

# 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 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. 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 up to 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	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

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 TharParker 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, 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:

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”** (up to knees), **“chel jitto”** (up to waist), **“kulhe jitto”** (up to 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, “Khatris”, “Maalis”, “Bajeers”, Goldsmiths, “Meghwaals”, “Bheels”, “Kolis” 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, Bhojaks and Shreemali brahmins stayed strict vegetarians.

Jains used to live in Nagarparkar. Except there at none of the places in Thar had Jains (Oswals) 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 cattle (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 ground to produce lentils and further ground 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 skin) 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 occasionally 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 death of a relative 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 “pach-cho pallo”. In hands, they used to wear kafur (rubber) or ajj (ivory), these usually covered the whole hands from shoulder to elbow and sometimes up to wrist. On feet they used to wear local jootis or “sapatas”.

**Widows:** Widows used to wear kanchali (a plain gown up to waist) and sleeves up to 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 ghaghras 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 collars so that the collars 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 embroidererry 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 *mahiyar*. 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 land-pits. 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 cow-dung is required for which people used to reserve the whole village's cattle for a night so that somebody else can't take any cow-dung. If there is cow-dung 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 cow-dung was done which was called **dhor dini**. This was done daily in the kitchen to keep it neat.

On the door tops of less strong houses a thick wooden plank was kept as a lintel. In

the houses made up of bricks, the door tops were made up of brick arcs 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 high school. 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 Umarmkot 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 ink pot. 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 Vth. Books were put in a cloth bag and hung on shoulder to take to the school. These bags were called **bujki**.

Primary education was up to fourth grade. In 1911, in Mithi, A.V. (Anglo-Vernacular) school started where English was taught from first to fifth standard. After passing fourth grade Sindhi in primary school, in A.V. school, first grade English with fifth grade Sindhi was taught. In subsequent two years, second and third grade English with sixth and seventh grade Sindhi was taught respectively. After passing fifth grade English, for sixth and seventh (Metric) grade English, one had to go to Hyderabad (Sindh).

For girls, there was one school from grade one Sindhi till grade seven. In primary fourth grade and English third grade a competitive exam was held in which some

bright students used to participate. Successful students of this exam received a monthly scholarship of Rupees five. This scholarship was given for three years. After third grade English, this scholarship was given for the next four years.

Vadhwan's (Saurashtra, Gujarat) Mr. Dayashankar Ganeshji Dave was appointed the first headmaster of A.V. school. He was also given the authority of second class magistrate. He stayed in Mithi for several years. The ritual of changing of the sacred thread **janoi** on the day of **Balev** was started by him.

If boys and girls wished, they could appear for the **kameti-final** (Vernacular Final Examination) exam. This exam name was changed in 1939 to "Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination". The center for this was Umarkot which was changed to Mithi in 1938. After passing this exam one could get a job of teacher in the primary school.

The population of Mithi in 1901 was 2806. In the primary school, the number of boys was 143 and girls was 93. Umarkot's population was 4924 in 1901. While the number of boys and girls in its primary school was 180 and 120 respectively. In Umarkot, boy's school used to impart technical education. They used to teach carpenter and ironworks to students.

The seventh grade English examination "metric" was considered a very important examination. This examination was organized by the Mumbai University. The centre in Sindh was Hyderabad.

Initially, in the primary schools, wearing cap was compulsory and in the English medium school, wearing blazer was compulsory which was abolished later on.

In those days there was no boys-girls co-education. Girls had a separate two-storied school. As their headmistress, a lady from Kathiawad (Saurashtra in Gujarat) was appointed. She was called "bai saahab". Initially, parents were hesitant of sending their girls to schools so government used to pay them four to eight annas as incentive (one anna is one-sixteenth of a rupee). Girls used to get free cloth and threads for embroidery work at school. When higher authorities came for school inspection, heads of the town or village used to distribute **patasa** sweets. On the birth anniversary of the Queen or the King, toffees or sweets were distributed among students.

Corporal punishment was common in schools. This included, pinching, sit ups, hitting with wooden rule or thin stick. Some teachers also made students do little household chores.

Around the year 1931-1932, in order to open a new highschool in Mithi, a Thar Education Society was established. Main members of the society were Mr. Murlidhar Parumal Nabisaria, Mr. Bhojraj Laxmandas Sindhi, Mr. Hemraj Mulchand Bachani, Mr. Dungromal Narayandas Jeswani, Mr. Tikamdas Maljiram Rathi.

After the inspiration and hard work of then district collector Mr. Madhusudan Damodar Bhatt I.C.S., finally the highschool that was going to be built in Diplo was moved to Mithi and the work started in 1937. The people of Thar collected and donated an amount of Rupees 25,000 for the highschool. Each Maheshwari voluntarily donated one month of his salary.

In Chhachhro, English medium school was available until grade three. A.V. school till fifth grade started in 1940 and a highschool started in 1945. First headmaster in the A.V. school was Mr. Mulchand Pitambardas Khatri.

Boys from Chhachhro, Chelhar, Gadhado, etc. used to come to Mithi for studies. Mithi highschool was under the administration of the district local board. In the campus of highschool there was a boarding facility for Hindu boys and later there was a hostel for Muslim boys outside of the campus. There was good facility for dining and staying. There was a deep well in the campus of the highschool. This went dry later on. It was called **heladio**. In front of the school, there was a big playground.

In fourth grade English medium, Persian was taught as a second language but after the year 1940, Sanskrit was arranged as a second language in addition to Persian. For Sanskrit, a knowledgeable pandit was hired part-time. Students were allowed to opt for either of the subjects.

Students used to get one or two paise as their pocket money out of which they used to buy **Taluna** (cooked chickpeas lentil), **bhugada** (grams without skin) or peppermint. It also happened that student paid 1 paisa and asked for half the stuff in the recess and the other half at the end of the school.

In those days in around 1944-45, without the availability of ice, a man belonging to Bhojak community used to sell ice-cream made with the help of Ammonia. Students used to buy from him and eat on campus.

Only boys used to go to highschool initially, but in the year 1944-45, after the arrival of a lady teacher, two girl students – Revti Waghjimal Jagani and Nirmala Bhojraj Sindhi entered the school. They used to sit in the boy's class on a separate bench. They got married in a year or two and had to leave the school.

To become an English teacher, there was a college in Hyderabad from where after passing the S.T.C. examination, many became teachers. In order to get B.A. degree for teachers-only Aligarh University organised an external examination where many teachers from Thar also graduated.

In highschools, ink was used to write in notebooks. Ball-point pens were not yet available. Blue ink pot and nib-holder had to be used. In the school every bench had ink pots, one per student in which the peon used to fill up the ink everyday. For this, one paise fees per month was charged. The fees for games and sports was

one anna per month.

Occasionally plays were held in the highschool for which students used to bring sari's **odhani** for curtains etc. Some students also brought chairs from home. School also organized competitions for speech, singing, sports, etc.

In monsoons, students and teachers used to go on picnics-excursions to nearby lakes. Every student used to contribute 2-4 annas and some sweets were prepared at one of the student's home. These sweets were taken along to the picnics.

In Thar, before the partition of India, Mithi's Mr. Murlidhar Parumal Nabisaria was the first person to get matriculation. While Mithi's Mr. Shevaram Vinomal's daughter Draupadi studied from Mirpurkhas and became the first Maheshwari girl to get matriculation. After metric, followed the inter which paved the way for the L.L.B. degree. First such graduate was Mithi's Mr. Amolakhdas Parumal Kela (Nabisaria). After that Mr. Jethanand Lilaram Lalwani and Mr. Waghjimal Gunesmal Jagani became advocates. After that Chhachhro town's Mr. Maneklal Khetaram Sharda became the first B.A. graduate. They started working as an English teacher and later on joined the government's Revenue department. After metric, a training could be taken to become post-master. Some Maheshwaris were post-masters.

A school was opened in Mithi in 1938 wherein Patan's (North Gujarat) Pundit Mulshankar Shastri used to teach Hindi and Sanskrit. Students attended it voluntarily. One such school was in Umarmkot. To open one such school in Chhachhro town, Umarmkot's Mr. Tikamdas Ramjimal Kakkad made a donation. The school had pictures of both father and son on its walls. School also imparted religious teachings of Bhagwat Geeta's Shlokas.

Studies were specially emphasized in the schools. There were no private tuitions. Students only studied from textbooks and school notes. Guides were rare. They used to be called **tat**. If some student had one such guide he was considered duffer. For such poor students, teachers used to teach them additional hours.

For evening sports and games, there was a special games teacher. If some student is found to be absent, they used to ask reasons. If the student is sick, they used to visit him to their homes. Teachers had great affection for their students and every student was taken well care of by the teachers. There were no extra curricular activities in the schools.

Students were very respectful of teachers. If some students are chatting around in the town and if they see a teacher coming, they would stand up in respect. If a student sees a teacher coming from the other end of the street, he would either stopped or would change his way.

## 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, **gagaraia** 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. Aluminium 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

Because of Thar's sandy and weedy soil, many bugs, insects and reptiles were found. Among them, poisonous creatures like snakes, scorpions and such were very dangerous and one had to be careful. People were afraid of their bites. Normally they could not climb up the cotts but **funkan** could climb up the bed, will blow poisonous air in the sleepers mouth and wake him up with its tail.

To be safe of such creatures, homes must have good bed. Bed made by local carpenters were called **micha** which were very simple. Good local bed frames were made up of **rohida** wood and its legs used to be engraved with designs. Bedframes made in Hyderabad were called **khat**. They were popular because of their **sangheda** wood legs, fittings and height.

Gujarat's Vadodara district's Sankheda town was famous for its bedframes. When people visited this town for business, they fondly bought bedframes with lacquer work in their legs. They also engraved or painted their names on the bedframes and brought them home. Such bedframes were also given to daughters in **bihnda**. Small such bedframes were given to the daughters at the time of childbirth.

To make a complete bed out of these bedframes, weaving was required. A special type of rope called **waan** was used for weaving. The weavers were expert people in the art of weaving. Two different color ropes were used for weaving and different designs were made while weaving. To begin weaving, first, two-feet from one side's hump, a life-knot was tied and rope was weaved around it which was called **vadaan**.

Another style of weaving starts from one corner and continues in angle throughout. Such angled weaving was done without vadaan. While weaving, people used to keep little threads below the frame where rope was winding so that the rope does not slip away. These little pieces of rope were called **kuti**. Once the weaving is completed, these kutis were removed. In the end the ropes were pulled for tightness and tied into a knot. Special care was take while pulling so that the legs do not get unbalanced. Instead of cotton or waan, sometimes the ropes were made from the thread-yarn obtained from the **aakdo** (*Calotropis*) plant's flowers.

Later on instead of ropes, plates of textile or other materials were used. These plates were called **nivar**. In the case of nivar, instead of weaving at an angle it was weaved straight. First, between two bedposts, plates were wound 9 to 11 times. This was followed by weaving the other plates in the right angle of the previous plates from the other side of the bed. This style of weaving was called **tanipeto**. With this weaving, sometimes **chopat** game's design were also made. In a variation, 3,2 and 1 plates were weaved with the **Bharat** material and the other 3,2, and 1 plates were weaved with **khanat** material. This design was stronger than the previous ones. Once the weaving is completed, the nivar was pulled and the end was sewn. Such beds did not have vadan. These types of beds were soft and comfortable compared to the rope beds. During usage when the bed gets loose **like a swing**, then the ropes or nivars were pulled and tightened again.

Rugs (**faraasi**) were spread on these beds. Mattress and bedsheet were put on rug. Mattress were called **pathrani** which were made by filling of 3.5 to 5 kilogram of cotton-wool. Mattress were covered with cloth cover which was washable. This cover protected the mattress.

As a blanket with bed, quilt or duvets were made. These quilts were made up of a filling of 1 to 1.5 kilogram of cotton-wool. Another kind of blanket was called **sirakh**. Sirakh were thick and made with more quantity of cotton-wool. The meaning of Sirakh is Si (cold) + Rakh (keep) or a blanket which keeps cold away. These were also covered with a cloth cover. It was a tradition to give silk-satin quilt to daughter in marriage.

Such mattress-quilts etc. came later. In early days, woman of house used to make blankets from rags of cloth found in homes. These blankets were called **rali**. Old cloth and rags were collected from home and from it a **leh** was made. Two equal pieces of jute-cloth were taken and sewn from three sides to make the outer cover. One end was kept open unsewn. This was opened inside-out and spread on the floor. On top of this leh was put as much as required. This leh was then spread out and then a well-practiced woman would invert the cover in such a way that the leh does not get heaped up and can get evenly spread between the two layers of the cover. After doing this the cover and leh (cover + leh = rali) were stitched together. Daily a little bit of stitching was done. If the stitching was not done over a long time, the rali had to be tied around a wooden stick. Beautiful designs were made while stitching. Oftentimes, colorful cloth was used for the cover. Rali for kids was called **ralka** which were made fondly for kids. Silky cloth was used to make the cover and was adorned with shiny threads. Such ralkas were given to children of daughters and also son's children. Rali was used as mattress as well as blankets.

In winters blankets made up of wool called **khatha**, **kambal**, **kambalia** were available. They were very protective of cold weather.

In summers, cotton sheets called **khes** were used which were brought popularly from Sindh's Nasarpur town. Islami style **Ajrakh** kept body cool in summers.

To support head, pillows (**vihana-osisa**) filled up of cotton-wool were made. Pillows were covered with pillow-covers. These pillow-covers were embroidered with users name or phrases such as "good night", "happy dream", etc. In the corner nice creepers were embroidered. Such embroidery was also done on bedsheets.

In addition to big beds, small beds called **michli-khatli** were made for children. People who do not have a swing **ghodiyu** used to put a little stone under one of the legs of such bed and rocked it across to give the bed a rocking motion so that child sleeps well.

Wealthy people had big bedded swings and they used to swing in them (**ludta**). If some sick person has to be taken somewhere on camel then a special kind of bed called **kajao** was tied to the camelback on which the person could sleep comfortably.

To spread on floor, cotton **farasi** was used. Wealthy people used **galicha**. **Karad, jaroi** weaved out of camel and goat hair was used. These were strong and durable. These all kinds of beddings were called **hundh** in Thar and to store them wooden **dahnchi** was made.

In the event of someone's death, people used to sleep on sheets on floor without mattress. This kind of sleeping tradition was called **ukhrande suta**.

## 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 Thar Parkar 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

In order to escape from the boredom of routine life, and enjoyment, society has made arrangements for festivals. Celebration of festivals are arranged such that they fall on the days according to the seasons, religious events, political events, or social systems. These festivities blossoms the hopes and aspirations of human heart. The stories and legends related to these festivals have been preserved by heart by the women of the community. They enjoy these festivals by reciting these legends for each festival. Ladies also perform religious ceremonies related to the festival.

Gujarati Month	Marwari Month	Gujarati Month	Marwari Month
Kartak sud 2057 <sup>2</sup>	Kartak sud 2057	Magh sud 2057	Magh sud 2057
Kartak vad 2057	Magshar vad 2057	Magh vad 2057	Fagan vad 2057
Magshar sud 2057	Magshar sud 2057	Fagan sud 2057	Fagan sud 2057
Magshar vad 2057	Posh vad 2057	Fagan vad 2057	Chaitra vad 2057
Posh sud 2057	Posh sud 2057	Chaitra sud 2057	Chaitra sud 2058 <sup>3</sup>
Posh vad 2057	Magh vad 2057	Chaitra vad 2057	Vaishakh vad 2058

Table 5.7: Gujarati and Marwari Calendar

These festivals are also attached with the scientific viewpoints and the traditions associated ensures a healthy and balanced life for the people celebrating them.

Since the time of immigration from Marwar, Maheshwaris have strived to preserve their identity as per traditions. To this effect, along with their language, clothing and garments, jewelry, makeup, they also strived to preserve their festivals.

**Marwari Year** : A Vikram Samwat (calendar) year in Marwar starts on the first day *sud*<sup>1</sup> of Chaitra month. Whereas in Gujarat, the month starts on first day of Kartak sud. Means, in Gujarat the new years starts 7 months after it starts in Marwar. However, a Marwari month starts from the vad fortnight followed by the sud fortnight whereas the Gujarati month starts with the sud fortnight followed by the vad fortnight. So, each month has a difference between Marwari and Gujarati Calendar as shown in table 5.11.

As seen in table 5.11, in every fortnight, sud is the same but vad has a difference of one month.

Thar's festivals are associated with Marwari calendar still coincides well with the Gujarati calendar. For instance, Diwali in Gujarat falls on Aaso vad New Moon day while in Marwar it is Kartak vad New Moon day. Both days are counted as different on calendar but fall on the same actual day. All the festivals celebrated by hindus of Hindustan are celebrated by us with minor differences and additions of some new local festivals. In the following description of festivals, Gujarati tithi is mentioned and where the festival falls on a vad part, the Marwari tithi is mentioned in the brackets.

**Ishwar Gavar/Gangor.** This festival falls right after Holi. Ishwar means Shiva and Gavar means Parvati. When the Spring season is on its full blossom, this festival

<sup>1</sup>The waxing phase of moon is called sud and the waning phase is called vad

is celebrated. On the next day of Holi, that is on the day of Dhuleti, unmarried girls would wash hair, put on new clothes and went where the Holi was lighted. They would cool down the lighted Holi with water, which was called **Chhanto nakhyo**. From there, they would make fistful shapes of wet ash and brought some of them to someone's home. Here, they would establish Gavar from the ash. This was followed by making statues of sand and seeding of **jvara**. After that girls used to put on new clothes and jewelry everyday and used to offer water (**arag**) to sun before breakfast. They used to wish well for their parents and in-laws. The song they used to sing is given in the appendix. This routine used to continue until the farewell of gavar.

After that fasts (**ektana**) started. In these ektana, they used to have one meal a day. Fagan vad choth was called chothio ekano. On this day, ladies used to make **behdalia** in which they used to stack 9 or 11 gagar, moriya or lota etc. in ascending order. This behdaliya was carried to the temple or well by some girl or middle-aged woman. After singing gavar songs, they used to put some water in a small lota and sprinkled the water around. Newly wed woman used to observe ektana and the girls used to gather other women who observed ektanas. Similarly, on vad aatham (eighth), athalio ekano was observed. Chothio and athalio were observed only by the unwed girls.

Athalio ektana was also called Surajio ektano. That day, after worshipping the sun, a sun shaped *tikli* was prepared and a hole was made. Sun was seen through this hole. Then the girl used to say **sakhi, sakhi, mi surajio diththo; diththo ehdo tuttho**, which meant, Sun god, bless me and make my wishes come true.

The non-widow married women used to observe a **dasalio ekana** on the tenth vad day. From vad 11th day till Chaitra sud 2nd day, there were seven such ekana were observed, which were called **bilke**. The non-widow married women used to invite little girls for meal after these fasts.

The last ekana was observed on Chaitra sud third day belonged to **gangor**. This ekana was observed by both unmarried and non-widow married women. On that day, Ishwar-Gavar were married. Similar to a real wedding, wherever Ishwar-Gavar is established, there the family became parents, sing wedding songs and followed all rituals for this wedding. The next day on Chaitra sud forth, similar to the farewell to a wedded daughter, the Gavar was given a farewell and the figure was put on the bank of lake on the outskirts of the village. Along with the Gavar, a raw earthen pot was carried which was broken at the lake and the pieces were brought back and put inside the storage of grains and believed that will increase the prosperity and grains. This festival is celebrated fondly in Marwar.

**New Year.** Marwari new year begins on Chaitra sud first day. (However, since Chaitra month starts from vad, the day comes after 15 days and that is considered



the beginning of the month.) There was not much celebration of this day in Thar. This day falls in the middle of the Ishwar-Gavar fasts.

**Ramnavami.** Chaitra sud ninth day is the day of birth of Lord Ram means **Ramnavami**. Ladies folks observed a fast. A Ram birth festival used to be celebrated at noon in the temples.

**Hanuman Jayanti.** Full moon day of Chaitra is the birthday of the son of Goddess Anjana means Hanuman Jayanti. It was called **Ajadi**. Women folks observed fast on this day. Clay figurines of **Ajado-Ajadi** (Hanuman-Anjani) were made and covered with a cloth-piece. Large **rotas** of thick wheat-flour were cooked. Separate rota per person were cooked. After breaking a coconut and doing rituals, Ajadi's story was told-**Rota moti kor de, saagi roto aane de**. Such rotas could be eaten by the boys of the home but the girls who did not observe fast could not eat them. Married **niyani** (daughter) was invited by sending a **dhamu** or invitation. Ghee and powdered sugar was spread over the rota and used to be eaten with spiced curry of **sangri**. The next day, ajado-ajadi were left under a tree outside the town.

**Panthewari.** During the whole Vaishakh month, girls and newly wed brides go to temples to sing panthewari. There they used to sing Krishna devotion songs. After making **sakhio** (Swastika) sign of grains, they used to listen to stories. Worshipped tulsi (the basil plant) and Pipal tree (the sacred fig tree). At the end of the month, clothes were donated to Brahmin women.

**Akhatrij.** Vaishakh sud third day is **Akhateej** (akhatrij). In every household two each heaps of bajra (barley) and moong and one heap of guvar, thus five heaps were made. Niyani were given small water pots. Boys used to dance with *ghungroo* tied to their feet. **Rihans** were organized in the town where sprouted barley and sugar were eaten. **Amal** (Opium) was used freely. At the home of the head of the village, small wheat flour pits were made and water was poured into these pits. These pits were named after the months Vaishakh, Jeth, Ashad, and Shravan. It was believed that it will rain plenty much in the month whose named pit leaks water first.

**Vaishakhi.** On Vaishakh sud full moon day, niyanis were invited over for meals or *tikli* with sugar-ghee were sent to her place. Raw material for food were donated to temple.

**Nrijala Ekadashi.** Jeth sud 11th day is called **Bheem Agiaras** or **Aamba Agiaras**. Women observe fast on this day. Some women even refrained from drinking water. Some women used to have sharbat (a sugar-based drink) after 12 noon and used to eat Mango. Niyanis were given mangoes and sugar.

**Nani (small) Trij.** The **Nandhi theej** festival falls on Shravan sud third day. Unmarried girls used to apply henna on the previous night. They observed ektanu on this day.

**Veer Pasli.** The Sunday after Nani Trij was called the day of Veer Pasli. On this day, brother's sisters used to take grains and sesame seeds to her parent's home and burnt them and used to say: **til badin, jav badin, bhai ra dushman badin** which roughly translates to: the way these grains are burning, let my brother's enemy burn like that. Sisters had meal at the brother's.

**Pavitra Agiyaras.** On the eleventh day of Shravan sud, women used to colour threads. Such threads were called **pavitra**. They were offered to god in a temple as decoration.

**Ak Chatth.** On the sixth day of Shravan sud, new-born baby and newly wed couple were worshipped using **aakdo** plant's leaves, coconut and offered sprout barley grains to eat.

**Bin Baras.** On the twelfth day of Shravan sud, women made sand walls on the lake-shores and offered betel-nuts, kumkum, coconut in worship. The betel-nuts were sent to brothers.

**Rakshabandhan.** The full-moon day of Shravan month is Rakshabandhan. On this day, unmarried sisters at home and married sisters used to come to the homes of their brothers to tie the **rakhdi** thread on the right wrist of their brothers. If the brother is away in another town, they used to send rakhdi thread by post. Sisters used to bless their brother after offering sweets. If some brother doesn't have real sister then cousins used to tie rakhdi. Similarly, if some sister doesn't have a real brother they used to tie rakhdi to their cousins. Brother used to give money or cloth to the sister who tied rakhdi. Brahmins also came to home to tie rakhi and obtained gifts and/or money. Businessmen used to tie rakhdi to their inkpot-pens.

**Kajali Trij.** Shravan vad third (Bhadarva vad third) was called **vadi teej**. This day was considered a big festival. On this day unmarried girls and middle-aged women also observed fasts. On previous night, they applied henna and observed **ghamodi** (the breakfast of sweets on the previous day of fast). They tied swings on the tree-branches and play swing there. They used to go to sand dunes **dheba** in the evening to play. At home, they played cards. Engaged girls were sent sweets like **penda**, **gundarpak**, **halva** or dry fruits from the in-laws. In the night, men and women used to gather at a high place such as the terrace of a house and waited for the moon to show up. As soon as a little edge of moon was visible, they used to shout in joy to call others. At this time the moon was offered **ardhya** of water and rice.

The leaves of Aakdo plant were brought home. One of them to sit on, one to put on the head, one to put under the plate, and in one of the leaves, milk was taken to drink. This was followed by a breakfast of sattu and tikli-shak. (Sattu is a sweet made up of ghee and cooked flour, tikli is fried roti and shak is vegetable spiced and cooked like curry.) Married women come to parent's home to observe this fast and the breakfast ritual. If the moon is not visible because of monsoon clouds, then the next day, after looking at the morning sun the fast was broken. Unmarried girls observed teej fast and continued to do so after getting married. After observing sixteen such teej-fasts in sixteen years, the teej was celebrated in conclusion.

**Ubh Chatth.** On the day of Shravan vad sixth (Bhadarva vad sixth), women dress up and go to the brahmin's home to listen to the stories. This was followed by the ritual of tying a rag cloth on a finger and standing up. When tired, the rag cloth was passed on to another women who stood up. After seeing moon in the night, they used to take meals.

**Randhan Chatth.** Shravan vad sixth (Bhadarva vad sixth) is also the day of Randhan chatth along with the Ubh Chatth. Women started cooking in the afternoon. To eat cold food the next day of Sheetla Satam, they cook **tikli** of jaggery, crispy **puri** of wheat flour. Also cooked rice and added **Raito** (cooked buttermilk in oil and spices) to the cooled rice. Each food item were kept **abot** (untasted, untouched), so that it could be used in the ritual the next day. After the night's meal when everyone has finished eating, the stove in the kitchen was sprinkled with water to make it cold. This ritual was called **chulho thadho karyo**. After that the stove was not lighted in the night.

**Shitla Satam.** Shravan vad seventh (Bhadarva vad seventh) was called **Thadhi Satam**. That day, in the morning, at the temple of Shitla goddess or at a place

where Shitla goddess is designated, women used to take a plateful of cold food. Along with the food, they used to carry Barley flour-ghee-jaggery made **kuler**, coconut and performed the rituals and offerings. After that, the family members took the coconut-kuler offering and had their meals. People used to eat cold food the whole day. No stove was lighted that day.

**Janmashtami.** Shravan vad eighth (Bhadarva vad eighth) is celebrated as a big day of Janmashtami. It was also called **Gokala Aatham**. On this birthday of Lord Krishna, everybody observed a fast. Lord Krishna's temples were decorated. The festival was celebrated at midnight. An offering of **panchamrut** (milk+honey+curd+ghee+sugar) and **panchajiri** (carom seeds+ghee+sugar) were given at the temples.

**Vachch Baras.** Shravan vad twelfth (Bhadarva vad twelfth) was the festival of Vachch Baras. On this day, women worshipped cows which have newborn calves. Also listened to the stories of cow-calf. Instead of using iron utensils like spoons and pans, clay utensils and pans were used. Green-grams and barley-flour roti were cooked. Instead of cowmilk, ghee they used buffalo milk and ghee. Also observed ektanu fast.

**Gauna Oas (fast).** From Shravan vad thirteenth (Bhadarva vad thirteenth) till Bhadarva sud first these fasts were observed. On first day, women washed their hair and put on new clothes and lighted lamps in the temples and do rituals in the compounds. During the fasts, an unbroken lamp was lighted at home. Every morning ant's hole (**nagro**) were filled with flour and the lamps were filled with oil/ghee. Every night they slept on bare floor. They could eat curd, sugar, melons, etc. (**faradi**) during the fast. On the forth day, which is the first of Bhadarva, they circumambulated (**parkamma**) the village and distributed money to little girls.

**Ganesh Chaturthi / Gunes Choth.** Bhadarva sud fourth is the big festival of Ganesh Chaturthi but it was not celebrated in Thar. Instead of this, women used to observe a fast on every month's fourth day or on a few month's fourth day. After seeing the moon and offering the water, they used to have meals. After the wedding of their son/daughter, mothers wished and used to observe five Ganesh Choth. So, on the next month's fourth day, herself and four other women from the family or the neighborhood used to observe the fast of Gunes Choth. The mother of newly wed son/daughter used to send fruits etc. to the homes of these women and invited them in the evening to see the moon and have meal together.

**Shradhh.** During the vad part of Bhadarva (Aso vad part) the Shradhhs are observed for the peace of paternal souls. On these days, the abot food is taken in small quantities and offered to the birds from the terraces of homes. This was done by the males of the family. There was a tradition of preparing **kheer** (milk+rice pudding-like sweet). Almost every family had **dhinu** or the milking animal: cow, buffalo etc. If the milk is not sufficient then milk from neighborhood was taken in lending and returned when they had a shradhh to observe. Brahmins were offered meal and betel-nuts and money were given as gifts. Sometime, cloth were also offered.

Shradhh were observed for the dead men-women of the family for upto 2-3 previous generations. Meaning, the living persons parent's and grandparent's Shradhhs were observed. Last day means new moon day was called **sarva pitri** amaas or **sol saradhi**. This day Shradhh was considered a Shradhh for all the paternal souls. If brahmins were not invited then all the raw materials for meal were given to the temples.

Deceased person's first Shraddh was the following year of the first anniversary of death. The same day of the death by calendar was the day of Shradhh in the fortnight. On the first Shraddh, sistes, daughters and relatives were invited over.

**Navratri.** Aso sud first till ninth are called **navarta**. Every home had incense and lamp. Seeds were planted in the clay trays in temples. Their, goddess was worshipped and **khak** (holy ash) was put on tongue and forehead. Women observed ektana fast for nine days. On the eighth day a big religious ceremony was held on which they observed a fast.

**Dashera.** Aso sud tenth is the Dashera festival. This is the day when Lord Ram won over Ravan. It is also called Vijaya Dashami. Rajput's of Thar worshipped their weapons on this day.

**Sharad Poonam.** Aso month's full moon day is Sharad poonam. On this day, in the night, on the terrace of homes, **Misri** (crystal sugar nuggets) was kept in a bowl covered with a perforated lid. This was eaten in the morning as an offering.

On the night of Sharad poonam, girls used to thread a needle 108 times in the light of the moon. This was a job of perseverance and patience. It was said that this improved the eye sight.

**Dhan Teras, Kali Chaudash and Diwali.** Aso vad thirteenth (Kartak vad thirteenth) was the beginning of Diwali festivities. Monsoon being ended, the avail-

ability of foodgrains, milk and ghee used to be good. These festivities were spent with much joy and fun. Homes were cleaned and dusted. Schools observed a vacation. People who lived away from home for business etc. returned home on these days. Kali Chudash was also called **Roop Chaudash**. That day people washed their hair with oil and Fuller's Earth (Multani Mati). On Diwali night, goddess Laxmi was worshipped. Books of accounts were also worshipped. Rates and cost of commodities such as foodgrains, ghee, gold and silver were recorded in the books and prayer were offered to goddess Laxmi to wish that she gave double and quadruple the prosperity she gave in the last year. The offering of the worshipping were distributed among relatives.

Engaged girls were sent sweets by her in-laws. Every home had lighted earthen-lamps. Children celebrated with fire crackers. In meals, sweets, lentils, puri and **lasso khich** (soft rice) were made.

In the night, children used to tie rags on the sticks of the Calotropis plant and lighted them to form a torch and took them to the outskirts of the town. These were called **Mereiya**.

Newborn kids were sent clay toy hut, sweets and dresses while singing songs from the maternal grandparents and paternal aunt **bhua**. While bhua received a piece of cloth from her parents. During the 4-5 days of Diwali festivities, children used to play with toy guns (gudadia) made by town's ironsmith. They used to put little balls of gunpowder in the toy guns and cracked them. Gunpowder was mixed with coal powder and wrapped in a **sushi** and burned like a cracker. Also crackers were bought from market. These days were passed with much fun.

**Annkoot.** On the day of Kartak sud first, different kinds of sweets were offered to gods in temple and were distributed as holi offerings.

**Baliraja.** On the day of Kartak sud first, outside of the home a figurine of Baliraja was made out of cowdung and was kept in the sleeping position. This was called **bad raja**. Children cracked firecrackers there and untie the rakhdhis.

**Bhai-beej.** Married girls came to their parents place for meals. At home, women used to whitewash the walls and drew small footsteps out of red sindoor. The number of footsteps were same as the number of brothers she had.

**Tulsi na Upwas.** In Kartak sud **tulsi-ra-oaas** started. Women observed fast from the eighth till the twelfth day. They only had water and used to sleep on floor

during these fasts. On full moon day when the Kartak month ended, they used to donate things like clothes and household items. Parents invited girls for meals.

**Makar Sankranti.** English month January's 14th is celebrated as Makar Sankranti. Earlier, it was celebrated on 12th and then 13th. When sun entered Capricorn, this day was celebrated. Sweets made of sesame seeds were prepared such as **tilodia** and sweet balls. Sesame seeds and raw rice+lentils were sent to temple and daughter's home. Newly wed women used to take coconut, clothpiece, money etc. in a new clay pot to the temple. This ritual was called **Mandir kholyo**. Married sister-in-law was given cloth piece and brother-in-law was given a towel.

**Vasant Panchami.** Magh sud fifth was the day when everyone used to visit temple. Winter was considered over. **Vasant panchami ra vaja vagiya, naag-bichchu sab jagia.** (roughly translates as the springs arrive the snakes and scorpions awake from their slumber.)

**Maha Shivratri.** Magh vad thirteenth (Fagan vad thirteenth) was the day of **Shivrat**. Everybody observed a fast on this day. Engaged girls were send sweets by their in-laws. Festivities and fairs were organized at the Shiv temples **Shivalo**. Elderly women chanted songs of devotion. While the young girls and daughters in law played cards. Sea shells were also played. They used to stay awake the whole night. In the early morning, everyone used to go to the lake of town and collected 108 pebbles and brought them out of lake.

**Amali Agiyaras.** On Fagan sud eleventh, in the compound of the temple of the town, women used to plant a branch of khejda tree. They did circumambulate the tree four times and after fifteen days observed a **saamdi Agiyaras**.

**Holi.** Fagan sud full-moon day is the Holi festival. On the outskirts of the village, after the dusk, a holi of dried wooden branches was lighted. New born children and newly wed couple were taken for rituals. The holi was circumambulated. Coconuts were broken. If the smoke of holi goes to the southern direction, it was believed that the rains will be good in the monsoon season. Everybody wished for a prosperous coming year. Brahmins and Maheshwaris used to sing traditional songs at the temples. Brahmins used to sing erotic songs on the previous day. Children used to tie musical straps in their legs and became **Heer-Ranjha** and collected money. Women observed fast and had meal after the holi worshipping rituals in the evening. Maternal grandparents and paternal aunts (bhua) sent new clothes and sweets to

their nephews-nieces. These gifts were called **Dhundhaniu**. On the other hand parents gave cloth piece to bhua.

**Dhuleti.** In temples, god's statues were put in small swings and a colored powder **gulaal** was kept in a dish in front. Everyone used to sprinkle gulaal to the god and put some money as offering to another dish nearby.

In the evening, engaged girl's and boy's parents (in-laws) used to celebrate by sprinkling gulaal on each other. Brother-in-law, if married, gave one coconut to his brother-in-law or two if unmarried but engaged. In the evening, married daughter and son-in-law were invited over for dinner. Sisters used to put her sugar-necklace over the head of her brother. These sugar necklaces were called **harodia**. Brother gave money to sister.



## Chapter 6

# Rituals and Social Traditions

**Rituals.** Many of us believe in rituals but not many think of the root element of a ritual. We ask ourselves, are we as much humble as talkative? What would others say about us? We are always afraid of this but still we never have a good opinion of others.

Now let us think about the rituals. Every ritual happened one time as a result of people's process and people's arrangement. People means, what is society's view, what is society's situation and what is society's intention, is important to understand.

I, you, our relatives, neighbours, and going further, our community and town-city and country, why do we live together? Why do we accept the rule of living together? All theories, all beliefs are linked to each other one after the other. Our each step is decided by a pre-established arrangement.

Discussing this ponderable question in more detail, we find that every deed of our life has been organized into reasonable or unreasonable by a social system. Every arrangement has been deemed reasonable by a comprehensive principle. New arrangement is born from old arrangement. New principle takes fruition from old one. This is the chain of society.

For instance, when a child is born, there are some norms decided for his upbringing. Some system is decided to train him. His marriage is put under some limits and with regard to his progeny, some responsibilities are decided and others are denied. These systems, these standards and these responsibilities are deemed reasonable under some principles of life. A series of these principles makes a kind of social chain. Each link of this chain fits perfectly with the other link. This whole chain could be called a social view of life but a main point is that to create this view of life, some basic points are required. These, in the absence of a better phrase, could be

(1)	gold:	tuss	(12)	rupees:	visa/khodo
(2)	opium:	mung/rati	(13)	sand	fistful/handful
(3)	mixture to make curd:	chhanto	(14)	grass	bundle
(4)	butter:	fingers	(15)	kana	bhakar
(5)	snuff:	pinchful	(16)	wood	log
(6)	magat:	chugtho	(17)	melon	pie
(7)	sangri/beans:	fistful	(18)	roti	piece
(8)	buttermilk:	lup	(19)	laddu	kado
(9)	sugar:	mouthful	(20)	ghee	spoonful
(10)	wheat/barley:	gaaro	(21)	sweets	daboro
(11)	dates:	satto	(22)	distance	vikha

Table 6.1: Measurements of different things in common usage

called the basic elements of social life. In English, there is a word for this: “data”. A theory can not be established without sufficient data. But this data is not a thing of logic, intelligence of humbleness. This data can only be the interaction of facts with the natural laws. **These facts and unanimity can not be forever. They have the limits of time and place. This fact is so clear that it is not required to put any more arguments in its support.**

Based on your situation and circumstances you think of how will you prosper most in the future and live within your means is a thing of commonsense. Similarly, society also plans and programs its future based on the situations and circumstances. These programs are rituals and the initial thought behind these rituals are theories.

At some point, some one can say, every ritual might be deemed reasonable based on some theory, afterall, our ancestors were not foolish to implement them.

Let is see the above point in more detail. Every theory needs some data. The data available at the time of forming a theory remains forever. The theory remains valid as long as the data remains valid. If the data changes, then, based on natural laws and systematic depreciations on theories and opinions, the nature of these rituals change. As the nature of above mentioned data changes, the theories behind the data must change and by consequence, the rituals formed from the theories must change too, or else the rituals becomes meaningless and baseless.

**Inspite of these, if a ritual is followed just because it is coming along from a long time, the society becomes ritualized and a ritualized society is aimless society which is like having a roof without walls.**

After this introductory discussion, let us see Thar’s main rituals and traditions.

## 6.1 Birth

Almighty has created a system of birth in this world for the progeny in humans, animals and plants, etc. For a systemic management of world and society, seers and saints institutionalized marriage under which woman gets pregnant and as a result new generation is born leading to progeny of generation. Now let us see the prevalent rituals related to birth in Maheshwari community.

When a pregnant woman is in her seventh month of pregnancy, the **hair washing ritual** is performed. When the woman is at her in-laws place, the hair washing was done on *sud* day fifth, seventh, ninth or thirteenth. At this time **khetwar's or kshetrapal's juhar** was done. A brick is washed and worshipped as a symbol of kshetrapal. The girl is adorned with *kumkum chandlo*. *Abil*, *gulaal*, kumkum, 7 cardamoms, 7 cloves were used with a *diya* light and coconut was broken. *Sawa ser* (750 grams) wheat laduo were made and was worshipped. With another sawa ser flour, five big *rotas* were made and worshipped with powdered sugar and ghee. These *rotas* were eaten by the woman. Along with the woman, her younger brother-in-law or elder brother-in-law's son used to sit to eat. The food hence cooked must be consumed before night, and could not be left for second day. Other things used in worshipping were given to cow. Sweets were distributed among the relatives. If for some reasons the hair wash ceremony was not done in seventh month, it is done in ninth month.

In Maheshwari community, since a woman's first delivery is traditionally done at her parent's place, they are informed in advance. After the hair washing ceremony, woman's uncle or brother came to pick her up from her in-law's place. The in-laws used to give a large **dohti** which was called **sadra-ri-reet**. After reaching the parent's place, this dohti was distributed among relatives, so that people knew the woman is pregnant. After the ritual of hair washing, the woman has to stay at home. If required to go out, she had to come home quickly. She was not allowed to go out at late evening or night at all.

There were no public hospitals for childbirth in Thar. There were no maternity homes. Experienced mid-wife (who likely used to be the town's barber) assisted in childbirth. In cases of problems, she knew of home-based solutions but in serious cases such as if child is inverted, the child or woman would die because of lack of doctors and hospitals.

Experienced mid-wife and some senior women would predict about the gender of the child based on the mother's stomach and other characteristics. These predictions used to be true most of the times. No advanced tools such as sonography were available in those days.

Birth control devices and abortions were not prevailing in those days. As and

when the child was born, it was accepted as almighty's gift. However, if after first daughter, second and third daughter were born, dissatisfaction spread into family. However, daughter is born, so there will be an exchange in marriage used to be prevailing thought. Sons were more desirable. This was because, son was the heir of family and was the one who could perform the death rituals of parents. There are instances of upto eleven daughters born back to back **naronar** in the hope of a son out of which 4 died and 7 were married off.

Mid-wife periodically visited to check on the woman. She would also inform of an approximate date of birth. Childbirth was done at home in a separate room. A jute bed-cot was used for childbirth. After the childbirth, woman was given warmth by burning dried cowdung under the bed-cot.

If the newborn is a boy (and that too the first) then the mid-wife would immediately go th woman's parents to congratulate them and would receive some prize in addition to regular fees.

In the event of the birth of a boy, people used to beat steel plates with rolling pin (**thali vagadvi**) to announce in the neighborhood of the birth of the boy (if some family had only girls born, people used to taunt: **taye ghare thaliye kon vagi ahe**). Woman's in-laws were informed by telegram or letter. Some elder person from family would go to a holyman (*maharaj*) and informed the time of birth and asked for child's birth planetary positions. If there is some troublesome planetary positions, then rituals were done as per the advise of maharaj. Oil was donated in bronze bowl.

On the occassion of son's birth, relatives used to visit to congratulate the family. Grandfather offered party (*rihan*) and gave a rupee and coconut to guests. If no rihan was offered, still coconut and rupee was given. Celebratory songs were sung at grandfather's place which were called **lara**. Such laras were sung for the newborn son. Child's paternal uncle and aunt also organized singing of lara one day each. Dates and sugar candies were given to the singing women.

On the sixth day of birth, child's maternal aunt wrote the child's **chhatthi**. It was drawn on the wall of mother's room using colored lines and boxes. Aunt lovingly used to bring clothes and gold ring for the child while the parents would give some more valuable gift in return. In the night, a blank paper and pen was kept near child's head so that the god of destiny could write child's destiny.

After eight to ten days, at an auspicious time, the woman would wash her hair which was called **melo matho dhoyo**. Until then, she would not go out of her room. The child is given a name on this day. The name was given based on the birth *raashi's* birth-letters. As far as possible name other than according to raashi were not given. If the name is different than birth raashi, that name was called **arak naam**. Maharaj would perform a holy ritual with holy-fire and would tell

the child's name with a blow in its ear. This was called **gur funk**. Maharaj was rewarded with appropriate remuneration **daxina**.

If the child is born under one of the four lunar constellations (**Ashlesha**(Hydrae), **Mula**(V Scorpionis), **Magha**(Regulus) and **Jyeshtha**(T Scorpionis)) then after 27 days, constellation ritual was performed (**nakhtar naaita**). At that time twenty-seven well's water, 27 tree's wood, 27 sea shells, betelnuts, grapes, drumsticks, copper coins etc. were gathered. Maharaj performed holy fire ritual. Woman and her husband with the child in lap sit together in the ritual with heads covered and relatives put color on them. Maharaj would give name based on the lunar constellation such as Mulchand, Jethanand, Magharam etc. Twenty-seven children were offered meals.

After the child-birth, woman of the town would visit the mother and child and would bring sugar nuggets (**sangan misri**). This visit was called **bolan aayi**.

At the time of child's birth, nectar of a green leafy vegetable (**maido**, tandalja) and jaggery was given as **suti** or first food. Woman was given sweets with spices such as dried ginger and sweets with mussels cumin (**churi-ro-wato**). Such sweets were called **goli**. At the time of son's name giving ceremony, sweet balls of jaggery were made and distributed. These sweet balls were called **baruo**. Other sweets were also distributed among relatives.

Woman after birth was taken care of by the mid-wife. She would wash her's and the child's clothes for one month or more. She would give oil-massage to both and would tie the hands and legs of the child with its body properly which was called **tanjyo**. This **tanjan** continued till six months. For child's diaper, a square cotton cloth was doubled and folded in a triangle. This diaper was called **potro**. When the mid-wife left her duties, she would get money and mother's old clothes.

After a month, woman would wash her head again. This was called **achcho matho dhoyo**. If the child died of some reason, then, the head was washed after twenty-one days. At this time child and son were fed with water from the Ganges. After that the woman would take over the household work and would work in kitchen. Feeding mother would take special care of her own diet. She would not eat sour, spicy and difficult to digest food so that child remains away from problems. special care was taken in winters and summers. Child was exclusively fed with mother's milk. External milk was not given. Even after the child starts eating food, mother would feed her milk for about one and a half years. Often mothers would give little opium to child so that it sleeps and would be convenient for mother to finish chores.

After achcho matho dhoyo woman's husband would come to pick her up from her parent's place. At this time parents would do a ritual called **suat-ri-reet**. Woman would get 10 pairs (**mudd**) of clothes and child would get 18-20 pair of clothes and golden and silver ornaments. Child would get a cradle (**pingho**) or a small bed-cot

(**michli**). Mostly the first delivery happened at the parent's place. Second, third and successive deliveries happened at the in-law's place and parent's would give two pairs of clothes to mother and son each.

Child's **khetwar juhar** (kshetrapal's ritual) after birth was done in the forest. On first Deewali festival of child, its paternal aunt and maternal grandparents would prepare clay pots and would give sweets and two pairs of clothes. They would bring this with celebratory drum beating. Similarly, on first Holi festival, they would bring sweets-clothes. This was called **dhundhaniyu**.

If the first son is died and a son is born after that, he was called **miyachchiwalo** and his nose was pierced. If a son is born after three daughters, it was called **tipokar**. For such children, an additional sister was named from Maheshwari or Brahmin community so that he has four sisters. If many children died during childhood, a new born was given clothes from neighbors and given odd names such as *luno*, *mirchu*, *bhugdo* etc.

At home, the father would not talk to or hold the child for 6-8 months as decorum. Other family members would play with the child lovingly and enthusiastically.

After three-four years when *bhat* visited, he would record the names and dates of birth of new born children in the family. If a first son was born he would get a nice gift (**sheekh**), sometimes a golden ornament.

## 6.2 Janoi (Sacred Thread)

Brahmans would certainly wear Janoi in Thar. Earlier, Maheshwaris would also wear but later on that system decayed. Only before getting married, maharaj would put the Janoi on which was taken off and put on the basil plant after 2-3 days.

In reality Janoi means a second birth of a child because of which Brahmans are called **dvij**. But when Maheshwaris wear Janoi (which was worn over left shoulder and would go to the right and behind), it was used to tie keys. A man with Janoi would put the thread over his left ear when he goes to toilet and would remove when done.

## 6.3 Engagement

Engagement is called **veenhaan** in Maheshwari community. These engagements were usually done at a small age. Engagements could be done in any bloodline (**nukh**) other than one's own paternal. (Marwadi Maheshwaris avoid maternal

Year/Area	1881		1891		1901		1911		1921		1931	
	male	fem	male	fem	male	fem	male	fem	male	fem	male	fem
Sindh	545.5	454.5	546.2	453.8	548.7	451.3	552.0	448.0	560.2	439.8	561.1	439.8
Gujarat	515.0	485.0	514.1	485.9	511.4	488.6	518.6	481.4	522.3	477.7	524.9	477.7

Table 6.2: Male/Female ratio in Sindh and Gujarat between 1881 and 1931

bloodline in addition to paternal ones). Where there is a close blood relations, such as uncles and cousins, engagements are not possible.

Owing to a skewed male:female ratio in Maheshwari community, there is often a scarcity of girls for engagement and thus often boy's engagements were difficult to do. The male/female ratio of Tharparker district is shown below: This information has been taken from the Census of India 1931, Vol. VIII, part 1, Bombay Presidency. For every thousand people the male and female population was as follows:

On taking averages, it is found that in Sindh, the ratio was male:female = 552.3:447.7 and in Gujarat it was male:female = 517.7:482.3. Taking into account the numbers from six decades, it seems the number of females have been decreasing in Sindh steadily.

Because of this, the system of *sato* (the system of double in-laws), might have become popular from early on. If a boy is to be engaged, a girl has to be offered in marriage. The girl can be boy's sister, cousin, neice or other relative. When the offered girl was a distant relative, it was a tradition to return a girl in marriage at a later date.

This system was called **ningri chhokre re varhe mi dini** which roughly translates to "the girl was given in boy's dowry". When hearing of an engagement, people would ask—who is the girl given as dowry (**chhokre re varhe mahi kun buhi ahe**)? Sometimes when the boy has went past marriageable age or the home is weak or if the engagement was not happening because of some other reasons, more than one girl had to be offered in marriage for boy's engagement. Sometimes, girl's parents would get "**pet likhe diyo**" which means that if the girl has a daughter in future, girl's parents has right over her hand in marriage and they can use it the way they like.

In addition sometimes "**mucharko**" was written which means that if the girl dies, another girl would be offered and so on.

If sometimes when there was no available girl to offer, boy's father would fix engagement by paying 5-7 thousand rupees. This was called "**bought bride**". This kind of transaction was not seen in good eye for bride's father.

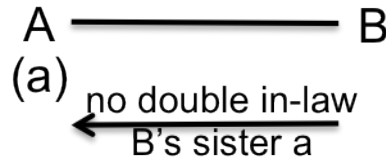


Figure 6.1: Straight Sirhai

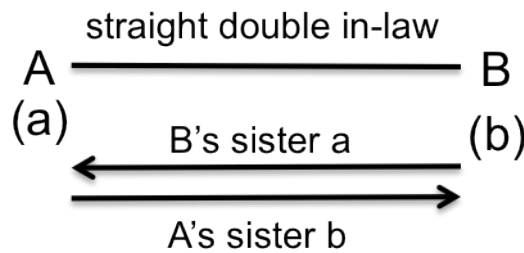


Figure 6.2: Straigh Opposite

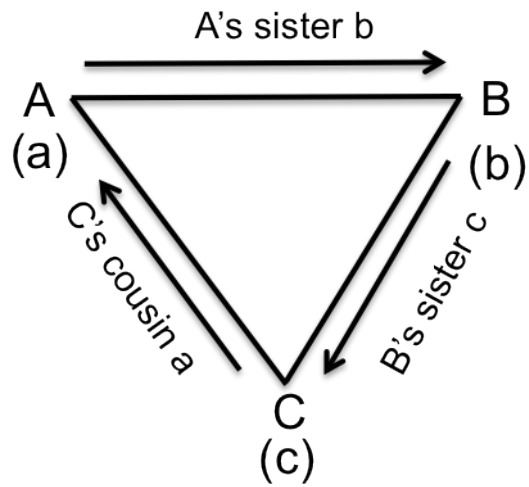
There are also examples where if one's wife is dead, he would offer her daughter in marriage for getting married again.

Because of this system of double in-laws, there were many men who would get old without getting married and would die single. Such people were called **dung** or **pitar**.

Sometimes, contradictory to the above system, girl's father would find a good groom and fix the engagement. This was called "**chhokri sirhai te dini**" and considered to be a status symbol for boy and his family.

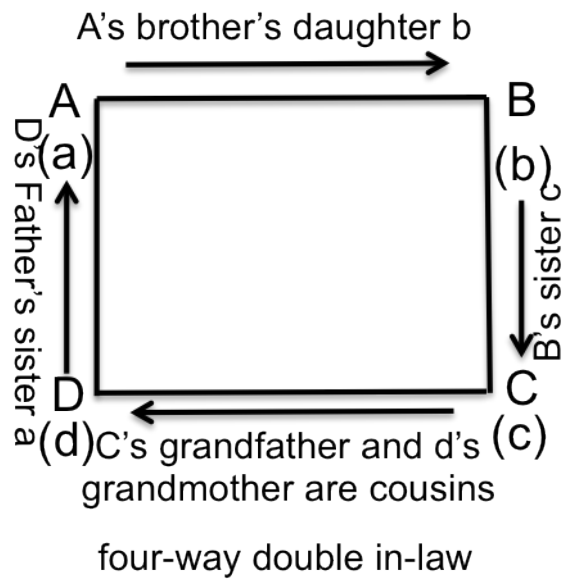
Because of the system of double in-law, straight engagements happened frequently. Such as a boy and a girl from one home marrying a girl and a boy from the other. Such cases were possible when there is brother and sister on both sides. When there are no sisters, distant relative was used as offering. When there is a spare brother or sister, a third party was brought to use the system. Sometimes, this happened with a fourth party too. This will be clear with some diagrams and examples. The examples are taken from real marriages but names are not given. Instead, alphabetical letters such as A, B, C are used.





three-way double in-law

Figure 6.3: Triple



four-way double in-law

Figure 6.4: Four-way

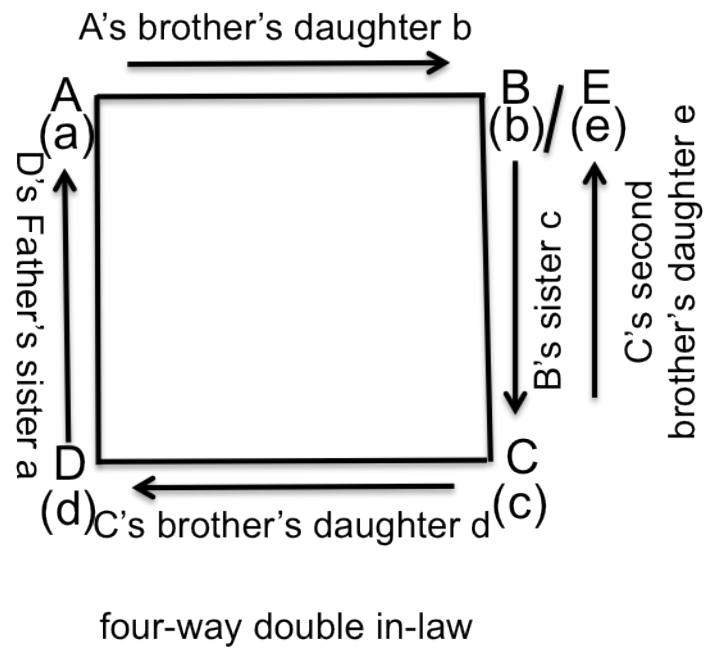


Figure 6.5: Four-way 2

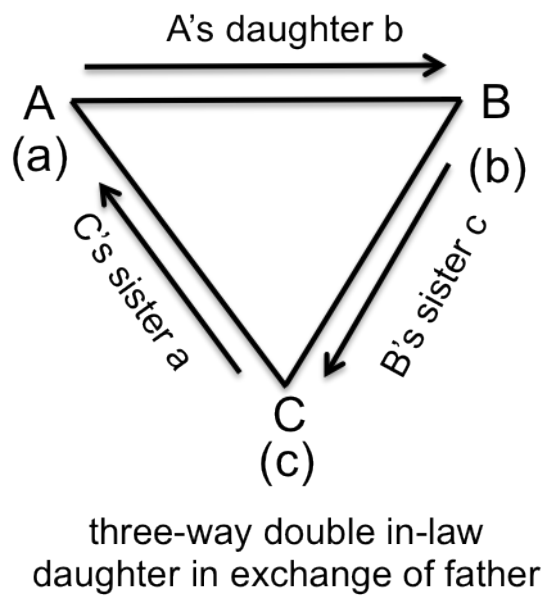


Figure 6.6: triple

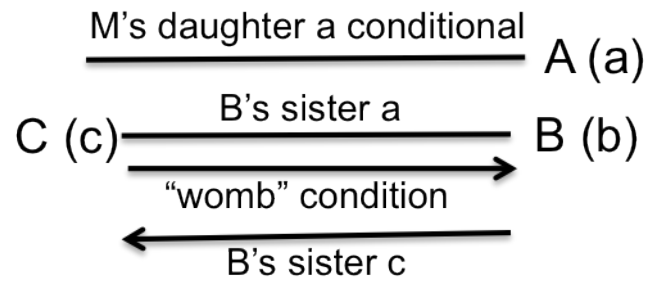


Figure 6.7: Womb

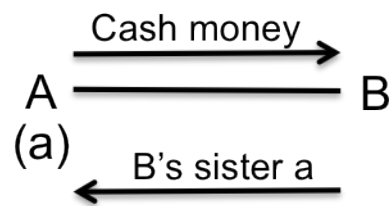


Figure 6.8: Cash

## 6.4 Marriage

## 6.5 Death

### 6.5.1 Dirges