, Post-offices, Courts and prison buildings were all located in the headquarters of the Talukas and were well built.

## 5.7 Education

Thar region was very underdeveloped owing to the lack of transportation and scarcity of water etc. This was the main reason it was lacking in education too. Till AD 1901, the whole district had 3639 literate people. This ratio was 1000 to 10 from the population point of view. As Sindh was the part of Mumbai state and since Thar area was under the administration of Kutch regions political agent, Gujarati language was taught in the schools. Initially, Gujarati was taught in second, third and fourth grades while Sindhi was taught in first and second grades. However, soon all Taluka headquarters had primary schools. In 1907, Tharparkar district's main centre was moved from Umarkot to Mirpurkhas, so Sindhi language teaching was more emphasized and Gujarati language took a place as second language. After teaching Gujarati with Sindhi eventually in 1940-41, the Gujarati teaching stopped completely. For Gujarati exams, a separate education inspector used to come from Karachi.

Primary education started from kindergarten. Black stone slate and black-white chalk-pen were used. To improve hand-writing wooden plank panels were used. Fuller's earth (**Multani Mati**) was applied to these panels and after drying it, alphabets were written with ink and **baru** pens. To prepare black ink, semi-circular sticks were available which were soaked in water in a wooden or glass inkpot. Inside these raw cotton threads were also introduced. Accounting and book-keeping was done using this black ink and the books were sprinkled with fine sand. Later on as blue ink, bloating paper, pen holder, fountain pen became available, the usage of black ink stopped.

Primary education books were printed in Mumbai state (Sindh was a part of Mumbai state). Books were printed in equal quantities for both Sindhi and Gujarati languages. Lessons and pictures were same. Only poetries were different. Book's cover had pictures of British queen Victoria-George Vth and queen Mary-George VIth. Books were put in a cloth bag and hung on shoulder to take to the school. These bags were called **bujki**.

Primary education was upto fourth grade. In 1911, in Mithi, A.V. (Anglo-Vernacular) school started where English was taught from first to fifth standard.

## 5.8 Utensils

We human beings eat food to sustain life and to prepare food, we need utensils. Earlier, poor people used clay utensils. Whereas, Maheshwaris, Brahmins etc. used brass, or copper utensils. Muslims used to use enamelled iron utensils. A detailed

description of the utensils used by people in Thar is as below:

### 5.8.1 Regular Usage

1. To cook *khichdi*, *daal*, *rabdi*, **topio (tapeli)**, **sipri**, **degdi** and for its cover, **rikebi(chhibu)** were used.
2. To prepare Wheat or Barley dough from floor, **paiter** was used which was made up of wood.
3. To roast roti or *fulka*, iron pan or clay pan (*tavdi*) were used.
4. To assist roasting, a long flat spatula which used to be made of iron, was used.
5. To stir vegetables, daal or khichdi, big brass spoon called **kudchhi** or **kevi** were used. Small spoons were not used.
6. To serve and eat the cooked food, plates, bowl (**vatki**), glass and round mugs (**loto**) were used. These utensils were made of Brass or Bronze. Bronze was preferred.

Slanted edged plate was called Hyderabad plate. To fetch **Moger**, this was specially used. Round mugs or **lotas** were named differently based on their shapes and sizes. For example, Banarasi, Jaipuri, Moradabadi, Chauda Ghat, Golmora, Kalasia, Vachhati etc. People used to carry **lotas** for defecation in the woods. In addition to copper, brass and bronze, after the world-war-II, utensils made up of German Silver were used which looked shiny and neat. Copper and brass utensils were enamelled in order to avoid cooked food getting ‘poisoned’. However, bronze utensils did not need to be enamelled.

The container for ghee (refined butter) was called **ghilodi** while the inner spoon, called **mirio** used to be made up of iron. In order to serve more ghee, **tipri** was used which could carry about 65 grams (6 to 6.25 tolas) of ghee. *note:* At home on Bajri roti, more ghee was served while on chapati, the ghee used to be smeared with the help of a small piece of cloth called **thigdi**.

To store spices, a wooden holed **chaamak** was used. While on travel, spices were taken in little cloth bags called **kothadia**.

Knives were used to cut and chop vegetables.

### 5.8.2 For Fetching and Storing Water

**gaagar**, **morio** were used to fetch water. These two together were called **bedu-hel** and were made up of brass or copper. These would be imported from Gujarat's Visnagar town. To store water at home, clay pots, big pots, **gagaria** and their covers (**dhak**) were used. For more needs or during festivals, copper-brass or iron drums were used.

### 5.8.3 For Milk Production and Storage

Brass **chaudo**, **boghardo** or **chaudi** were used for milking. To store milk, curd, buttermilk, fermenting (**ambedva**) and churning a big pot, small **handi** and **dhakni** (cover) were used. To feed milk to children, seashells (**supli**) were used instead of spoons.

### 5.8.4 For Sweets

To place flour or to make dough or to put sweets **tambith** (big dish) made up of copper or brass were used. To cook flour, to fry or for sugar syrup **kadhahi** (large handled bowl) made up of brass or iron were used. To filter big circular filters made up of brass were used. To crush or grind big mortar and pestle made up of wood, iron or brass. To pull out the fried food/sweet, iron **jhaaro** (spoon with long handle and large circular base) was used. To distribute sweets among the community, iron beaker with handles on both sides was used so that two people can hold it from opposite sides. To store sweets **daboro** (round box) made up of brass was used.

### 5.8.5 Large Utensils on Wedding/Funeral Occasions

To prepare **mogar**, a large iron kadhai in which upto 10 kilogram of flour could be cooked. **kudachch** (large spoons) made up of iron which used to be 5 to 6 feet long. To cook vegetables, curry, rice, **khichdi** (porridge-like mix of rice and lentils) a **deg** which was made up of copper was used.

### 5.8.6 Clay Utensils

Some clay utensils are mentioned in the above sections. In addition, to store flour **tasli** and to store salt or such powdered things **kulhadia** were used. Previously vegetables or khichdi was cooked in clay pots which used to be tastier. To crush

**thandai** the pestle was wooden and the **kundo**(special clay made circular deep vessel) were used. To grind homemade medicines stone made pestle and flat sheet were used. In addition to above, to store grains the following utensils were used: To store foodgrains **kothla** which were cubic or cylindrical large vessels made up of clay. The foodgrains were filled up from the top and were fetched from the bottomhole. This bottomhole was sealed with a cotton cloth which was called **suhanu**. To store less quantity of foodgrain, flour or raw vegetables **dhabra** were used which were made up of clay mixed with paper. To keep stuff or to put clothes for washing **taans** were used which were made up of iron. Buckets were iron or brass. To grind foodgrain, the mill was stone made. To crush rice into small pieces **jandar** made up of cooked clay was used.

### 5.8.7 Other Necessary Utensils

To bring burning coals **taanda** from neighbors to fire the stove, a clay or iron made **dhupio** was used. To hold taanda **chimto** (tongs) made up of iron were used. Such nice tongs were used to hold or turn sweets like **jalebi** or **dohti** (a type of donut). To fetch **chhaas**(buttermilk) out of handi, coconut shell called **topsi** were used. Dried coconut was used to make topsis. After removing the skin of dried coconut, a line of water was made in the middle and then it was broken so that it breaks into two halves. The half with eyes was thrown away and the other half was mended and cleaned to make topsi. To wash handis, **jhunthi** (a kind of grass) was used. To pick hot vessels, cloth piece were used which were called **garno**. There were no pliers. Wealthy people used silver utensils. When Maheshwaris invited brahmins or other community people over for lunch then they used silver vessels as they were considered unpollutable. If by mistake a brass vessel was used then that vessel was depolluted by using taandas. Silicon or chinese clay vessels glass utensils were never used by Maheshwaris. Alluminium vessels came late but were not adopted by Maheshwaris. For domestic usage, different types and sizes of utensils were stored at home and were used depending on the occasion. Big community vessels were kept at a common place and were brought as and when necessary. When Maheshwaris went for business of pilgrimage to Sindh or Gujarat, they used to buy and bring the utensils from there. They used to engrave elders name on the utensils. When great grandparent's or grandparent's utensils were used, they used to read their names and felt proud and happy.

The stoves **chula** were made up of clay. In winters portable stove of clay were made which was called **angethi**. For fuel in those stoves, dry wooden logs or dried cowdung was used. There were no coal stove, kerosene primus, electric or gas burners or ovens.

In addition, utensils for religious activities were made up of copper or brass such as **panch patra**, **aachmani**, lamp, and so on.

## 5.9 Bedding

## 5.10 Business and Employment

Maheshwaris used to do business, farming and livestock raising. When they arrived in Thar, they found soil and environment similar to Marwar, so they found it suitable and continued their original business and economical activity.

Thar's Maheshwaris used to put shops in the nearby villages of their own towns. Every town and village of Thar had such shops of Maheshwaris. Only one Maheshwari used to put a shop per village. They used to sell cloth, spices, jaggery, sugar, silver jewelry, utensils etc. on such shops. In lieu of these they used to take grains, ghee, wool, "jiroi", "kharad", "khatha", blankets etc. under the barter system of trade. Additionally, rural people had little cash in those days. They used to lend money on interest from "vaniyas" (Maheshwari) on occasions like wedding-death. They had to mortgage their jewelry against money and had to pay a good amount in interest. This interest business used to be profitable to Maheshwaris. Shopowners used to stay at the village shops for 4-6 months. The family stayed back in their towns. So they managed all their household activities like cooking themselves.

In some villages where there were no such shops, Maheshwaris used to go with a big bag of stuff to sell (called "khadiyo" with 2 sections hanged on the either side of shoulders). They used to shout in the village: "**ahe koi maai, tol vatthan vari?**" – which means, is there any lady who would like to buy jewelry?

Some Maheshwaris had fields on the outskirts of the towns. These were given to kolis and bheels on "haarap" for cultivation. The grain thus produced was partly given to them, partly used for domestic use and the rest was sold away. In monsoon Chibhri, kaaring, Guvar etc. was available. Milking animals like cows, buffaloes, were domesticated and used to produce enough milk, butter, curd, butter-milk, ghee etc. for the domestic usage. Ghee was traded in big quantities with Kutch and Gujarat. Thar's ghee was famous. Some Maheshwaris used to sell oxes. Oxes from Thar used to go to Kutch for sale in return of silver, wooden beds, "gaj", "atlas", small wooden cots (from Sankhda, District Vadodara) etc.

Maheshwaris had shops of grains, cloth, cutlery, grocery etc. shops in cities. They used to import wheat and rice from Sindh. Colored cloth was imported from Gadhadra, while pattani dhoti-jota were imported from Patan. Jaggery from Sindh and



sugar was imported from Sumatra.

In the headquarters of TharParkar district called Mirpurkhas, Mithi's Tejomal Jagani had a big financial establishment. Jagani family was called "lakhpati" in those days.

Some Maheshwaris had shops in Naukot also.

Umarkot's Tikamdas Ramjimal Kakkad was the owner of many acres of land. He was a big landlord. First English education started in A.D. 1912 in Thar. First batch of metric students came out in A.D. 1919-1920. Students passing metric in those days and after used to work as clerk's in the government's departments such as customs, courts and revenue. Some got special training and became postmasters or teachers in schools. These service class people were around 2-3% but were better respected than others in the community. Their lifestyle was visibly different than others.

## 5.11 Festivals