

Our Cultural Heritage

Bansidhar Maheshwari

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Chapter 1

Origin of the Maheshwari Caste

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

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

One day the king invited brahmins and grandly honored them. Brahmins were very happy with the king’s service and asked for a boon. The king then asked them for a son. Brahmins said, if you worship Lord Shiva, you will be blessed with a very brave and adventurous son, but do not allow him to go towards the north direction and bath in the Surya-kund there until he is 16 years old. If the prince respects brahmins, he will become a great king else will be reborn in the same kingdom. Hence being blessed by the brahmins, the king honored them with fine clothes and jewelry and respectfully saw them off. The king prayed god Shiva and obtained the boon.

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

Once a Jain sadhu came and preached the prince about Jain religion luring him into anti-Shiva opinions and showing the faults of brahmins. At the age of 14, prince opposed Shiva and started practicing Jain religion. He campaigned the Jain religion in East, West and South directions and banished idol worshipping. He harassed brahmins and broken their sacred threads (*janoi*). He shut down all religious activities including yajna and hawana. Out of the King’s fear, he never went towards the North direction, but who can stop the destiny.

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

The King and citizens became worried after hearing this news. King Khadgalsen died of the shock.

16 of his queens became *sati* with him. With no protector of the kingdom, nearby enemies attacked the state. They divided the state into pieces and merged into their own states.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

Amazing Life-Journey of the Maheshwari Community

Quitting the Kshatriya religion and accepting the pen and weighing-balance is as courageous and amazing story of the King's officers as is the story of the life-journey of the Maheshwari community.

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

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

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

One group of Jaisalmer went to Malwa in Central India and Vidarbha via east Madhya Pradesh's Gondwana (Jabalpur etc.) and another group went and settled in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Aligarh, Kaasgunj, Meerut and Saharanpur. Such was the journey of the community and went on to spread in a large portion of the country, providing a courageous example like other Vaishya communities of Rajasthan.

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

Today Maheshwari community is not only settled in India but have crossed international borders as well. With today's transportation and communication facilities it is not very much surprising that people migrate to different countries but imagining how our ancestors used to protect their families

of thieves-dacoits and enemies using those primitive tools will give goose-bumps to the most courageous of today's people. We can but only imagine how by foot, camel and ox-carts, they migrated to unknown regions, mixed with strange people, adapted their unknown language and customs and demonstrated great courage. Such people with their self-courage and firm determination accepted and faced all kinds of adversities and eventually reached on top successfully.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3

Migration from Marwar to Thar

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

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

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

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

In those days, rows of camels (caravan) with many camels used to transport the luggage and goods from the Jaisalmer state. Such rows went to Umarkot via Ratokot towards south (Ratokot was a big city in Thar-Parkar district near the Marwar border. This city was destroyed later.). Another route went through rohdi to sakhkhar. So, that was a known route as well. Both these routes were called *Trade Routes*. Depending upon the situation, familiarity and opportunity, people used one of these routes for migrations. These times were approximately between the years A.D. 1736 and A.D. 1755.

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

¹Vikram Samvat, a hindu lunar calendar

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

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

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

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

Rathi, Kela (sarada), Kadva, Hadkut, Gikal, Chandak, Bhutada, Baththar, Malhar, Masania (Baheti), Panpaliya, Lohia, Kachoria, Kasumbia, Malpani, Laghad. Kela's are called "Ghurya" in Thar and "Maandan" in Kutch.

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

Chapter 4

Brief Geography and History of Thar

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

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

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

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

To reach NagarParkar, Kutch desert had to be crossed (lit. "*par kari ukarvu*"). From this phrase, the name of this town was "parkar". NagarParkar is situated at the base of Karunzar Hill. "Thar" + "Parkar" = TharParkar is the name of district.

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

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

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

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

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

The district was divided into three divisions for administrative purposes:

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

In Thar subdivision, Mithi, Diplo, Chhachhro and NagarParkar Tehsils were located where a Tehsildar (Mamlatdar) was appointed. Mithi also had a Deputy Collector and Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dy.S.P.). Until A.D. 1906 the headquarter of the district was Umarkot which was moved to Mirpur-Khas in 1907. Since A.D. 1992, the main TharParkar district has been modified with addition of some more parts from the Thar Subdivision and the headquarter has been moved to Mithi.

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

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

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

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

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

From A.D. 1782 Talpur obtained Thar from Kalhoda 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

5.2 Water

5.3 Food

5.4 Clothing

5.5 Jewelry-Makeup

5.6 Residence

5.7 Education

5.8 Utensils

5.9 Bedding

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