

Our Cultural Heritage

Bansidhar Maheshwari
(Translated by Ketan Maheshwari)

Contents

1	Origin of the Maheshwari Caste	5
2	Amazing Life-Journey of the Maheshwari Community	7
3	Migration from Marwar to Thar	9
4	Brief Geography and History of Thar	11
5	Infrastructural Necessities of the Community	15
5.1	Dhatki (Thari) Language	15
5.2	Water	19
5.3	Food	21
5.4	Clothing	22
5.5	Jewelry-Makeup	23
5.6	Residence	23
5.7	Education	23
5.8	Utensils	23
5.9	Bedding	23
5.10	Business and Employment	23
5.11	Festivals	24

Chapter 1

Origin of the Maheshwari Caste

Authentic historical material is not available about the origin of the Maheshwari community. Whatever material is available is in the form of the book “Itihas Kalpdrum Maheshwari Kulbhushan” authored by late Shivkaranji Darak of Mundwa. Based on this, following is the mention of the origins of the Maheshwari community:

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

One day the king invited brahmins and grandly honored them. Brahmins were very happy with the king’s service and asked for a boon. The king then asked them 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 direction and bath in the Surya-kund there until he is 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 honored them with fine clothes and jewelry and respectfully saw them off. The king prayed god Shiva and obtained 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 became 12, enemies were afraid of him. The king was very much satisfied with his work. He was careful of not letting the prince go towards the North direction.

Once a Jain sadhu came and preached the prince about Jain religion luring him into anti-Shiva opinions and showing the faults of brahmins. At the age of 14, prince opposed Shiva and started practicing Jain religion. He campaigned the Jain religion in East, West and South directions and banished idol worshipping. He harassed brahmins and broken their sacred threads (*janoi*). He shut down 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 direction to the Suryakund with his 72 officers. He got 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, nearby enemies attacked the state. They divided the state into pieces and merged into their own states.

Even as this happened, the prince's queen and 72 officer's wives 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 taking back 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

Quitting the Kshatriya religion and accepting the pen and weighing-balance is as courageous and amazing story of the King's officers as is the story 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, Jaipur families went towards Delhi, and that of Bikaner went to Calcutta crossing many many borders. People from Marwar also went to Mumbai and Maharashtra. This flow 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 and Assam and then to Utkal-Assam and Nagaland. Some of the Maheshwari people 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 portion of the country, providing a courageous example like other Vaishya communities of Rajasthan.

For the above mentioned expansion, apart from livelihood, self and family's 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 is not only settled in India but have crossed international borders as well. With 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

of thieves-dacoits and enemies using those primitive tools will give 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, 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.¹ 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 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.

¹Vikram Samvat, a hindu lunar calendar

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 Kutch.

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 *Pachnad* area, flowed through Bahawalpur's east and near Umankot 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 Dhathi 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 gadhodo.
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. Occasionally 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 Kalhudas 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-Sind'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 language-wise. 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. However 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

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

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 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 Umarkot 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, Khatris, Malis, Sonaras, Rajputs (Sodha), Meghwal, Bheels, Bajeer

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

Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati	Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati
Ankh	Akh	Aankh	gaa	gaun	gaay
kann	kan	kaan	meens	meen	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

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 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).

Dhatki	Sindhi	Gujarati
tahjo naam ki ahe?	thunjo nalo chha aahe?	taru naam shu chhe?
maan h 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

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, people’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:

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

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

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.

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 embroidery. 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 baaisaaheb. She also built one tadho and it was called baaisaaheb-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, “Khatri”, “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:

5.5 Jewelry-Makeup

5.6 Residence

5.7 Education

5.8 Utensils

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 Gadhada, 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