

# CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE DHATI PEOPLE OF THAR DESERT

Translation of the original work titled  
“Our Cultural Heritage” by Bansidhar Maheshwari  
from Gujarati to English by

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# Preface by the Translator

Presenting the English translation of the unique work by Bansidhar Maheshwari documenting the cultural heritage of the Dhati people of Thar desert. Dhati and Maheshwari are used interchangeably in places. Attempted to do a literal translation where possible. In other places a translation is done with the most appropriate interpretation. Apologize for any mistakes. Please send your feedback to ketancmaheshwari@gmail.com. Notations: Words/statements in Gujarati are noted in *italics* and Dhati language in **bold**. Hope you find the book informative.

– Ketan July 2016

# Chapter 1

## The Origin of the Dhati 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 Kalpdrum 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 Dhati 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. to 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 Umarmkot. 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 Umarmkot, Sodhas spread across Thar. With them Maheshwaris too settled in different villages in Thar. These families settled in Dahali, Chhod, Bagal, Chhachharo, Nabisar, Chelhar 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 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-Sind's" Hindus which were relatively less in number. Still the proposal was sent to the government. But unfortunately, before anything could be done about this proposal, the British government already signed and stamped the orders of partition and the prepared maps. Because of this, Thar's Maheshwaris and Hindus decided to leave their homes and villages and come to India through Migration (called "Ladpalaan" in local language).

## Chapter 5

# Infrastructural Necessities of the Community

### 5.1 Dhatki (Thari) Language

Many languages are spoken in India. Every region has a different language or should we say regions are made language-wise. Thing every person who uses to express his feelings is dialect. Inter-human relationships are different at different places and depends upon geography, business and community. And so is the dialect. Still dialect maintains the characteristics of its place of origin. 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 Jaisalmer 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 Umarkot via Ratokot. After that they started living in Thar according to their convenience and started speaking Dhatki. But those who came from a different route from Jaiselmer via Sakhkhar to Sindh region, then Sahevan, Tando Allahyaar, Tando Adam, Badin etc. places or came after some time had influence of Sindhi language on their dialect. Maheshwaris living in Tando Allahyaar and Tando Adam were called “Tandai” and their dialect has clear influence of Sindhi. Table 5.1 throws some light on this fact: In the same way the dialect spoken in one end of Thar is different than that of the other end. This is shown in the table 5.2. In the towns of Thar, Dhatki language was spoken by Maheshwaris, Brahmins, Bhojak, Shrimalis, Khatris, Malis, Sonaras, Rajputs (Sodha), Meghwal, Bheels, Bajeer 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:

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

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

<b>Man's Full Name</b>	<b>Shortened Name</b>	<b>Woman's Full Name</b>	<b>Shortened Name</b>
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, “Khatiri”, “Maali”, “Bajeer”, Goldsmiths, “Meghwaal”, “Bheel”, “Koli” and Islamic people had always been non-vegetarians but when Saaraswat brahmins Shuddh started consuming non-vegetarian food, at that time only brahmins of Pushkar, Maheshwaris, Bhojak and Shreemali brahmins stayed strict vegetarians.

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

Securing food by farming on their own fields, consuming milk, curd, butter milk, ghee from their own 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 ghaghbras” (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 ghaghra made of “fillingiai” hand-colored by the local khatri, ghand etc. Some cloth used to be imported from gadhado that was also used.

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

Government workers used to sew shirts with detachable 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 aluminium 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 embroidery 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 bridegroom 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" × 6" × 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 **dhori 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 bucketful 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 VIth. Books were put in a cloth bag and hung on shoulder to take to the school. These bags were called **bujki**.

Primary education was 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 paise 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 high school 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 high schools, 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 high school 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. Alluminium vessels came late but were not adopted by Maheshwaris. For domestic usage, different types and sizes of utensils were stored at home and were used depending on the occasion. Big community vessels were kept at a common place and were brought as and when necessary. When Maheshwaris went for business of pilgrimage to Sindh or Gujarat, they used to buy and bring the utensils from there. They used to engrave elders name on the utensils. When great grandparent's or grandparent's utensils were used, they used to read their names and felt proud and happy.

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

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

## 5.9 Bedding

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, jaro**i 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 TharParker 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, after all, 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. *Sawas* (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 up to 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 cow dung under the bed-cot.

If the newborn is a boy (and that too the first) then the mid-wife would immediately go to 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 occasion 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 water from twenty-seven wells, wood from 27 trees, 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 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 Diwali 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 worn 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 ones own paternal. (Marwadi Maheshwaris avoids maternal

Yr/Reg	1881		1891		1901		1911		1921		1931	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Sindh	545.5	454.5	546.2	453.8	548.7	451.3	552.0	448.0	560.2	439.8	561.1	438.9
Gujarat	515.0	485.0	514.1	485.9	511.4	488.6	518.6	481.4	522.3	477.7	524.9	475.1

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.

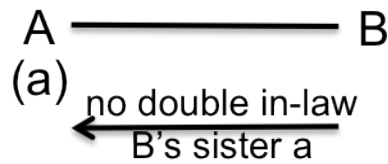


Figure 6.1: Straight engagement–Sirhai

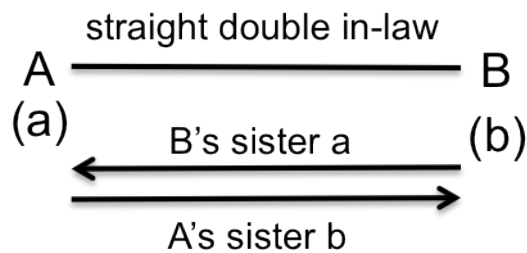


Figure 6.2: Straight engagement Opposite double in-law

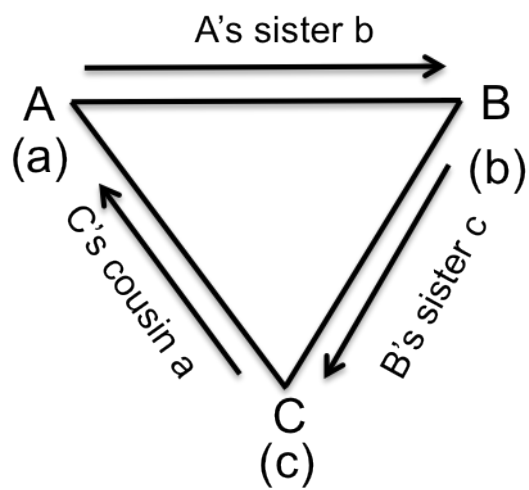
There are also examples where if one's wife is dead, he would offer her daughter in marriage for getting married again.

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 bridegroom and fix the engagement. This was called "**chhokri sirhai te dini**" and considered to be a status symbol for boy and his family.

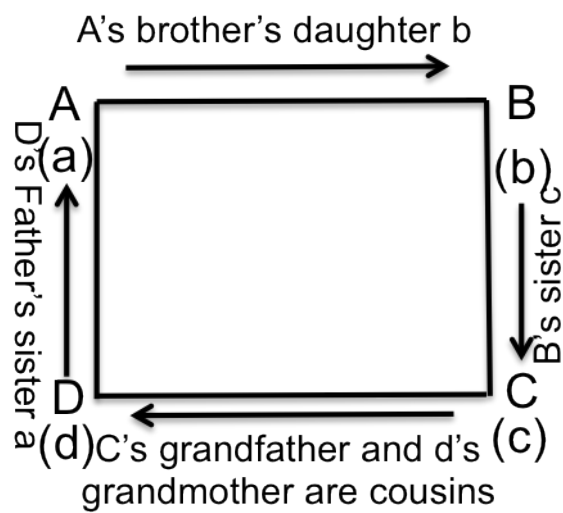
Because of the system of double in-law, straight engagements happened frequently. Such as a boy and a girl from one home marrying a girl and a boy from the other. Such cases were possible when there is brother and sister on both sides. When there are no sisters, distant relative was used as offering. 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.

In those days, three things were considered when looking for a bridegroom for a girl: 1) Household–family, 2) Wealth, and 3) Boy. In household–family, the social image and prosperity–wealth of the family was considered. There wasn't much cash but it was considered if the family owns land, gold–silver and such wealth. Further, the boy's profession–employment and his age was considered.



three-way double in-law

Figure 6.3: Three-way engagement



four-way double in-law

Figure 6.4: Four-way engagement; note: C's grandfather and d's grandmother are cousins



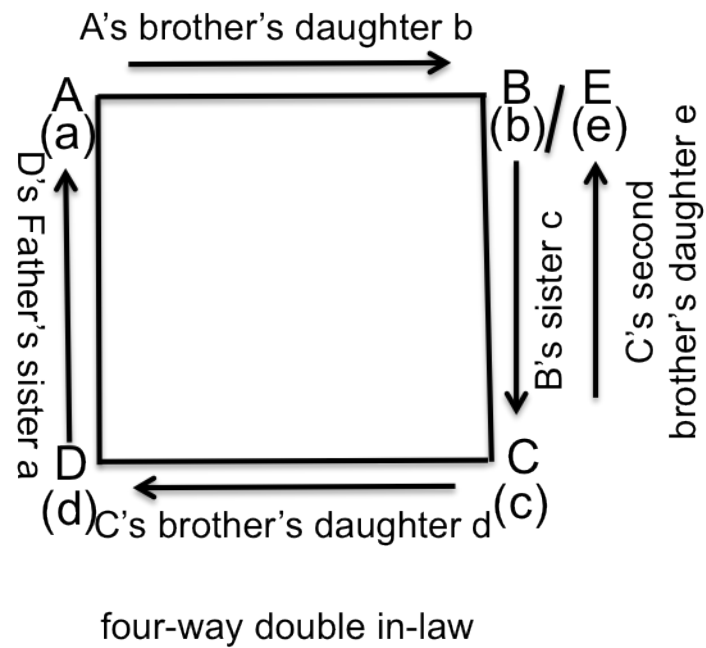


Figure 6.5: Four-way engagement with two girl's offered in marriage; note1: In order to get C engaged, two girls, d and e were offered in marriage; note2: B and E are brothers

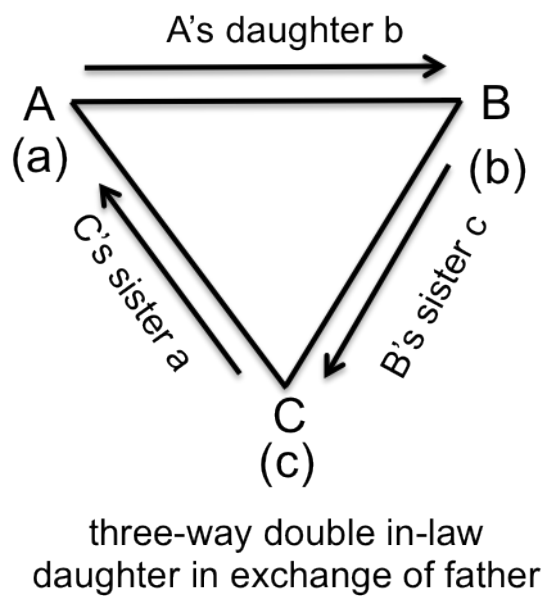


Figure 6.6: Three-way engagement; Daughter in exchange of father's engagement

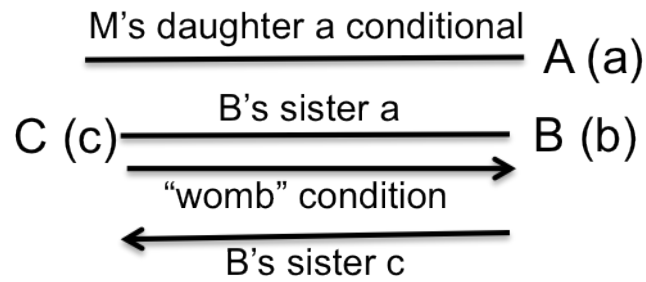


Figure 6.7: Womb written into marriage; M and N are brothers; a is daughter of M and C is son of N; M's daughter a is married to A and N has got womb written that the future daughter b of A(a) will be offered in exchange of his son C.

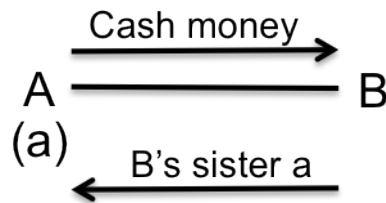


Figure 6.8: Engagement in exchange of cash money

However, since the English education started in Thar and boys started to get matriculation (around 1918-1919), the education became the most important aspect to be considered when looking for the bridegroom for a girl. Different situations demanded different considerations though.

In order to fix the engagement, bride's and bridegroom's parent did not meet with each other but would use a third-party who is a trusty and known to both the families. The discussion and conversation would go along for 6-8 months before the declaration of engagement. If later on there are any disputes between the two parties, a third party would intervene and addressed the issues. There was no system of matching bride's and bridegroom's birth planets at the time of engagement.

When town's elders get together for engagement, they would consider unmarried boys and girls and set the two- three- or four-ways double in-laws and distant relatives would communicate the conclusion to everyone involved. In those days elders were respected and no one could over-ride their decisions. Once the decision is made verbally, it was considered a fixed decision. Everyone had to respect the decision.

Engagements were arranged such that the boy and girl could not meet each other. There was no mutual interview or communication even after the engagement. There were no photos which could be exchanged.

For the engagement ritual the holymen would be consulted for the right time and main people of the community would get together at the girl's place. The engagement was declared there and was registered in a "**vahi**" or a register. The names of both the parties and any double in-laws were registered. If there is an agreement of a future offering, it was clearly registered so that there is no dispute later on.

Girl's parents would offer a rupee coin and coconut to boy's parents which they would accept. People joined from the bridegroom's family would identify people from the family who are to be given the coin and coconut. Bridegroom's uncle or brother would announce the names and bride's uncle or brother would bring rupee and coconuts in a big pan and would go to each of them. The people the rupee and coconut are offered would take them in lap or in a towel. First coconut was offered to the paternal family and then to the maternal family. Afterwards the brothers, cousins, son-in-laws and relatives were offered coconut. If someone is not present and he is one of the person announced then someone else would accept on his behalf. The intention of this ritual is to get each parties introduced to the other parties. After this people would throw color on each other, have milk and betelnuts and say good bye to each other.

On the other side, the women from the boys side would send milk to girl's family. Bridegroom's sister-in-law or aunt would carry milk in a colored pot and walk towards the bride's home. Other ladies from the relative's family would join them. They would sing along while walking. Bride's family would gleefully accept the milk. The milk was offered to the people of family and the empty pots would be returned with small money. Bridegroom's family would bring dresses and jewelry for the bride and gift it to them. Bridegroom's maternal and paternal uncle would offer a "**mud**" to bride's family. This included a full dress which happened to be a sari, ghaghro and blouse and in jewellery, golden head-ring, nose-ring and necklace were offered. In addition, silver anklets were offered. This system was called **sakariyo**. After having meal at bride's place, before leaving, they would offer one sari.

After the declaration of engagement, people from town would go to bridegroom's place and would congratulate bridegroom's father. They would say "**vadhai ahe, vihan karyo**" meaning "congratulations on the engagement". On which the father would reply "**thakur vadhaje**" meaning "god's grace". Rupee coin and coconut would be offered to people who came to congratulate. Wealthy families of town or the families who had engagement after a long time would organize a "**rihaan**" (party) at the house. Opium, betelnuts and cigarettes were offered in these parties. Coconut and rupee were also offered. Bridegroom's relative and family would sing songs which were called **raaso**. On the second, third or fourth day, bridegroom's married sisters or aunts may also have **raaso** at there place. Women joining in these singings would be offered seven fresh dates. After the engagement and before the marriage, when there were festivals such as **vadi teej, janmashtami, Diwali,**

**Shivratri, Holi** etc., the bridegroom's family would send sweets such as **sattu, pedha, gundpaak**, other sweets or dry fruits. Such a sending was called **bhaado moklyo**.

Engaged boy and girl would never visit their in-law's or in-law's relatives places. They would not share a vehicle, a seat or would not sit together at a meal on any social function. Bridegroom would not speak to the in-law's family members. Bridegroom would never shake hands with his in-law's or any members of in-law's family. Mother-in-law would never speak to her son-in-law and the daughter-in-law would never speak to her male in-laws. This kind of decorum was observed forever from the bride. If a girl is around and her would-be in-laws appears, the girl would run away.

If a would-be mother-in-law wants to treat her would-be son-in-law, she would invite her to a neighbor's house. Boy would be accompanied by his 2-4 friends where the mother-in-law would offer milk to son-in-law and his friends. This ritual was called "**dudh piyaryo**". Everyone would have meal there. Mother-in-law would offer coconut, handkerchief filled with goodies and dresses etc. Son-in-law would also offer sweets to children and sister-in-law.

Son-in-law was addressed with a special prefix or suffix: "**sahukar or shah**". For example if the name is Roopchand, he would be addressed as Roopchand Shah. This way his respect was maintained.

If the engaged girl dies, the girl's parent would offer another girl or a relative's girl in marriage so that the other marriages which are linked under the double in-law system would not break. Sometimes wise people would not break the marriage and would continue with the other marriages without any amends.

If the bridegroom dies after engagement, the girl would be engaged elsewhere. Engagements done at a younger age would stay for a long time, sometimes for 7-8 years. If the girl is too young or there are other obligations and marriage dates are not fixed for a long time, both parties would understand such situations and would normally not insist on a fixed date or period for the wedding. The same understanding prevailed in the case of linked marriages under the double in-law system. The saying was that "**vaal vichhaye dinha ahin to sahe junu paise**" which roughly translates to an expression that if hair is offered as carpet everything has to be considered.

Sometimes it so happened that a widower would have to be engaged with the girl. In the system of double in-law the aim was always bridegroom's marriage and girl's choices were not given any priorities. Another thing is that if one's own daughter gets in some trouble after marriage at the in-law's place then the daughter-in-law was also treated badly to avenge this.

## 6.4 Marriage

In human life, birth and death are in the hands of almighty. Humans do not have much control over them. While marriage is organized by the man himself and he enjoys its bliss. This bliss happens only once in life. (Although man can marry twice or thrice). Now let us see the old system prevalent in Maheshwari community:

**Deciding the date.** After engagement, when bride's and bridegroom's family think of marriage, they would consult the holymen known to them. The holymen would suggest 2 to 3 possible dates. Out of these, the date agreeable to both parties would be decided as marriage date. Some dates required that bridegroom or bride needed to perform a special ritual which had to be agreeable to both parties. Mostly people would select clean dates where no such rituals were required.

**Writing Marriage.** Before the date of marriage, on an auspicious day, bride's family would invite their relatives and 2-3 people from bridegroom's family. At an auspicious time, everyone would gather at a temple or at bride's home. The holyman would invite bride's father or brother for a ritual. He would wear a red turban or an embroidered hat. After the ritual, the holyman would write a marriage card on a blank paper. He would write the details of bride and bridegroom and their parent's names, date marriage and planetary positions etc. He would prepare a *kundali* of the marriage. He would suggest if any additional rituals are required. The marriage-card would be sprinkled with red kumkum powder. *Gaudhulik* wedding meaning the time when cows returned in dusk and dust would fly was considered the best time for wedding or the night time. Wedding were not organized during the daytime. Holyman would offer yellow rice and would do a teeka to everyone present at the time of writing marriage. This meant that the marriage was written in witness of everybody present. In the end he would collect the yellow rice back from everyone, would add coin, betelnut, 7 dates, turmeric piece and put into the paper and wrap the paper. He would make a Swastik on the paper and would write the bride's name on top. Rupee coin and coconut would be offered to the people present from the bridegroom's side. Children would get small money. People would disperse after having smoke and betelnut. The marriage packet ("**pado**") would not be put on floor. It had to be put on chair or cot. Homes where marriages were written and their relatives would not go to any funerals until the wedding is over.

**Marriage "sojhna".** Own relatives or neighbor's 4-5 married woman would perform this ritual. They would put a kumkum swastik on a pan and put a fistful of salt, rice, moong beans and juwar and would clean and separate them. The bride

would be seated on a cot and they would sing “**saahevero**” songs. Afterwards the marriage packet would be tied again. This ritual was called “**lagna sohya**”. The participating women would be offered dates.

**Sending of Marriage.** The products of the above mentioned “sojhna” ritual were put in small cloth packets and would be sent to the bridegroom’s family via a gardener. Care would be taken that the marriage packet reaches the bridegroom’s place as soon as possible. Along with the marriage packet, girl’s father would write a letter in which he would write his family’s name, ancestry, salutations to bridegroom’s family members and their relatives. Afterwards, would mention that their daughter’s auspicious wedding has been written and the agreed upon date and would invite the bridegroom’s family to come with a “**surangi jaan**” or colorful procession to wed his daughter. If the gardener had to go to another town, they would rent a camel for him. When the gardener reaches the bridegroom’s place, he would be welcomed with water and salt crystals/nuggets. The marriage packet would be opened and a similar sojhna ritual would be performed by 4-5 married woman with bridegroom seated on a cot. The gardener would get 10-20 Rupees as gift and some cloth. He would be offered meal and bridegroom’s family would arrange for his travel back. Bridegroom’s marriage has arrived was soon known to people of the town and they would come to congratulate bridegroom’s family. Everyone was given coin and coconut. Some families would organize a **rihan**.

**Invitation Card.** After the marriage sojhna event, both parties would write invitations to their relatives. The invitation cards were written by hand and sprinkled with kumkum powder in those days. If close relatives are in a different town then the invitation card would be given in person and hand-to-hand. Sixteen jaggery **laddu** and 1 syrup **laddu** were also given along with the invitation card. Others were sent invitation cards by post. Care was taken as to see that no relative is forgotten. Close relatives would take this opportunity to steal respect by taking offense and the hosts would go above and beyond to coax them. Hosts would politely insist and say “**maahnje otte te chadho**” meaning please come to my home. In extreme cases bride’s father would say, “**tahje page potiyo rakha to**” which roughly translates to all my honor is at your feet.

**Raw oil.** About ten days before the wedding, bridegroom/bride would be seated on a cot at their home and they would be adorned with oil and songs would be sung. In order to get the bridegroom up from the cot, his brother or uncle would say, “**uthi tana bhalo uth deisa**” meaning, get up, will give you a nice camel. Bride would also be got up from the cot by her brother or uncle and she would get

money or ring. At this time Bride/Bridegroom's leg would be tied with "**laan**" which was a thread with some iron ring, sea-shell and sealing wax. This was done so that they remain safe of foul play and bad spirits. Such bride/bridegroom were called oil adorned and would not go out of home much. Bridegroom would get back massage from a visiting barber everyday. Bride would also get back massage from a female barber. A "**devakotho**" would be painted on the northern wall of home in which Lord Ganesh, Sun-moon, bride-bridegroom, bed-cushion etc. would be drawn. These were bordered with colorful boundaries and would look beautiful. Girl's devakotho would have 2-4 riddles/puzzles written over it.

**Nanani-Dadani.** Bride's maternal and paternal grand parents would offer one day's meal to all the invited relatives. This was called "**nanani-dadani**".

**Laapsi.** About five days before marriage, bridegroom's family will cook **laapsi** and would distribute it to the community. Three people would go door to door with a large beaker full of laapsi. Two would hold the beaker and the third would measure 50 tolas (approx. 500 gram) of lapsi and give it to the family. They would give more if there is any guest in the family at the time.

**Vinyakh.** Two-three days before the day of wedding (**paarnet**), the Vinyakh ritual would take place. Vinyakh means the worship of Lord Ganesh. Bride/Bridegroom would sit in from on their devakotho on a cot. Songs similar to raw oil ritual would be sung and all relatives would have meals at the hosts place. On the right side of the devakotho, a cotton plug dipped in ghee would be pushed against the wall seven times making seven streams of ghee from top to bottom. This was called **maae uthiyarta** meaning remembering the seven rivers. Bridegroom would wear a big golden necklace.

**Vinaho.** Two to four days before the wedding, family's relatives would start arriving at the family's place. They would bring 1/2 to 1 kilo of sweets with them. This sweet was called **vinaho** and would get distributed among the guests at the time of meals. Until the wedding sweets such as *magat* are made, the vinaho was used in meals. This way people would know who has brought what. At the end of the marriage when sweets were distributed to departing guests, the vinaho was taken into account.

**Mogar.** In the home with marriage, the most used sweet was **magat**. Rarely was seen a wedding without magat. To prepare magat, men would be invited from

among relatives. A brick furnace would be prepared in the night. The mogar was made under the supervision of experienced and knowledgeable person. This work was done through labor and community member's cooperation. In a large deep pan the flour would be roasted. Two persons would stir the flour with large six-feet long iron spoons. When they are tired, the next two people would take their place. This way they would all take turns in the activity of stirring the massive amount of flour. The roasted flour thus made was called mogar. Adding sugar and ghee to mogar made **magat**. Everyone present would eat the magat. Mogar thus made would not spoil for six more months and magat would be ready in minutes. A detailed recipe for magat is given later. (Such a process of preparing magat has not been heard of in any other community).

**Siloka.** On the night of Vinyakh, and thereafter, there would be chanting of siloka (god's sloka) at bridegroom's place. 25-30 people would sit together and one would start chanting slokas. 5-7 people would catch up the tune enthusiastically. This was called **tuk jhalai**. People would have betelnuts, sugar, cigarette, fennel and would leave.

**Jaan.** Jaan or the marriage procession would go on feet if the marriage is in the same town. If the marriage is in a different town, they would hire camels. On the way they would take break and had magat and savoury fried gram lentils for snack. Magat would be stored in brass pots. Care would be taken as to who joins the procession. If someone who joins without a relation then the hosts would say this is **lakho jaani** meaning a freebie. When the jaan is about to reach town, the bride family people would go out to receive jaan. Jaan would arrive one day before wedding. The day the jaan arrives, they will get camels decorated with adornments and would ride camel and make camel jump and dance. The bridegroom (**lado**) would wear soiled clothes with massage oil and turmeric and a yellow turban so he would be readily recognized. Lado would distribute money at the time of riding camel. Elderly women and bridegroom's mother would not join the jaan.

**Jaan-ro-dero.** The place where the jaan would lodge and board is called **jaan-ro-dero**. There, for the convenience of jaan, bride family would arrange bed, cushions, cots etc. Members of jaan would prepare food themselves and would eat. Bride's family would send in some snacks. Relatives of jaan members would send them curd.

**Mandhotani.** Bride's family would order two festoons from town's carpenter. It would be colored red. Festoon means three wooden strips joined in a triangle where in the top two strips are decorated with two sparrows each shaped wooden



pieces and the top angled part is decorated with one sparrow shaped wooden piece. Five sparrows symbolize five god-goddess: “**Saraswati samru Sharda, Dhyavu dev Ganesh; paanch dev raksha karo, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh**”. Bride’s family would hang to the roof angle, a mud plate, roti and raw *papad*. Afterwards, the festoon would be tied to the home’s door. After that, they would be accompanied by a holyman and would go to the jaan-ro-dero. A drummer would beat the drum in front. 5-7 children would walk with mud plate, perforated wheat flour roti, sugar, cotton thread, clay pots etc. Men would follow them. House’s daughter-in-law would tie a decorated head band and would carry a colored pot filled with milk. She would be followed by other woman singing songs. After reaching at the jaan-ro-dero, people would greet the jaan members and sit together with them. The woman with milk would be welcomed with salt-water. Bridegroom would do “**bandai**” to the milk pot by touching his turban’s end cloth to the pot and then touching the cloth to his face. He would do this 4-5 times. Holyman would tie the festoon to the door and other things to the hook up the roof. Jaan members would greet others with cigarette and betelnuts. After a while, they will return back.

**Nani Kholo.** Bridegroom, Best Man and some friends would sing sloka, stop frequently on the way and walk to the in-laws place. Best man would be usually bridegroom’s brother-in-law. Best man would carry a bag on his shoulder which had coconuts and other useful things. In-laws would do the Nani Kholo ritual meaning would offer a cloth-lungi to the bridegroom and gave coconuts.

**Rihan.** It was a custom to organize **rihan** when the procession came back to bridegroom’s town. Bridegroom’s father would ask for permission for this.

## 6.5 Death

One’s birth can be predicted 7-8 months in advance but death is unpredictable. Nobody knows when death will happen unless some one inflicts it upon self (commits suicide), which is a sin religiously and a social and legal crime. If he gets lucky to live, he becomes unlucky to get punished by law.

Now let us see the prevalent traditions for deaths in the Maheshwari community: When a person falls ill and has left all hopes of living, at that time a lamp (with ghee as fuel) is lighted which is called **jivat divo**. The person is taken down from the bed. The oldest son would put the person’s head on his lap which was called *godo dinho*. Geeta book was read for the dying so that they can listen to something good. Relatives would declare the donations they would make in the dying person’s

name such as grains, milk, ghee, curd, utensils, grains for birds, animals etc. They would also declare how many *agiyarash* fast would they observe in the name of the dying. At this last time family would send ghee and rice to local temple.

Sacred water of river Ganga, basil seeds, and curd is put in the dying person's mouth. It is said that every form of life gets milk but not curd. Only human *yon*i gets to taste and enjoy curd. ( It was believed that the dying person might not get curd in the next birth. ) A tiny gold grain (**tus**) was put in an eye. Someone experience would hold the pulse to learn and verify death.

At the time of last hiccup before last breathe, water was poured over mouth from a steel pot (**gagar**). This was called **paani thyo**. This was considered very important event. If this did not happen it was considered that the dying person's soul went wrong way and the sons of the person were criticized such as **moena lap panie kon thyo**. (This tradition was in place so that the ill person is continuously taken care of and nobody stays careless. When the breathe stops gets known timely.) At the time of pouring water everyone would cry loudly so that neighbours would know someone has died.

Dead body's hands and legs would be straightened and the body would be laid such that the head stays in the North direction. Ear and Nose were plugged with cotton plugs. Eyes were closed. A brick was placed under their head.

After that in one corner of the room a square was made with cowdung (**dhor deita**). The body was washed/bathed, wrapped in a fresh white cloth and laid down on the square. Forehead was spotted with *Tilaka*. For the shroud (**kafan**), a **nav nali** (approximately 36 square feet ). The shroud would be wrapped and sewed on one side and about 1 feet extra was left open on the other side. This shroud was wrapped on the body with the open part on the head side. Three small silk cushions were made with cotton filling.

The funeral procession would start by placing the body on a *nanami* made of two vertical bamboo sticks and seven horizontal wooden plates tied between them with jute ropes. Dried grass, dried plant of basil and a small piece of sandalwood was put on top of nanami. If an unmarried boy has passed away, a lungi cloth would put as shroud. If a married young man has passed away then his wife's saree is draped as shroud. Dying married man would be given lungi from in-laws home called **ochhado** and if the dying person is a young married woman, she would be given a pair of clothes (*madd*) from her in-laws home. If the dying person is an old lady, a necklace made up of basil wood beads would be put in her neck. Often for the elderly people silken satin cloth would be used as shroud. The body is tied to the nanami with a sacred thread and some *gulaal* is sprayed. Dying man's widow would break her bangles and remove the nose stud. (These were considered the signs of a married woman.)

Relatives living far away were sent telegrams. However, it took some time for the telegram to reach and relatives to come so they were not waited for. As much as possible the funeral procession would start immediately. They would not let the body stay overnight. However, funerals were never held in night. In the times of poor communications and transportation, the dying person was given last rites in the same town where he died.

Before the procession, the relatives of the dead would circumnavigate the nanami and pray for the departed soul's piece. Barbers were called to home to shave off hair, beard, moustache etc. of the brothers and sons of the dead. If someone does not want to clean shave head then the sideburns were shaved and was said to have **sirbadra dinha**. This was an indication that someone in the family has died. Relatives would also put coconuts near the body which was taken with the funeral.

Townsmen would reach the cremation ground with a **kumbhat** wood load on his camel. This wood would weigh about 100-140 Kilogram. Family's daughters in law would clean the floor from the place the body is put to the street outside the home. They would use their saree to dust the floor. This was called **vehdo boharyo**.

To give shoulder to the nanami, first great grandson then grandson, son, brother, daughter's son etc. would be the order. If the dying person has great grandson, it was said he has a golden stairs to heaven meaning he has lived a happy and fulfilling life. Nanami was lifted such that head remains on the front. Two people in the front and two in the back, when they lift the nanami, everyone would cry loudly. Nanami would leave from the main door of home. There have been instances where daughter's marriage ceremony is about to take place and father dies. In such cases nanami is taken out from the back of the house, in some cases after breaking the court wall of house. Dying person's elder relatives such as father, uncle, elder brother etc. would not join the procession to crematorium grounds. Husband would also not join the cremation procession of his wife. Women would also not go. However, women would go to some distance in elderly person's procession chanting religious songs (**bgajans**) and return back. At the time of procession to crematorium grounds, household and neighbourhood women would cry which is called **munhda odhti**.

During procession, three balls of wheat were made. First was given to dog/cow at the time of beginning the procession, second at the time of reaching (**vesahi taane**) and third at the time of cremation.

If death has occurred during some special time of calendar year such as *panchak* five such wheat floor balls were taken. It was said that a dying person during the time of panchak would cause death of five more people from the community. To avoid this, five wheat balls were made. Other people would take some grains tied in towels and would give those grains to birds at the crematorial grounds. They would wrap the towel in their necks. One person would chant "*raam naam satya hai*" from

behind the procession which was repeated in chorus by others. They would chant this all the way. Dying person's relatives would change shoulders among themselves. Relatives would throw sugar *patashas* and coins during the procession.

A little before the crematorial grounds, at a decided spot, after sprinkling some water on the ground, the nanami would be brought down to the ground. The end of the cloth shroud would be torn and tied to a tree. The nanami would then be turned. Now the original people who lifted the nanami in the beginning of the procession would come back to the nanami and it would enter the crematorial grounds.

At the crematorial ground, after pouring some water and grains, nanami was put on floor. A place where there is no recent cremation, wood is arranged after putting a coin and some water sprinkles. Some dried grass was put on top. Then, the body was put on top with head to the North direction. Ghee was applied on body's hands, legs, forehead etc. Then after putting more wood on top the pyre was completed. Some coconuts were also put in between.

Initially, all four people who gave shoulders or the eldest son would circumnavigate the pyre and would put fire to the right toe of the body. Everybody would sit at a distance. 2-3 experienced people would inspect the pyre frequently. They would turn the wood or if required added more ghee and wood. Special care was taken so as no part of the body is left unburnt. Such parts were brain and women's waist. After the pyre is burnt fully, people would return after bowing to the pyre.

These cremators would go straight to the village well where their children would be waiting for them with fresh clothes. They would take bath in the same clothes as they are wearing and then change into fresh clothes. If one has to bath at home then they would go to the dead person's home. One person who has already been taken bath would bring some water from inside the house and put some on each of the cremators head. After this, other than family members, all would disperse. As cremators come back near home, they would cry. Cremators from the family would bath at home with clothes on and then would change into fresh clothes. Died person's son would go to his mother and console her. Roti was offered to cow and dog and grains to birds.

Meanwhile meals get cooked at home or at the neighbour's. If the died person is young then pearl millet (**bajra**) roti and rabdi/moong dal was cooked and of the died person is elderly then wheat *tikli* (a type of roti) and dal was cooked.

Everyone would have meals together so that the close family members would also eat something and would not feel too sad. Until the 11th day at home everybody would observe **sutak**, meaning nobody would go to temple and nobody would do any worshipping at home.

In third day, **teiyo** was observed. At this time, relatives in the town were asked

to wash their heads. Everyone would get together and with a *maharaj*, 2-3 people would go to the crematorium. Others would go to the well. A water container and some milk would be sent in advance to the crematorium with which the pyre would be cooled down. This was called **chita tharta**. Bones were collected from the pyre and take them to the well. There, near a peepal (sacred fig) tree the late person would be given last rites. First the son and then brother etc. would take some water, milk and leaf and pour some water from hand (108 times) on the ossified bone put on top of a wheat flour ball. Those who have worn janoi (sacred thread) would do the same with the thread held between thumb and small finger. After this, they would put fuller's earth (**mait, multani mati**) in head and wash it with water and return home. The ossified bones would be wrapped in a silk piece of cloth. Alongside *panchratna* (five metals-gold, silver, iron, copper and brass) and honey would be put and this all would be wrapped in deer skin. Some fuller's earth would be applied on top and then this would put in a box. This box was not put on floor but in cupboard or some shelf.

If no lamp has lit then after washing head on teiya, they would lit a ghee lamp. Died person's son or grandson would take care of the lamp which was called **dive betho**. He was given everything to eat that he wished for such as sweets etc. It was believed that these things will reach the died person. The lamp was kept alight continuously.

This boy would offer rites everyday with water, milk, leaf and wheat flour ball with 108 times water pouring using both palms near the peepal tree. Alongside, another person would carry water in a bucket and a metal pot. After the day of death, each day the flour balls would be increased which became 11 at the eleventh day. After the rites, the ball was given to cow which was called the **bahar-ri-kriya** ritual.

On the day of teiya, died person's in-laws would offer rice and ghee which was called **ras dino**. On that day other relatives would wear turbans. Close relatives would tie some cloth on head until 11th day. Sons and brothers would not wear shirt. On that day a holy person or priest (**maharaj**) would start reading **garudpuran** which was listened by the women of the family.

If the died person is elderly, then the in-laws of their sons would come with color and would offer a rupee coin and coconut.

On the day of teiya distant relatives were written letters which included the news of the death and the date of death and dates of 11th and 12th day. Right corner of the postcard was torn off so that the receivers would know the letter is about death news.

In the evening of teiya, in a lid of earthen pot, sweets, food and opium etc. (things liked by the departed soul) with an iron tong and water would be taken to crematorium. In a street by the crematorium, the lid would be put on floor and the water

would be poured around. The iron tong was taken along so as to avoid some evil spirit talking the food away.

Men would sit at the home of the departed soul for 12 days. They would spread sheets etc. (**tapad vichhaye**) and sit on it. People from town or other towns would arrive to console the family. They were offered cigarettes, betelnuts and opium. Women would fold double the end of their saree and put on their head so that they can put the saree over their face and cry (**ochhingar**) when they see some relative coming to console them. This type of doubled folded saree would also serve as a sign that the woman has someone passed away in the family.

Household's oldest daughter-in-law, married daughter, or maternal and paternal aunt's were the main women sitting in mourning. Younger women would do chores. When some other women come to console, they would also join in mourning. Depending on the departed soul's age, situation, they would sing mourning songs (*dirges*). Visiting women would join in mourning for some time then would pull the saree over the head of the host woman and would console her to calm down (**maat karaiti**). Women of house and visiting women would not wear *bindi* on forehead. This ritual would continue for months.

Relatives living in other towns, as and when they come to know of the departure, they would inform others in the town about the death and would say **paani ro kahije ta** which would mean that others will come to their home to console. The relatives would do the water rite 108 times as mentioned above. They would also sprinkle water over the gathered people and then disperse. Women would mourn similar to women of the departed person's household by double folding saree and putting it over their face.

After *teiya*, the departed's relatives would eat at their house. The relatives would sleep on floor on a sheet without mattress (**ukhrade**).

On the midnight of the tenth day the lamp would be taken by the boy to a place with crossroads **vathan** or **chovate**. He would dig a small pit and store the lamp there. He would sprinkle some water. Person taking this lamp would not speak and would not look back.

Closer relatives from other towns would come on 11th day to visit called **kaanehaar** while distant relatives would come on 12th day. If the visitor is a close relative, he would put a cloth on his head as he comes close to home and would start crying aloud while coming to the home with wailing sounds like *ohh my uncle* (**he mahnja kaka**) or brother or any other name depending on the relation. This way it would be known who is the person. Visiting women relatives would also cry like this. Visitor would sit near the door where someone from house would come and give water. After drinking water, wherever the mourning is happening, he would sit on the corner for sometime and then would get up and go to the main person and would console him

by hugging. This is called **sampharto**. Or, he would shake hand and say kind words, eg. *ram-ram* and ask about wellness. Similarly, he would say *ram-ram* to other people around and would sit down.

Visiting woman on **kaanehaar** would also **sampharti** to host women, elderly men etc. depending upon relationship. Such mourning would go on continuously.

Priest or holyman would assist the son of the departed in 11th day rituals. They would sit near the sacred firepit, would chant mantras and do rituals so that the departed soul could rest in piece. They would add grains-sesame-ghee to the sacred firepit. They would add sutak to the fire. This was called **ote-ri-kriya**. In memory of the departed, who would do what kind of donations and fasts, that would also be declared. In the 11th day meal, they would cook sugar *halwa* and close relatives would eat together. After things get burnt in the sacred firepit, the priest or holyman would also have meals.

Priest would help tie turban (**potia ra var deraita**). For this ceremony, people from community would be invited. Priest would do a tilak on forehead and would give basil leaves to them. This ceremony would mark end of mourning. However, in reality, some kind of mourning would continue for 8-12 months.

In-laws would put on shirts over the mourning hosts. Father-in-law would offer money to their son-in-law. Visiting daughter and her **vejada** (children) would get clothes and sweets. If the departed soul is a parent of a married woman, she would also get some gold jewelry. Visiting people would give money to departed's widow which was called **thigdi ra paisa**.

If possible, the departed's son, nephew or brother would carry the ossified bones to Pushkar or Haridwar. They would put the ossified bones in bag/suitcase and hold a wooden stick with them. Before leaving they would call the departed by relation or name eg. father/mother/uncle come with me (**mi bheda halo**). He would not look back and would not speak. On the way when he would dine, sit or sleep, he would ask the departed's soul to sit, sleep, eat etc. After reaching, he would do the appropriate ritual with the help of local holyman, offer meals to the holymen and appropriate donation for the rituals. This ritual was called **taravto** meaning letting the departed soul's ossified bones be merge into the holy waters. He would also register his name on the registries maintained by the local holymen. After this ritual, he would let his head shave there. He would return after finishing everything.

If no one is able to go to Haridwar or Pushkar for this ritual, the box with ossified bones would be sent by post or parcel to the holyman and they would themselves do the rituals. The donation for holyman would be sent via money order. Such holyman would visit Thar's villages once every 4-5 years and would obtain some money as donation.

On the 12th day, the departed's son would go to *dhura* (a division of community), would wear towel around neck and would request **assanje vadil ri osser ri mokal dyo** meaning grant permission to organize a community feast in memory of the departed soul. For this there was a special saying as **muth ghughariya ri karan do**. Depending on the past deeds by the family on other similar occasions, the dhura would accordingly grant permission.

A community rihan is organized on 12th day where opium was used. After that, in sweets *dahithara* (a sweet made up of curd)/*jalebi* (a sweet made up of fermented flour, oil/ghee and syrup)/*bundi* (a sweet made up of chick peas flour, ghee and sugar) (in increasing order) would be cooked depending on one's status and position. If some likes to do **panch pakwan** they would cook five sweets as *bundi*, *jalebi*, *dohiti* (a sweet made up of flour, ghee, sugar), *mesu*, *mohanthal* (a sweet made up of chick peas flour, milk, sugar, ghee). Brahmins were said to have done Brahmboj. Each Brahmin with sacred thread would be offered a donation of a rupee or more.

Arriving Brahmin would have meal for himself and would take a fixed amount of sweet per family member at the time of leaving. This is called **biro**.

Dhura's guests arriving for feast would bring their own utensils, cold water, poppadams, pickles etc. Feast would happen in the street where everyone would eat together.

Such community feast was called **mahajan** and when done by Brahmins, it was called **maastan**. If someone organizes this kind of feast in memory of their departed elders then it was said that one has done **mahajan-maastan** and this would get registered in community holyman's registers.

Maheshwaris would spend a significant amount of money in such **ossers**. For poor people, this would mean that all their savings would get washed off and they might have to take loans to organize such events.

In memory of the departed, priest would read *Garud Puran* from teiya till 13th day. It would end on 13th day.

People who have visited in kaanehaar would also offer some donations to the priest reading the *Garud Puran* which was noted in a notebook (**bandi**). Additionally, family would give cot, duvets, beddings, cushions, mattress, light, cow etc. in donation. Instead of real cow, a symbolic token of small silver cow would be given which was said to help the departed reach heaven. It was said that the departed would hold the tail of this cow and swim across the Vaiterni river and would reach heaven.

After the 12th day, almost everyone would disperse, only close relatives would stay. On 17th or 18th day **Maasi chhant** (monthly ritual) would be done when the priest would be offered meal and a donation. After this everyone would leave. Six



monthly and annual ritual would be respectively done on 5th and 11th month during the waning (**vad**) part of the lunar calendar. Family members would be invited for six monthly and annual rituals by writing letters. Brahmin would do sacred fire-pit ritual and would obtain a donation.

After the departed's death date, one **shraaddhs paksh** would be left and in the next **shraddh paksh**, their first **shraddh** would be observed. At this time all the relatives would be informed by postal letters. Sweets such as **kheer** (a kind of rice pudding) and **muthia-ra-laddu** (a sweet made up of flour and ghee) would be made. Alongside wheat flour **tikli** (a kind of roti) and **chibhde-karing-guvar fali ro saag** (mixed melons vegetables) would be cooked. More than one brahmins would be invited for meals. After that, on each of the Shraaddhs, only family members, a brahmin and daughters would be invited for meals.

Widow would not step out of house until after the first Shraaddh of the departed which was called **khuno paadyo**. Such a thing would sometimes happen for two years (if a person is dies just after the Shraaddh paksh, his Shraaddh would be observed after two years). After first Shraaddh, woman's parents would take her to their home and would offer her a new pair of clothes. This was called **khuno chhadayo**(she can step out the door now).

**Vaikunthi.** If the departed is a leading person in the community and of upper status then their children would celebrate a vaikunthi for them. For this, the corpse would be bathed and arranged such that it is sitting upright with straight neck.

A wooden chariot would be made with three sides open and the back side closed. The departed would be seated straight on this chariot. The chariot would be decorated and there will be four handles around it which would be lifted by four turbanated people. Red color powder (gulaal) would be sprinkled all over during the procession. Also, money and sugar candies (**patasha**) would be distributed along way.

Temples on the way or all temples in the town were visited and the procession would stop for a short while. The pyre would be set with the body straight in seated position and wood etc. would be arranged around it. Before doing Vaikunthi, a permission was sought from the community and the community will consider all the relevant factors and past of the family before making appropriate decision.

The meals would include panch-pakwan. Mahajan-Maastan would be offered meal. Brahmins would get good donations.

After the formation of Pakistan, in Mithim Ranchhod-das Bekhatmal Dhirani and his brothers celebrated Vaikunthi of their father, Mr. Bekhatmal. This Vaikunthi was celebrated on 24/03/1982 which was probably the last in Thar. Then, the departed's sons offered meals to the whole town of Mithi (including community and

non-community people such as muslims). In other towns of Thar where Maheshwaris lived, they sent special people to cook sweets the same day and distribute to Maheshwari households.

**Infant or Child Death.** If an infant or a child is died because of diseases such as Pox then they would be buried instead of cremation. After wrapping them in appropriate shroud, digging a pit and the child would be rested in there. Some salt would be sprinkled over the body so that it gets dissolved in soil faster. Some thorns would be spread on top and then the pit would be covered with soil. Thorns were put so that some animal may not dig the pit and disturb the body.

**Note:** Elderly person, if passes away, it was called “**Ram karyo**” and if a child passes, it was called “**pachho thayo**” meaning “returned back”.

**Dirges.** Dirges are called “par” in Dhati. Women sing them while mourning behind a person who passes away. Such dirges were sung about the person’s life, their age, the family they left behind etc. Even after trying no woman (or man) was ready to sing these dirges, so they were not recorded here.

Widowed woman would normally sing dirges behind their husbands like so:

**hey hu to muthi** (became widow)

**hey mahnja bachiya na role gayo** (left my children alone)

etc.

## Chapter 7

# Religious Culture

Religion links soul to the supreme. Religion connects the world with the creator. Religion shows the way to rendezvous with the God.

There are many religions in this world and people observe their religion. Hindu religion is the religion of Hindus. It is the oldest religion of all—it is a *sanatan* (eternal) religion and is also known as a vedic religion.

Thar Maheshwaris are Hindus and followed the Hindu religion. Maheshwari community originated from the God Mahesh. So, Lord Shiwa was worshipped but Maheshwaris were Vaishnavs. Every town had a temple. Temple is a leading symbol of our culture and heritage. Eternal religion is incomplete without temples. Temples are so integrated in Indian life that it is hard to believe any Indian has not visited one in his/her lifetime. Many *Murlidhar* temples were built by Maheshwaris. Beautiful marble idols were brought from Jaipur and were installed in temples. Shri Ganesh and Hanuman idols would also have a place in such temples. Towns had *Mataji* temples and *Madhi* where people would go for worship during *Navratri* festivities. Other Matajis such as *Sheetala Mata* idols would also be present in such temples. *Bhojaks* would maintain and take care of temples and were called *sevaks*. They would take care of temple's cleanliness, God's bathing, decoration of the idol, prayers etc. Occasionally, people would donate gold and silver which was taken care of by the sevaks. Musical instruments such as drums, hand-symbols etc. would also be found in temples. These were used occasionally during devotional songs and during festivities such as Holi.

There was not much literacy among Maheshwaris in Thar but there was tremendous belief in almighty. Sanskrit knowledge was negligible but because of Gujarati knowledge, people used to read Ramayana, Mahabharat, Bhagvadgita and Bhagvat. Other religious text were also read. Such Gujarati books were mostly published by the Akhand Anand Publishers in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat. When people visited

Gujarat for business, they would bring these books with them back home.

Women would visit temple almost everyday. They would donate some grains and money. They offered 16 *Akshats* (unbroken rice grains) and milk to *Shivalinga*. After bowing to the god in temple, they would hold a small mirror put in temple towards god and then towards themselves. From a small bowl of *tilak*, they would dip a small stick and do a tilak on their forehead to the tip of their nose. They would circumnavigate the temple. They would chant devotional songs there. On special festivals such as *panthevari*, *Holi*, *Janmashtami*, *Shivratri*, etc. related devotional songs would be chanted by community and towns people.

Every 11th and full moon day of the month, woman and some men would observe fasts. On full moon day meals were taken after seeing and worshipping the moon. *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Hanuman Jayanti*, Mondays and Saturdays were also observed as fasts by some people.

Towns will always have organization of religious stories called **katha** in the evening. Usually, elderly women would go to listen to kathas. If there is a touring playgroup for *ramleela*, men-women would visit without fail. Occasionally, *Chobas*, *Pandas* and *Gosais* would visit towns and would receive donations.

Households would organize *Satyanarayan katha* to which neighbors, relatives and friends were invited to listen. They would listen, and enjoy sweets and meals in the end.

In addition to the deities in temples, other forms of god as described in the *Geetaji* were also worshipped. *Khetwal* (kshetrapal), trees and plants (especially basil, peepal), *Holika*, *Baliraja*, Sun, Moon, snake, lamp and other symbols were also worshipped. Some households had a *thaan* (place) for their ancestors and they would put aside some food for them before eating meals.

Women threw grains for pigeons every morning. Would offer a token-sacrifice to fire in the afternoon. Separate *roti* was cooked for cow-dog. Wandering *sadhus*, if they come for donation, she would offer them some food. Every Saturday, *varatiyas* would be offered oil. Ant's mounds were offered flour and grains. People would donate food and clothes after eclipse. After eclipse, bathing with same cloth on would be practiced in all seasons. Potable water would also be changed.

In the *Chhachhro* town, celibate holyman *Devnarayan* and holyman *Ladhuram*'s lectures had significant influence on people's religious inclinations. *Aryan Society* also influenced people's cultural and religious influences, interest and practices in *Thar*.

Travel was difficult in those days. After travelling over camel for two days people would reach nearest railway station. Despite these difficulties, *Maheshwaris* would go pilgrimage to *Pushkar*, *Mathura*, *ShrinathDwara*, *Haridvar*, *Jagannathpuri* and

Narayan Sarovar. Specially, Pushkar and Haridvar where they would do ossification of their loved ones with the assistance of holymen. Such pilgrims, when they returned from their pilgrimage would be visited by the people from town to wish them on a successful pilgrimage. They would offer them coconut and rupee as gift and the pilgrims would offer sacred sweets (usually brought from the pilgrimage) and some utensil in return.

With such a tremendous faith, religious sentiments were maintained over years by the community which was an inseparable part of Maheshwaris life.

**Devotional Songs (*Bhajans*).** No devotional songs in Thari/Dhatki language were found. Perhaps no devotional songs were made in Dhatki language or were made but did not spread and last long.

Ancient devotional songs such as by Surdas, Narsingh Mehta, Mira, Tulsidas, Ramayan's *chopai* etc. were sung. Morning songs, prayers were also sung.

## Chapter 8

# Position of Women in Society

In Hindu scriptures, the caste system and phase (*ashram*) system has been patriarchal. Woman is considered as the one who follows man and is a companion of a man. Woman does not have their separate duties but her duties are what the man commands.

Woman would be dependent on father after birth, then under the shadows of husband after marriage and finally dependent upon her son if she becomes a widow. Women would normally receive education in household chores, kitchen work, etc., from her mother. They did not have opportunities for education and freedom similar to men.

To start, at the time of birth itself, an inferior attitude was held against them. If son is born, family would celebrate by beating plates and offering *rihan* in the community whereas if it is a daughter, they would say a “stone” is born. Although, there was some consolation that the girl born would be useful at the time of boy’s wedding in exchange for a bride. There used to be discrimination in feeding, dressing, and bringing up in general.

Boy was always given importance at the time of engagement. Traditionally, for boy’s engagement, his sister was given in exchange as mentioned above. In such a situation, it was always seen that the boy gets a good bride and his sister was almost always sacrificed. It was never thought that select good bridegroom and family for girl and any bride is good for the boy. In fact, some poor parents would also sell their daughter in marriage for money as if she is a thing on sale.

Marriage would take place in the childhood normally. Immediately after wedding, the child bride would be surrounded by the veil *ghoonghat* system. Among the in-laws, she had to be in veil even from her brother-in-law who is younger than her husband but elder than her. She had to stay as much away from men as possible.

If she is wearing shoes and has to walk near men, she has to take them away and hold in her hands while walking near by men. Among women, she had to be in veil from her mother-in-law. She never had a chance to talk with her husband during the day.

Because of child marriage, many women would die during childbirth. So, the widower men would remarry a second, third (sometimes fourth) time and the newly wed bride would be in trouble. Elderly men would die and their young wives would become widow in a very young age. Men would be able to marry more than once but women would not be allowed to marry again even if their husband dies immediately after marriage. There was no custom of widow marriage.

Woman would always stay at home. Since all the financial affairs were upon men, no woman from the gentry would be allowed to step out alone. At the in-laws home, she had to tolerate taunts from mother-in-law and/or sister-in-law. Mother-in-law would remember how she had to tolerate such behavior from her mother-in-law and would vent this on her daughter-in-law. Men would go to their 'hut' shops in villages or would live in another town where they had jobs. When they returned home, they would be tattletaled by their mother and sister against their wives. Bitter arguments would ensue and husband would beat wife. Domestic violence would happen often and woman would be at the receiving end. She would often be hit with punches and kicked. In such times in-laws would ban the daughter-in-law from going to her parent's place. After getting fed up of such problems, woman would either immolate self or jump in well.

Now if we see the daily routine of Thar's woman, she had to wake up at a very early hour when sun has not yet risen in the morning. She started with household and kitchen related chores such as grinding grains, cleaning floor, repair mud floor if required, churn curd to make butter, clean the cattle shed, feed the cows-buffaloes, etc. If cowboy is not hired, she would milk the cows-buffaloes herself. Then, after bathing, would fetch 3-4 or more of water pots from the town well.

Morning tea wasn't customary but would feed children with roti-curd when they wake up. She would dress and ready up the school going children.

Cooking for lunch and dinner had to be done in time. Everything would be normally available at home for cooking. Fresh vegetables were not easily available so dried vegetables would be used. She would eat in the end after everyone. If something is over, she would do without and often would stay half hungry.

Before meals, she would take time to visit temple, and if it is some festivity, she would also observe customs accordingly. During festivals, sister-in-law would be invited or meal would be sent to their homes. Before evening, if parents also live in the same town, she would briefly go visit them and got updated on any news. Elderly woman would also attend any gatherings to listen to religious stories at the

temple.

After cooking dinner, cleaning up, making beds, she would get free late in the night and go to bed. There weren't many light sources, just one lantern per family, so she was used to work in little or no light.

Once in a week, she would go to well or lake to wash clothes, or grind grains and cereals or sew or cook occasional sweets. Works such as mud plaster on house and whitewashing the walls would also be taken care of by woman.

Now think about how they would manage time to finish the above chores in a day and when would they get time to rest? Were they physically strong enough to work so much? She might not be healthy all the time, during pregnancy or other situations she might be not in good health yet she had to work equally hard. However, because of the custom of joint families, most everything was taken care of.

Woman would have not visited towns other than her parent's and in-laws. If husband's job is away, she may happen to visit briefly but in the end would come back to in-laws house. Fashion had no place in life but would wear plenty of gold and silver jewelry. Any woman was photographed would be an exceptional event.

Even in such an orthodox society, it was surprising that when girl's school in Gujarati and then Sindhi started in Thar, the education level among girls was notably good. A girl could become a teacher after passing her finals (An exam after 7th grade). Many such teachers taught in schools. It is beyond our understanding how elderly orthodox men would have granted them permission to work in a job.

Let's bow to such humble life living and quietly passing life women like a goddess and provider of food.



## Chapter 9

# Society and Social System

Society is not simply a mob or a group of people. People gathered at a public place such as bus or railway station or a park can not be said to be a society but people gathered at an organized function or a conference or a meeting may be called a society. So, society is not just the addition of individuals but a system and elementary link that connects individuals.

Society means a group of people who have a distinct and identifiable goal in front of them. People whose hopes and aspirations are same and they have an intention of cooperating with each other in the quest of fulfilling those hopes and aspirations. People who are engaged in constant quest and potent efforts towards the goals. Such a group of people is a society.

Such a society made up of brave and focused men must define and march on a path towards their goal.

There are three stages of progress: will, planning and execution of plans. For this purpose, all people of the society must make good use of their energy for the self-development and the development of their fellow human beings. In such a cause, energies will not struggle against each other but cooperate and move forward at an ever faster speed.

When there are people with different thoughts and nature, it is inevitable that some conflicts in thoughts and actions might occur. Therefore, any person who is devoted to the development of the society must find a way to resolve such conflicts and channel the energies in a fruitful cause complementing each other.

When there is a lack of balance in the powers that lie within a society and if no one puts an effort to balance off these powers, then similar to how nature causes storms when there is a imbalance among elements, there would be storm in the society among the powers. All the social revolutions happening and happened in the past

in the society are nothing but the movements caused in the quest to bring about the balance among the various elements in the society. However, it still brings many wounds to the society. Therefore let us not wish that such revolution occur but work together towards causes that avoid the centralization and imbalance of such powers.

Just as with personal and group efforts society progresses and can become strong and resistant towards storms, the building of such a society should be so strong that it can provide support, safety and security to individuals.

With this background information, now let us see what are the various factors that play key role in the social systems.

# Chapter 10

## *Mukhi and Dhura*

After starting to live in Thar, Maheshwaris settled down gradually and started inviting others from nearby towns and villages from Marwar to stay together. In this manner, every town/village had its own social system. *panchayat* and *Mukhi* were appointed in order for a smooth administration of the system. Normally, people who are leading and of high status would be elected as mukhis. Mukhis would listen to the complaints of community people and try to resolve them. Mukhis would also oversee that the customs made by the system are followed appropriately.

Mukhis from different towns/villages would get together. In order to make sure that all Maheshwaris have a similar system, they would make sure that the customs are uniform and would make amendments if there are differences. They would elect one person among themselves as a president of the community. He would preside over issues related to the whole society and after due deliberation and hearing out all sides, he would offer his assistance in finding out resolutions of such issues. Such mukhis were highly respected in all of the society and it was seen that no one speaks against them.

As per information, at different times or simultaneously, 2-3 mukhis would live in a town. Their names and towns are as shown below (With insufficient information, please excuse if there are any omissions):

**Mithi:** Maljiram Mansukhdas Rathi / Somjimal Maljiram / Lachhmandas Somjimal.

Maljiram Radhakirshan / Meghraj Radhakirshan / Lachhmandas Meghraj Karmani  
Radhakirshan Amarchand Kullar

**Umarkot:** Khushaldas Khataumal Karmani

**Chhachhro:** Mathradas Motiram Maherani Jagroopdas Narsingra Maljiram Jagroopdas Nanjomal Maljiram Motiram Khushaldas Mathrani Somjimal Amarchand

Munhta

**Chelhar:** Damodar Vastani / Gokaldas / Ranomal Meghraj (Eldest of the Sajnani Family)

**Kantyo:** Khataumal Langhni (Kachoria) and their family

**New Chhod:** Jivraj Maankaani Kanji Amarchand Saanjhira Punamchand Kewalram Karmani (Mukhi of Dhat).

During one wedding related conflict, in order to bring about a resolution a Maheshwari community panchayat met in a town called Hingora, 6 miles east of Umarkot. Their the guilty party was resolved to be thrown out of the community. Here Umarkot's Mukhi Khushaldas Karmani and other leaders signed the resolution.

Mithi's Mukhi Maljiram Mansukhdas Rathi could not reach in time their for some reason. He was also considered a very influential person. First space was not reserved for him to sign. As soon as he reached, he was given the resolution document to sign. He saw it and asked: "**Sahi kith karan?**" (Where should I sign?). Somebody said sign somewhere in the side. On listening this, he said "**He sahi paseri j rehise**" (refused to sign) and left.

Since then, two polar groups of Mukhis were formed in Dhat. One was called **Karmania-ro-dhuro** and the other **Malania-ro-dhuro**. All towns and villages of Dhat were similarly divided in two groups of Mukhis. In a similar manner, because of some or the other conflicts, in Mithi, Chhachhro etc. places, many more *Dhuras* (literally polar groups) were formed. The details of these dhuras is as follows:

**Mithi:** (1) Mukhiyaan-ro-dhuro (2) Karmaniyaan-ro-dhuro (3) kularaan-ro-dhuro (4) laluraan-ro-dhuro.

**Chhachhro:** (1) Narsingraan-ro-dhuro (2) Mathraniyaan-ro-dhuro (3) Maheraaniyaan-ro-dhuro (4) Munhta-ro-dhuro.

**Chelhar:** (1) vado (big) dhuro included Vastani, Girdharani, Damani, Lalura, and Kara. (2) Nandho (small) dhuro included Damoshah Devani and Narsing Mehrani. From the small dhuro, 4-5 families separated and formed their own dhuro.

**New Chhod:** (1) Saanjhiraan-ro-dhuro (2) Maankaaniyaan-ro-dhuro

**Gadhado:** (1) Tikmanian-ro-dhuro included Chandani, Gopani, Kachromal Mukhi, and Narumal Tulsidas (2) Mulaaniyaan-ro-dhuro.

There were no dhuras in Kaantyo and Umarkot.

During the occasions such as wedding and passing away, invitations were given in the same dhura only. If invitees in wedding have relatives in other dhuras, they were also invited. However, there were no cases of violent conflict or quarrels because of dhuras.

# Chapter 11

## Assembly

Small conflicts among Maheshwaris were resolved by community's mukhis. If more than one village/town are involved then the *panchayats* from these towns were met and resolved the issues. Additionally, sometimes the whole Maheshwari community was invited into an assembly. There, a discussion was held on complains about weddings, relations etc. 4-5 people from each town would attend. So, 25-30 people would assemble. Dhat community's president would decide the date and venue and declare it among the towns. All Maheshwaris were allowed to attend these assemblies. Many complains were discussed there and if some changes are required in rules and regulations, those changes were brought about. Guilty people were thrown out of the community and/or fined. Even a one-rupee fine from the community was considered very bad/insulting. Such families who have been thrown out of the community were not invited to any occasions and they were generally boycotted which was considered a very bad thing for the family.

First assembly in Dhat was held in the Mithi town whose chair was Tando Al-lahyaar's *sheth* Lagharam Zaamandas Maalpani.

Second assembly was held in Gadhdado where *sheth* Mathradas Pragchand was the chair.

Chelhar's famous assembly was organized in the year 1940. There, the chair was Umarkot's *sheth* Punamchand Kevalram Karmani and Chhachhro's Mr. Motiram Valjiram Munhta was the minister. In this assembly, Surat's 13th All India Maheshwari Convention's chair Mr. Ramkrushna Dhyut (From Hyderabad, Deccan) was invited. Two lawyers from Mithi, Mr. Jethanand Leelaram Ramvani and Mr. Vaghjimal Gunesmal Jagani went to Surat to invite him. With them, Mr. Dhyut, with Ms. Gyaanidevi Heda and one more lady also arrived. They reached till Gadhdado by railway and from there, they travelled 75-80 miles very difficult journey by camel.

In order to communicate the systems, custom and other procedure of Dhat, the two lawyers accompanied them on stage.

In that assembly, Dhyut's comments significantly influenced Chhachhro's *sheth* Mulshankar Khetaram. He asked her wife to remove her *baanhi* and asked her to put in bangles. It was not appropriate to do this to a married lady with husband alive. This was subject to a lot of criticism in the community and people would curiously come to see her.

Another person who returned from a life term after committing a murder was thrown out of the community. He apologized with community people's shoes over his head and a pair in his mouth. When Mr. Dhyut came to know about this, he brought that person back into the community.

Such assemblies were held in Chhachhro and Chhod. Last assembly before partition (between India and Pakistan) was held in Kaantyo town in A.D. 1944-45 where Umarkot's *sheth* Punamchand Kevalram Karmani was the president.

In those times, the unity in community, respect for elderly and leaders and obeying of community's orders which are non-existent in these times. There were many Maheshwari assemblies in India after that but the results are not seen.

## Chapter 12

# Marriage Procession of the Bridegroom (*varghoda*)

It is a custom to have a marriage procession for bridegroom during wedding which also gives an estimate of the family's prestige. However, the modern day marriage processions were originally called "ghodi chadhan" (horse climbing).

After migrating from Marwar, wherever they stayed, Maheshwaris organized their children's weddings but they were much simpler because of a painful migration.

After some time, about after a couple of generations in Thar, Maheshwaris settled down and remembered the old style marriage procession. With some savings and established business, they started the custom again.

Bridegroom's marriage procession was one such custom which was resumed by one Chhatmalji from the Rathi family. In order to start a marriage procession, one must get permission from the panchayat of the town. Then, hire some camels, tie drums on each side of these camels and with musical sounds, take the procession from bridegroom's town to bride's town. Offer parties and gifts to the community families on the towns in the way and offer 30 camels to the holymen or an equivalent amount of money.

This custom was understood by Chhatmalji after inviting knowledgeable people from Marwar and organized first marriage procession in Dhat, of his son Dhanji. From this anecdote, a new proverb started as follows:

**Chhiti kari Chhatmal, varghode ri vaat,  
Rathi thari jaat, jaayo na jaapse**

Narsingdas belongs to this Chhatmalji's family and their ancestry was called Narsingra. Chhatmalji's great grandson was Ramji Shah and his ancestry was called

Ramjira.

A second marriage procession was organized by Maherchand Karmani which was from Umarkot to Badin. This procession was also as pompous as the previous one. All villages' Maheshwaris were offered parties, were given clothes and poets were also given donations.

In the year 1909, Nabisar's Sitaram and Lagharam Chaudhari's two procession reached Vastani's house on same day (presumably for the wedding of two of the Vastani daughters).

In the year 1914, Narsinghray Jogomal took a wedding procession from Chhachhro to Nabisar.

Sarupchand Saanjhira started a procession from Chhod with cheerful drum band. He offered parties to 5-7 Maheshwari towns. Mithi's Mukhi Malani's home was the destination.

In the year 1968 a procession was organized on the wedding of Vastiram Amarchand Ramvani. His marriage was fixed with Ramchand Meghraj Baluani's (Gigal) sister. After offering party to the community, 1.25 KG sugar, 2.25 KG dried dates and 1 rupee cash per family was distributed in the community.

Serving Brahmins were offered 18 camels.

After the formation of Pakistan, in the year 1963, Murlidhar Punamchand Dedha wedded into the family of Mithi's Gordhandas Manhardas Harani. After the marriage, with permission of the community, holymen started a procession by beating the drums. They roamed in the town's temple and despite being a dhura, offered party to the whole community. Distributed 500g magat and 4 rupees cash per home. Serving brahmins had meals and took about 400g of magat along. 220 KG flour was used in total for magat.

As per the best of our knowledge, the last marriage procession in Thar was organized in the Kantyo town. After the formation of Pakistan, in the year 1965, *sheth* Gordhandas Kevalram Laghad who moved from Dahli to Kaantyo had organized a procession from his home to the home of *sheth* Kishenchand Chaudhary (Ghurya).

People whose 5-7 previous generations had organized such processions were legible to wear gold necklace and a wrist bracelet. If worn otherwise, people would taunt him as **“taahje ke baap daade varghoda kadhya ahin, se kanthi-kado paheryo ahe?”**. Such necklaces and bracelets were made up of solid gold and could weigh as much as 200g each.

If there were more than one wedding procession arrived in a town on the same day then, in order to organize first *rihan* (party), a permission had to be obtained from the community. Those who have organized such a procession in the past would get



a permission to be first to organize the rihan. Family who have organized such a procession were considered superior in the community. Their social transactions were also high-valued. Everyone would always remember the family of procession organizer fondly: so and so person had organized a wedding procession and offered meals to Mahajan-Maastan.

### **“Shah”**

Maharana Pratap was the king of Mewad. He was very brave, thoughtful and patriotic. In order to protect the freedom of Mewad, he went to the battleground. However, he had to leave Mewad as his resources started to run out.

At this time a prosperous businessman called Bhamasha devoted all his riches to the king's service.

When Bhamasha offers all his riches to Maharana Pratap, he says, “Oh Bhamasha ! Mewad's land is radiant because of the gems like you !! The land which bears such courageous people will never be under siege of anyone !!! It will always be in the paradise of freedom.

“Oh Bhamasha, I do not have much to offer you in return of your loyalty and patriotism, but as a token of gratitude, I call you “Bhama Shah” and the title of “Shah” will stay for generations and would remind the coming generations of you courage and patriotism.”

This brave Bhamashah was a Maheshwari. Since then, Maheshwaris use “Shah” as a prefix or postfix title as a custom.

## Chapter 13

### Hospitality

People of Thar were very simple and straightforward. They were kind, truthful and self-respecting. Always stayed away from show-off and wiles. If some guest arrives from other town, they would consider it an honour. A saying went like this in Maheshwaris: **ganaat mahnje ankh mathe te** and if someone from the community arrived as a guest, the saying was: **nyati kere ghare, koi roti ro bhukhyo kon ahe** etc. “Guest is god” was the prevalent sentiment in those days.

Guest arriving from other town would be offered hand to shake and was asked as **chak sakrala, ruda bhala, kher khi, raji khushi, hokara, matara**, similarly the guest would also repeat same words. If some close relative or friend happens to arrive, they would embrace. And they were asked like so: **chadhe aayo ahin ke taane; pani pisho, dyan aane** (means have come riding camel or pulling it? Would you like some water, shall I bring?). They would also take care of the camel of the guest.

Then, the guests were offered water or water and light snack. They would be offered betelnuts, cigarettes etc. One room of the house which was called ‘otak’ whose one door faced street and the other faced inwards would be used for the guests. With this kind of system, women of home would be able to maintain their privacy/decorum. In otak and outside, 2-3 weaved cots were usually kept. People from town would come to visit the guest at evening/night. They would exchange news and whereabouts. Those who smoked hukkah would take turns. Opium would also be mixed and would be shared on palms.

In meals, if there are some sweets they were offered, else quickly something sweet was cooked. Sometimes, *tikli*, ghee and sugar were offered. They would share the same plate with guest at meal and would insist on offering food to the guest. If the guest talks about leaving, they would insist on them to stay 2-4 days more.

If someone had to go to a city, they would prefer to stay with some relative or at a community lodge. Generally, they would not stay with other people from community. If the visited a town or village, and if there is no relative, they would prefer to stay with the community leader in the town.

When it was time for guests to leave, they would offer some food to take and would also accompany them to some distance.

# Chapter 14

## Rihan

When there is a happy occasion in one's home, such as birth of a boy, boy's engagement or marriage, passing away of an elderly person, *Akhatreej* festival etc. Maheshwaris would organize *Rihan* (a party). Maheshwaris used opium freely during rihans. Fennelseeds, betelnuts, sugar, cigarettes were offered alongside. There were some people specialized in cutting betelnuts with betelnut cutter. Betel nut cutters from Kutch and Jamanagar's brass cutters were popular. Special care was taken that no one is missed in the Rihan and if so they would be fetched from their home with an invitation.

In preparations of Rihan, small and large carpets made of cotton, wool, etc were spread out in the Ottak. They would bring large plate, water pot, bowls, cotton etc. Opium wrapped in muslin cloth was brought and was dissolved in some water. A thick paste resulted which was called *kasumbo*.

Then, if it was a Monday, then, some cotton was wrapped in a match-stick, it was held up in a corner and some kasumbo was offered as a token to Lord Shiva. On other days, some kasumbo was sprinkled with index finger.

Kasumbo was taken from the bowl into a cotton plug and was squeezed on palm and the first one was offered to holymen after saying **pehli hathadi guran ri**. After this, it was offered to other people participating in the rihan. After some friendly negotiations, some one would accept it in their palm and would sip it taking palm to mouth. This way, after sipping 3-5 palms of kasumbo, he would drink water followed by some sugar. This was called **Thungo**. The first person would offer the kasumbo to next person in his palm. Similarly, sometimes it was offered from palm to palm. Sometimes people would engage in extended friendly arguments over who should have the kasumbo first and how it is too much for them.

Following is an imaginary dialog in dhatki (with approximate translation in English)

between people involved in such an extended friendly argument:

\* **hey seth hathali dyo -**

(now sir give me your palm -)

- **ae to jado galgalto amal ahe, kihnk thoro karo**

(this is very strong extract of opium, do a bit less)

\* **iye mi ki thoro karan mi age thoro ghaty ahe**

(how can I do less in this, it is less already)

- **hu age gharaun le aayo haan**

(I already had some at home)

\* **mataji ro soon, he na mu kaho**

(god swear, now please do not say no)

- **mana maran puthya thay aho ki seth**

(do you want to kill me or what sir)

\* **marin avhanja dusman, mahnjo hath pachho varso ki**

(may your enemies be killed, don't return my hand)

- **beli mahnjo kink kahyo karo, ito sahe ma dyo**

(pray sir please listen to me, not this much)

\* **avhin ito age pya lyo ta. he sanchai kaho ta ka jane**

(you always take this much, now tell the truth)

- **hu avhahun dikro thyan jo piyan to**

(I be your son if I take so much)

\* **avhana na piyala to hu avhahu dikro thyan**

(I be your son if I do not let you take this much)

When things go too far that it becomes the question of one's honor, someone will interfere and will give their palm to both parties. This kind of friendly insistence is called **manohaar**. If someone returns someone's palm, it was considered an insult.

People who are addicted to opium will only have it with other people to get best effect (get high). Such addicts would carry a small balance, and weights such as silver coins and seeds and would take opium in specific weights. Some addicts would take as much as 5g in one sitting.

In 1932, *Sheth Shri* Tulsidas Karamchand Akhani wrote the following mantra in

order to send a message to the society to get rid of the bad habits of opium consumption:

**have karvi chhe amal ni vaat,**

(now talk about opium)

**rupiya lutave roj na saat.**

(which causes loss of 7 rupees everyday)

Meaning at the rate of about six annas per 10g, about 180 grams of opium was used which used to cost Rupees 7 in those days which was considered to be a big amount. At the time of this writing the cost of opium would be more than 1000 Rupees per 10g.

Cities had licensed shops which used to sell opium.

When the rihan ended, and people started to leave, the host would honorably recognize this by saying "sheth, uthiyo ta".

### **"Dhati Dhoru"**

Here is a story of how self-respecting the Maheshwaris were in those days:

Some Dhati Maheshwari was going towards Jaiselmer to sell ghee loaded on top of camels. On the way near a *dhora*, he saw a huge container to cook. He stopped by and curiously asked about it. The local Maheshwaris taunted him saying would he be doing a party for the community or what? On hearing this, he took permission of the local community, unloaded all the ghee from the back of the camels, cooked sweets in the container and offered a party to the local community. Because of this event, the dhora was named as "Dhati Dhoru".

## Chapter 15

# Transportation

There were large dunes in the arid land of Thar. Plain area between two such dunes was called **dohar** which was suitable for human settlement. Small villages would form in these places and wells were dug, lakes were made and agriculture would also start.

The dunes were from North-East to South-West with the west side of them being very steep. Such dunes were usually 500-600 feet higher than the land level. It was hard to climb them straight so people and animal would climb in a slant over these dunes. Because of fine sand, often the feet would get buried under them or the sand would slip from under the feet.

Thar's Mithi, Diplo, and Chhachhro towns had dunes while the Nagar-Parker area was hilly. The Karunjhar hill located in the area was 1000 feet high and it covered an area of about 20 miles. Nagar-Parker was in the valley of this hill.

Naukot, Kunri, NewChhod, Umarkot etc. had plain land. They received water from Sindhu river canals which resulted in good agriculture. The area had roads and railway lines.

In the area with dunes where no wheeled vehicle could go, all transportation would be with camels and horses. To go from one town to other, if the distance is 30-40 miles, one would need to stay overnight for a few hours. To carry water on the way, leather **deeli** (sandari) or brass with cloth covered pot called **baadlo** were used. To eat, wheat *tikli* was taken from home.

To go from Mithi to Naukot (where there was a railway station), one had to rest at the Vijutra village. Similarly, Jhangro was between Mithi and Nagar-Parker, Kantyo between Chhachhro and Kunri, Dahli was between Gadhado and Nagar-Parker in addition to other villages.

People not habitual with traveling on camelback would find even the short, few

hours journey troublesome. In order to ride camel, a **pakhdo** would put on its back, sheets were spread and **Gaasiyo** was made over which two people could sit back and front. The person in the front would control the camel with the help of a rein (**mohar**). **Pagoda** were used to support legs.

It used to be scary to new person when the camel would rise or sit. Additionally, the thighs would start hurting in a few hours of journey. However, thankfully, when the person would rest in the sandy dunes for a short while, such pain would quickly go away and would become fresh.

In such a system of camel back travelling, the most difficult part was to move someone sick to hospital. For this purpose, a tool called **kajao** was used on which a patient would be able to sleep.

There were no streets or roads in Thar with a straight line or equal width. The only streets were the ones formed by the feet of horses and camels. These kinds of ways were used which were called **vadho** or **gus** or **Dhadu**.

Businessmen would load their mercantile in **khadiaz** which were then mounted atop a camel's back. If the mercantile was grains, sugar, or ghee they would use special type of bags called **taakiya**. Sometimes things like iron girder, almirah etc. would also be carried atop a camel's back.

Thar had a new railway line in year 1900 which was called "Jodhpur-Bikaner Railway". This name was changed on 1-11-1924 to "Jodhpur Railway". Maheshwari towns such as New Chhod, Gadhado, Lilmo were some of the stations on this line. People from Mithi, Chhachhro, Chelhar, Kantlyo etc. towns would catch train from Naukot or Kunri station.

Railway had first, second, intermediate and third class compartments. People would travel in third class. Job class people would get intermediate class tickets. Many Thari people had never seen a train in their lifetime.



# Chapter 16

## Fairs

We humans seek time out of our routine to activities that will give us pleasure and help us forget our sorrows and tiredness. In addition to daily such activities, society has organized annual festivities and fairs that we can enjoy in our leisurely time. Fairs are organized on religious and social festivals and reflect society's culture and traditions. One forgets themselves and gets enjoyment for a while.

Many fairs were organized in Thar and people—men, women and children would enjoy irrespective of caste-community or creed. Some such fairs are described below which were particularly organized around the towns where Maheshwaris lived:

(1) On the *otta* (outside of house) of Hardas Bhagat in the eastern Mithi a fair is organized over the dune. This fair is organized on **Bhadarva**, **sud** second day and participated by many people from towns all around. Earlier this was a one-day fair which became a 3-day fair after the partition.

A Pushkarna Brahmin named Hardas lived in Chhachhro. In the year 1781, one night, he saw in dream that some kind of catastrophe is going to befall upon the town of Chhachhro. There will be riots and bloodbath. Next day he told about his dream to people of the town and mentioned that he is planning to leave the town. Anyone is free to join him in this exodus. With Hardas Bhagat, Maheshwari community's leader Mukhi Malji Mansukhani (Rathi)'s ancestor moved to Mithi with family. Soon the predicted catastrophe happened. Madadkhan Pathan attacked and badly wrecked Chhachhro.

Hardas Bhagat was a saint. A fifth generation of his brother Asandas, Roopchand lives in Khithal in Alwar district of Rajasthan. Descendents of Rupchand's uncle Farasram, Harishkumar and brothers live in Palanpur and Kadi in Gujarat. As per tradition, the fair is organized in Palanpur and Mithi.

Malji Mansukhani's descendents are living in Mithi, Palanpur, Vadgam, Bhuj and

Ahmedabad.

(2) Six miles south of Chelhar near the way to Mithi a fair is organized in the town of Harehar in honor of goddess Malhan Mata. The fair is organized on the 7th day of *Magh sud*. As per the anecdote:

Bundi's Hada lineage king got married to a Rajput Malhan woman. Afterwards, a holyman informed them that their ancestry belongs to the eighth century Chauhans which is also the origin of the Hada lineage. Thus, both husband and wife belong to the same ancestry. King thus renounced the queen and decided to repent the mistake. The lady became a sati and Rajputs worship her as a goddess till date. Everyone from the nearby village come to attend this fair.

(3) Four miles from Kantyo town on the way to Chhachhro and Umarkot on the second day of *Bhadarva sud* Chandopeer's fair is organized. A platform is built their and people have immense faith in the peer. In addition to nearby towns, Maheshwaris also visit from Chelhar and Chhachhro.

(4) There is a memorial (a place where someone has meditated unto death) of *dada* Parbrahm near the Verizap town of Diplo district. There a fair is organized between the 10th and full moon day of *Jeth sud* month. The fair is organized in the night under moonshine. There is a *khabad* tree half a kilometer from the memorial. A flame is seen in the tree once or twice during the fair. Dada Parbrahm meditated against the ongoing tyranny on the orders of a Saint from Kutch named Mekandada. Mekandada was a saint from the times of guru Gorakhnath. Dada Parbrahm went on a pilgrimage to the goddess Hinglaaj and brought a trident which he set up near his meditation place. During the fair, beleivers come from all over the place with token tridents and erect them in place.

(5) Saint supreme Nenuram Saaheb's Ashram and his resting place is located about 28 miles from Mithi in the town of Islamkot. A fair is organized their on the second and third day of *Bhadarva sud*. Nenuram was born in the household of Meghuram and Meghabai in the year 1898. At the age of 9 he adapted a path of sainthood. Kuniram was his guru. Nenuram was a yogi, knowledgeable, celibate and saint. He campaigned for knowledge and devotion. Cold water and warm food is always available at his Ashram. Thousands of people and animals were blessed with food and water from the Ashram during a drought. He passed away on 15th September 1973.

(6) Two Miles East of the Chhachhro town, there is a village called Radli where Ramgerdada's fair is organized on the 7th day of *Magh sud*. Many people living around participate in this fair. Camels and horse races are organized. A lot of sweet is sold in 3-4 hours during the fair.

(7) There is a Shiwa temple near Khorad village near Umarkot. A fair is organized

on Shivratri. People from surrounding villages and from Maheshwaris from New Chhod come to participate.

(8) A fair is organized around Mukhi Tarachand's Shiwala (a small Shiwa temple) in Mithi.

(9) A fair is organized around the Saradhra's Shiwa temple in Karunjhar hills near Nagar Parkar. Many people participate in this fair from far away. The route to the fair venue is hard to travel.

(10) Peer Pithoro's fair is organized near the Pithoro railway station on *Chaitra* new moon day. Peer Pithoro appeared on a horse for the protection of religion. He disappeared in the place where there is a memorial. Thousands of pilgrims from different communities participate. Maheshwaris also participate with great faith.

(11) **Goddess Hinglaaj:** The beautiful and splendid place of this goddess is 200 KM from Karachi, over the Kech Makran mountains and across the Hingol (Aghor) river. It is located in a cave 300 feet high in the mountains. Journey is hard without some familiar person. From Karachi, one can go via Hub, Othal and Bela. Many saints such as Shri Ramchandra, Guru Gorakhnath, Oghadnath and others have visited with great faith. The fair is organized on 3-4 April. The place is very ancient.

# Chapter 17

## Seasons and Production

Thar had three seasons–Winter, Summer and Monsoon.

Because Thar is a sandy and arid land, the sand heats and cools down fast. Dunes would be cold in winters. December-January were very cold (**si pade**). Since there was no sea nearby no sea effect was seen in Thar’s climate. People would wrap **loi**, **khatha** and **kambal** to protect themselves from cold. A brazier would be lit in home every morning and evening where family would gather to get some heat. Improptu bonfires would be held in villages. People would work less in winters. If it is too much of cold people would say “**ruth pe to**”.

Season would change after the Holi festival. Summers would start. Summers are very strong in Thar. Earth heats up a lot. Body would sweat a lot. In the day time, sun shines hot and hot winds blow with small grains of sand. People would get sick of these winds which are called **loo**. However, nights were relatively cool. In summer all the greenery would fry away from the dunes and in the valleys and the area would look very desolate. Lakes and stepwells would dry up. Waters would go deeper in wells.

As the summer progresses, the heat would increase. May-June were very difficult to pass. Clouds would form and people would eagerly wait for rains. It was believed that rain will fall when clouds move from North-South. Everyone would look towards the skies. Initial raindrops would be absorbed by the sandy land which was called **rej**. If rain has fallen somewhere from where the cool breeze is blowing, it was known as **vuthe-ro-va**. Wet sand fragrance would spread around.

Thari people were wholly dependent on rains. There was a saying as: “**Vutho to Thar, na to bur**” meaning if it rains, Thar is worth living otherwise it is a desert. Rains would bring nature’s blessings. Dunes and land would have a green cover. Lakes, small and big would overflow with fresh waters. People and cattle would get

a new life. Leaves would get fresh and green.

Thar would get relatively less Monsoon rains. On average, it would be 10 to 12 inches of rain per season. Monsoon would last between 15th June and 15th September. Every third or fourth year would be dreaded as a drought year. People would get happy even on a small amount of rain. Experienced people would look into calendars and other circumstances and based on ancient knowhow, would tell when will the rain arrive.

If the lightning happened from the North-East corner, rain would certainly happen, they said. It was a saying: “**khivan khivi ishani, nodi ghare visani**” (khivan means lightning and ishani is the name of direction North-East). If there is too much of lightning, it was called **bakrar**. Rains without thunder and lightning was called **gungo meh** (gungo means mute). If it rains with sun out, it was called **ughado meh**. At this time colorful rainbow (**dangalo**) was seen in the sky. If there are rain clouds for too many days without sunlight, then it was said:

**tod pinchha, kar tara; si ta mari, garib vichara**

Meaning, “ohh god please remove the clouds and show stars, because poor people are dying of cold”.

If it rains heavily, it was called **soker pai**. Flooding was feared with too much rains. Such rains happened in the years 1913, 1927, and 1929. During the heavy rains of the year 1927, people went to live on dunes or tents because their homes were damaged by rain. It is remembered as **chorasiye-ro-meh** (chorasi means 84) because the year in local calendar was 1984. Too much rain fell in the year 1874 in Sindh because of which there was flooding in the Nara river. Maheshwaris who lived in Nabisar and Umarkot were affected by these floods and shifted to places with higher elevation such as Mithi, Chhachhro, and Kantyo. If there is incessant rains and not stop for days, people would fill small ghee spoons with rain water in an attempt/ritual to pray for rain to stop. When rains stop, it was called **meh okajyo**.

There were often droughts in Thar. One such drought was in the local calendar year 1942 (AD. 1885). Another big drought happened in the year 1956 (AD 1899). This drought is known as **chhappaniya dukal**. It is heard that people would sell off their children for a handful of grains. One drought of 1996 (AD 1939) is known as **Chhannuana dukal**. In such small and big draughts lakes would dry up and waters deepen in the wells. Cattle would die without grass and water. People would go to Sindh for labor work. Poor people would use leaves and dries, crushed bark of tree because of a shortage of foodgrains.

In the monsoon season, Thar's fields would bear pearl millet, sesame, moong, sorghum, beans, castor etc. This produce would grow in abundant and businessmen

would store this in roomful of their homes.

Other than these, different kinds of melons and gourds would grow aplenty. Additionally, where well water is available, other vegetables such as spinach, radish, eggplant, carrot, etc were also grown in small quantities. (More details are available in the 'food' section.) There were no parks or gardens in Thar. There were some gardens in Umarkot. There, fruits like Mango, Pomegrenate, Lemon, Banana, berries, grapes were grown. They had the benefit of plain land and water from Sindhu river.

Many Maheshwaris owned fields in the nearby villages which were given to *Bheels-Kolis* for cultivation. At the time of harvest, sufficient grains and produce were kept for themselves and the rest was sold off.

Other seasonal fruits in Thar were berries, **pipa**, **kundhir**, **tagra**, **Ghangheta**, **pakka**, **Khokha**, **fogesi**, **ratabor**, and **sangri**. These kinds of fruits were brought by children who were out playing or wandering people who would exchange them for some foodgrains or buttermilk.

Some fruits such as Apples, Banana, fresh Dates, dried berries, sugar-cane etc were brought from Sindh. Green and ripe Mangoes were also available. In dried fruits, Cashew, Almonds, Resins, Pistachios and **neja** nuts were available. Only some higher class people would be able to afford such dried fruits. Among fresh vegetables from Sindh, sometimes cabbage, cauliflower and okra would also be brought. Average person would rarely consume them.

In earlier days rice-paddy was brought from Sindh and it was crushed in a special Mill to produce rice. This rice was red in color. This was crushed in a mill and the powder or paste was given to cattles as fodder. White rice was used in *khichdi* and red rice, being sweet was used in making *roti*. Wheat was not produced in Thar and was brought from Sindh.

Sugar was imported from Java-Sumatra. The sugar was brownish in color. This kind of sugar was called **daboto** or **bachcha** sugar. During the world war II around the years 1939-40 the sugar stopped coming and the government decided to distribute Indian sugar made in the mills on rationing basis. Jaggery would come from Sindh. Jaggery was used more than sugar.

# Chapter 18

## Animals and Insects

Cow, buffalo, goat, sheep, camel, horse etc. were the main domesticated animals in Thar. There were stray cats, dogs and donkeys. Every Maheshwari family had at least one milk yielding animal. Some families had 2-3 cows whereas higher status families had cows and buffaloes yielding milk. Maheshwaris did not own goats.

There wasn't much of forest but still there were rabbits, foxes, bears, hyena etc. There were no large cats.

A very few people owned camels and horses for transportation. Camels were available on rent as and when required. Pushkarna Brahmins would rent out camels. Additionally people from Meghwal, Bheel and Koli communities also rent out camels.

Thar towns had more cows than buffaloes. When cows are in milk yielding phase, household's women would milk them or else in some cases, they would hire a cowboy **dhanar** for milking their cows. They would tie a special rope in hind legs before milking. First they would let a calf drink milk to let cow happy and yield more milk. The udders were washed and then milked in a metal pot. After milking two teets were left for the calf and when the calf becomes one month old, one teet was left. Female calf was fed more milk compared to male calf.

Cows and buffaloes were fed wet beans. Also pearl millet hay was given. Buffaloes were fed cotton plant remains. Pieces of straw were also fed. Water was given daily in summer and every other day or third day otherwise. The cattle were taken to the well where there was a place for them to drink water.

Cowbells were tied in the neck so that they do not destroy fields. If a cow is wandering a field the cowbell would ring and alert the owner of the field or the cowboy. If the owner of the field catches a wandering cow, he would tie it up and the cow owner would have to pay a government fine to get it back.

Cows and buffaloes were herded in a place by the cowboy for feeding in the wild. In

summers and winters cows would go alone to feed. In monsoon the cowboy would also go along. When the herd returns back in the evening, the owners would call them by name. The cows would return the call with their moo sound and would run towards the owner.

Cows were milked twice a day in Monsoon whereas just once in summers and winters. Cows stayed in a shed overnight. In monsoon, to help ward off germs and flies, smoke was made by burning dried grass or tree branches. Flies were ward off with cloth. Cows also moved their head and tail to ward off any germs, bugs and flies.

Oxes were used in agriculture. Maheshwaris would take oxes to Saurashtra and Kutch region of Gujarat to sell them. Every town had 1-2 or more stray oxes (they were called **allahiya dhaga** meaning nobody's or god's oxes). Such oxes were branded with a hot metal brand attached with a rod for identification. Every community and town had cattle branded with a distinct pattern so that they would be identifies quickly and easily. For this purpose, special types of cuts were also made in cattle ears.

There was not much theft of cattle. Specialized people would find the footmarks and would bring the lost cattle back. Livestock's diseases were cured with traditional methods by the owner themselves. There were no veterinary hospitals in Thar. Thar's camels were famous.

A leather smith would take away leather from dead animals and would use it to make shoes, containers for ghee, water bags etc.

## 18.1 Insects

In addition to animals, there were many small and big insects. In the sandy and hilly terrain, there were different kinds and species of such insects. There were many different kinds of snakes such as black headed **vaasing** snake, **lundi**, **khap**, **funkan** (**piyan** or **buchhdi** which would blow poisonous air). Two-headed **bodhi**, **bala** which lived under the soil. In winters they lived mostly under the soil and in summer many showed up outside. There was a saying as:

**“Vasant punchmi ra vaja vagiya, naag vichchu sahe jagiya”**

Legged venomous insects were scorpions, centipedes and **hunkhun** etc.

**dimbhu**, bees, mosquitoes, Wasps were some of the flying insects. If wasp or bee stings they would cause inflammation and swelling.

Other legged animals were Bengal monitor (useful for thieves), monitor, mongoose, cicadas, lizards, spiders, frogs, locusts, grasshoppers, bedbugs, ants (black and red),



termite, maggots (found in stale grains), moth, jatrophas (red insects found in rainy season), chancala etc were also found. These were non-venomous.

Insects seen in monsoon had a very short lifespan. Winged insects seen around lantern would die and a heap of wings were seen in the morning.

Holymen would chant mantras and sprinkle water in order to cure scorpion and snake bites. Snakes and scorpions would not come near fire. If snake has bitten, it was called **kakhjyo** or **kakh chhibyo ahe**.

Locusts would seen in July and August. A group of locusts were capable of eating up and destroy all the harvest of a field at a time. If they sit on a tree, it would go barren. Locust lay 108 eggs in soil which were called **teh** and **fakka** when they grow. When locust flies, the whole sky would get covered by them. If a plague of locust is moving in a particular direction, government people would warn the villages in that direction by telegrams. Government would run big campaigns to destroy locusts. Locusts were buried in land. Working officer would get a certificate and a prize. Some communities and Muslims would collect locusts in bags and would fry and eat them.

# Chapter 19

## Disease and Cure

In today's world cities and villages have polluted air and water, crowds and impure food, noise pollution which was unthinkable in the old days in Thar. With open villages and towns, clean air and water, food grown in own fields without any synthetic manure or fertilizers, food made of flour made in home mills, cow and buffalo's pure milk and milk products such as butter, curd, buttermilk, simple lifestyle and regular festivities kept busy men and women of Thar very healthy with minimum necessities.

Only the district headquarters had hospitals. There were rarely any hospitals in the small towns or villages. People would treat minor illnesses themselves with the home remedies. Home remedies included oil massage and oral medicines to eat dry or drinkable solutions. Household solutions would be used in most cases and no expensive medicines were used. Only in the cases of major diseases such as tuberculosis (T.B.) and typhoid were dreaded. Childbirth would happen at homes. Caesarian section procedure was unheard of. However, in some cases where the woman was too young, deaths related to childbirth occurred.

Influenza was seen in Thar in the year 1918 and it was spread all over. There were not many hospitals in Thar and people seldom took benefits of a hospital. Foreign medicines were dreaded. There were not enough savings to go to cities for treatment. This influenza would kill 5-7 people everyday in towns. The atmosphere was of dread throughout Thar. Thari people would call this disease “**loos**” and because of the year it happened, it was remembered as “**panchoter ri loos**”.

Now let us see how minor diseases were treated in those days:

**Constipation:** Senna powder and dried black resin were soaked in water overnight, which was warmed and an extract was given.

**perspiration/dizziness:** Salt water would induce vomit. Mint and fennel seeds

were given. **Gomaandar** powder was given.

**Cough:** Half cooked pearl millet flour roti was applied to chest and back. Salt, carom, or pearl millet was heated in a cloth bag and applied to chest or back.

**Cold and Fever:** Warm oil massage on head and forehead. Crown flower (*akdo*) leaves were strapped to head overnight. Hot jaggery soup was given in the morning.

**Flu:** Patient was sat, a whole cloth was wrapped over and water was sprinkled over a hot brick so that vapours would be produced. Patient would inhale these vapours. This process was called **bafaro**.

**Periodic Fever:** Maheshwaris would invite 4-7 people from similar ancestry as self and would discuss the fever.

**Pneumonia:** Hot ash from the stove was applied on chest. Soaked rice paste was wrapped/strapped along the chest.

**Sidkar:** If someone comes from outside with heat and sun and immediately drinks cold water, then sidkar would happen. This is why one should drink water after a short while. Sidkar would cause headache and uneasiness. A massage from an experienced person will also help. An experience person would put warm ash in patients hands between index finger and thumb, over temple, over chest and earlobes, over knees and shoulders and would say “**sidkar bhaje**”. This would help. This was similar to accupressure as practiced today.

**Black Cough:** A copper coin was tied along the neck. Milk obtained from donkey was given. A square of hair from head were removed and a cloth with medicine was applied. This was called **chatti**.

**Eye Pain:** **raswal** was applied. If the pain is severe, **chimed** seeds were crushed and fine yellow powder was applied to eyes which was called **bharan** nakhyo. Neem leaves were strapped over eyes. Soaked sand plates were made which were put on earthen pots for cooling. They were then applied over eyes so that the heat is absorbed.

**Red Eye:** Water was taken in a plate and then a cloth was dipped in oil and was burned. Patient would watch it. Oil drops would fall in the plate and the person who is helping would say, “**chop bhaje, chop bhaje**”.

**Leg Sprain:** Thick roti of wheat floor was cooked on one side and oil and turmeric was applied on the other side. This was strapped in place where the pain was maximum. This was called “**dagad badho**”.

**Pain:** Massage with sesame seed oil. Warmed castor leaves were tied.

**Boils:** Patient would bathe in hot water with neem leaves. Buttermilk was added to a copper vessel and would be rubbed with a copper coin. The produced rusty

paste was applied to the boil area. If the boil is big and without a mouth then berry leaves were crushed and applied. Coal and dried bedellium (gugal) would rubbed over the boil so that it bursts releasing pus.

**Throat Pain:** On eating sweet and sour food together sometimes pain occurs in the sides of the neck with small marble like growth. This was treated with massage, hot packs and hot saline water gargles.

**Throat Discomfort:** Throat discomfort because of cold weather. Can get as worse as making it difficult to swallow water. Hot salted water gargles helped.

**Lower Back Pain:** Pain in lower back because of heavy lifting. Massage and leg massage by a boy born with breech birth was done.

**Hepatitis/Yellow Fever:** Mantra treated water was given and mantras were chanted around the patient. Dried chickpeas and buttermilk was given.

**Skin Disease:** Hot ash was rubbed over body and thick blanket was wrapped.

**Nosebleed:** Cold water was sprinkled over head and rested. Cotton plugs used in nose.

**Wound:** Turmeric was used. If wound is small urine was used.

**Ear Infection:** Child's urine was used. Fresh neem leaves and oil was poured in the infected ear.

**Mumps:** Spices and flour was mixed and a paste was made which was then applied over cheeks.

**Legs Pain/Arthritis:** Legs would be inserted in hot sand.

**Asthama:** Opium cigarettes were smoked.

**Muscle Sprain/Nerve Pinch:** Pain around spine in upper back was treated by pressing with thumb and applying oil massage.

**Spine disorder in children:** Because of accidental handling children may get this disorder where they would vomit and the growth will be stunted. This was called "satt pai". This was treated by massaging over the spine.

**Seizures:** Patient would be laid down on their stomach and the back would be gently kicked. Seizure would be tied. Oil applied over stomach.

**Panic:** Sudden panic was treated by pouring cold water over eating dog to transfer panic to dog.

**najar:** Salt was moved around and over the head of the person who is believed to be a victim of najar. This salt was then put on a three-way junction or into a stove. The person doing this would not speak anything. This was called "**najar utari**". Sometimes some people were considered with a bad eye/najar. Then, a little bit

of sand was taken from the left heel of their footstep and was taken over the najar victim.

**Tummy Ache:** If tummy ache occurs every time someone eats then special person would do a massage and mantras were chanted.

**Pox:** During a pox (small or chicken) the room where a patient is resting would be tied with neem leaves at the door. After the pox infection becomes mild, on the next Tuesday, the person would be taken to the temple of Goddess Sheetala and worship was done. The patient would ride over donkey back to temple. The patient was given previous day's stale food. This disease happened once in one's lifetime.

In addition to these, **chor tup** (a kind of fever which occurred during night only), **aanjni**, **Chhapako** (blemishes and spots over face and body), tonsils, teething of children, **kachchoradi**, **rain jhhai**, **miriyo**, **petejari**, poked eye, etc diseases were also common and they had household treatments. There were no hospitals, diseases were present but people were generally contented.

When patients went to hospital and get medicines in bottles, they would tell compounder to add some salt in the medicine like so: "Uttama (name of compounder), jara dawa mi salat (salt) nankhe". The compounder would lovingly say "yes" whether he really adds or not. This loving behavior often caused half the disease to go away.

If the disease is serious or major then the patient would be taken to Mirpur-Khas or Jodhpur hospitals. They would not go to Hyderabad or Karachi.

Scorpion or snakebite will be treated by holymen with mantras. The *funkan* animal would blow venomous air in victim's mouth and would hit the victim with its tail. This kind of victims were given piece of alum to chew on.

People would assume holy restrictions in order to get rid of diseases. They would wish for some token offering at the temple if the disease goes away. Once the disease is gone, they would donate money and food. They would offer food to cow, dogs and crows. They would offer grains to birds and invite married daughters for meals. Holy men were given clothes, grains etc.

# Chapter 20

## Sports

Just as festivals, celebrations, fairs and plays provide us with entertainment value, sports play an important role in providing pleasure and relaxation. A brief description of games and sports played in Thar are as follows:

### 20.1 Children

(1) **Ingni Mingni:** 4-5 children would sit with inverted palms. A monitor would chant as per below and would touch his/her finger on each of the inverted palms on each letter.

**“ingni-mingni-ganthiya-gora-heeng-bahida-kirsan-kaka-lahe-gopala-chhinu-chhod-nakha-dor-itak-mitak-karnara-pura-chhutak”**

The palm that is touched by the finger at the time of speaking **chhutak** would open the palm. The chant begins again. If the finger comes on an open palm the child would take the palm behind to hide it. Then the monitor would ask question about whereabouts of the hand. The child would answer and bring the palm to the front and show it.

(2) **Champeta:** This game was played with five small stones, usually by little girls. The stones are called *panchika*. They would hold the panchika in their palm and would toss it up and catch them. Then she would put one or more panchikas on floor and toss the rest again. She would quickly pick the one or more from the ground while others are still in air. Then she would quickly catch the ones in the air as well. They toss panchika and catch it with inverted palm and toss again and catch it with open palm. In a next round they would toss panchika up and touch some part of body and quickly catch them in palm. Alongside they would chant as follows:

“ ikda/bida/munga/eka/jintha/hado/hundi/dhakni/doiyo/apura-sapura/saleba-choba/hek wari/biji-wari/teeji-wari/chothi wari/pahelka karira katora/bijka karira katora/teej ka karira katora/choth ka karira katora/pehlak bethi/bijak choki/tijak ubharlo/chothak pirlo/panchak khurkhuriyo khaja/dahik dabadko/khilo khaja/giriyo godo/khadiya/rayak bethi rambhlo/thak bethi thambhlo/isarya visarya/gerni/ekam/bijak/tijak/chothak/panchak ”

(3) **Dolls (Gudda-Guddi)**: children would make colorful dolls from the rags from old or unused clothes taken from parents. They used rosary peas (chanothi) for eyes. Dolls were decorated with different household items. Dollhouse was also made and dolls were married.

(4) **Skipping**: Girls were fond of skipping rope. A girl alone will hold the rope and skip. Alternatively, two girls would hold the rope from either side and a third girl would skip.

(5) **Jhurdiya**: Mango seeds were drilled and tied with threads such that both ends of the thread could be held in either hands and the seed would rotate in between. Young boys loved to play this.

## 20.2 Boys

(1) **Marbles**: 4-6 boys would hold a marble each and make a horizontal line and throw the marble. The one whose marble goes most further would get a first shot. He would aim and try to hit other marbles and so on. Marbles games were played in winters.

(2) **Top**: 2-3 boys each tie their tops with rope and throw on the ground or catch in the palm or even over the nail of thumb. Alternatively, they throw it over on the ground in a small circle.

(3) **Hide and Seek**: All will hide and one will try to find them. The first person found would take turn finding others. This game was also called thief-police.

**Moi-Dandia**: One player would dig a small slit on ground and put the *moi* horizontally and toss it by putting a larger stick underneath. 4-5 players standing in front would try to catch it. If it falls down, the first player would try and hit it by lifting it up with stick. The game will progress by next person's turn. Then, the moi would be hit by placing it on fingers, eyes, elbows, or legs. Then a measurement is taken as to how far did the moi went. In another version, moi would be tossed and caught with the stick. This was called **ilo-bilo**. Based on which part of the body the moi is placed, the shot was named after, eg. **muth** (on fist), **chhalo** (vertical fist), **kalkatto** (two fingers), **thunth** elbow, **godo** (knee), **pug** (leg), **ankh** (eye).

**Kabaddi:** Two team stand opposite to each other in a court. One person from a team would come running in the other team's court while chanting 'kabaddi-kabaddi'. If he comes back after touching any number of persons and without stopping to breathe those persons are out. If the persons can hold him and he runs out of breathe then he is out.

**Aatapata:** Large boxes are drawn over ground with stick. Two teams would be made. One person would take turn to be **vanjhi**. This person can go to any of the lines and if he gets caught, he is considered out.

**Seven stones (satolia):** Seven stones are stacked. Two teams are formed and each team stands on either side of the stack. One person from a team takes turn and tried to break the stack with a ball. If the stack is broken the team belonging to that person have to quickly restack the stones before the ball could hit them. If the stack is not broken by the throw, someone from the other team will take turn to break the stack. Meanwhile, if while restacking the stones, if someone hits the person with ball, the team is lost.

**Bhatabhati:** Hitting each other with a soft ball. Whoever has the ball will hit any person around.

**Wrestling (Mull):** Two man would remove their shirt, fold the dhoti and try to fell each other with heels while wrestling. This felling was called **malh vidhan**. The fallen person is considered lost. People from faraway who are expert in the game would visit Thar's villages and towns and would practice the game. These matches were called "**malakhdo**".

## 20.3 Indoor

### 20.3.1 Sea shell Games

1. Women would play this during festivities. Big shells were called **dayla**. Hot lead was poured in these daylas. Then the shells were held in the hand and would be thrown on ground. Depending on which shells have fell up or down, the scoring was done.
2. Shells were thrown in a circle on ground. Then they were carefully taken out. If a shell touches any other then the person is considered lost. The person who is able to get maximum shells out wins.
3. Four shells are thrown on ground. Then one down shell is used to hit another down/up shell. Points are scored per hit. No points if missed. All four up



would be considered eight points and all four down would be considered four points. If three are down then it is a void chance.

4. A small pit is dug in the ground and shells are thrown over it. Those that fall inside the pit are considered to be won by the thrower. This game was also played with money.

### 20.3.2 Card Games

In card games, young children would play stack, chance, etc. Adults would play games such as coat, 2-3-5, choice, etc. People would also play gambling such as poker and would lose or win money. Women would specially play money with cards during festivities.

Free people would play in the summer afternoons or winter evenings/nights.

### 20.3.3 Other Games

**Lion-Goat:** This game was played by young boys. There were seven pieces considered as goats and two pieces considered lions. They were arranged in a triangular shaped board with many points along the lines of the triangle. If the lions could skip over goats, the goat is considered died. If the lion do not have a place to skip or the goat is not in any of the surrounding points to lion then lion is considered lost. If lion can skip all goats, then lion is considered won.

**Nine Corners:** Two squares were drawn inside a larger square and some lines were drawn. Each person would have nine pieces to start with. Each person would take a turn and place their pieces one by one. If a persons pieces fall in a straight line the other person will give him his one piece. The game will continue until one person has exhausted with pieces.

**Chomal:** This game had 25 squares. 4 people would sit on each of the two sides. Each person would play with 4 pieces each. Each person would throw 4 shells to get a score and accordingly move their pieces in the game. If someone gets over other's piece, the piece is considered lost, and has to return to the starting point. The game progresses until all pieces reach the center of the board.

**Chopat:** The board was drawn by making boxes over a cloth. Four people would play with 16 tokens. The moves are obtained by throwing two special dices made up of ivory. The dice had 1,2,5, and 6 points painted over it. The token would move as many points obtained by the dices. In the end, the tokens would go on to the central box. This game would also be played with shells in place of dices.

## 20.4 Games at School

Students would play cricket, football, volleyball in high schools. Teachers and government employees would play tennis. Matches between schools were organized.

In Mithi, in 1964, after the arrival of R.S.S, chess and carom board games were also started. These games were played by the R.S.S. volunteers. They would also teach stick/baton games.

# Chapter 21

## Superstitions and Untouchability

### 21.1 Superstitions

Rural people believed in many superstitions. They would always look for auspicious time before going anywhere. If someone has fallen ill, they would immediately think about some superstitious cause. Maheshwaris were also influenced by this.

If someone sneezes or if a cat crosses over, it was considered as a bad omen. Man's right and woman's left eye twitch indicated something good is going to happen. If the other eye twitched, then it was considered a bad omen. If there is an itch on right palm, it was considered an omen to gain money. If a footwear gets over other, it was considered an omen for travel.

If new clothes are stitched then they were not wore on a Tuesday. On other days, they were first put on a water pot before wearing. Shaving could not be done on a Tuesday or a Saturday. Clipped nails had to be wrapped in a paper before throwing away. If a boy grind teeth in sleep then it is good but bad if it is a girl. Shewing one's fingernails was bad omen.

Some men-women were considered to have an evil eye and if they see something or someone then it was considered that they have cast an evil eye. If such a person passes from nearby then some sand from their footprint's left heel was taken and was ritually revolved around the head of a child though to have affected by evil eye.

If a child is sick then some salt was ritually rotated seven times around his head and thrown away near crossroads or in the stove. During this ritual the person doing this must remain silent.

After readying child with bathing and dressing, a black dot with the **kajal** was put over the forehead so as to protect it from an evil eye. A child was not kept in open

during the dusk because it was believed that some evil beings are passing through the skies at that time. That evil being, called **uparli** would cause the child to grow weak. This was called the child being shadowed.

In the afternoon, during the dusk and on the day of **kaali chaudash**, young woman would not go outside. This is because evil beings can control her at this time. If this is suspect then a wheat roti with oil is made and put at a road fork. Some rituals would also be done by holymen.

If a child is suffering from whooping cough then a coin from someone's **vaikunthi** procession was tied in the child's neck.

If someone's children are dying frequently, then they would loan clothes from others for their newly born and would name them some unpleasant names such as **luno**, **mirchu**, **bhugdo**, etc.

If a donkey hee-haws in street or a dog is howling in the night, it was a bad omen.

If a crow is cawing on roof top, some guests would be arriving.

In monsoons, if there is no rains and if a sparrow is wallowing in sand then it will rain soon.

In small diseases, Brahmins, Muslim holymen, etc would be approached for threads, lockets, water with mantras etc.

If a boy child had died and another boy is born then his nose was pierced. If a boy child is born after three girls, he was called **tipokar** and a special ritual was done.

If traveling, only some days of the week were considered auspicious to go towards particular directions. If one wants to go to other directions, the special ritual were done with honey, betel nuts, money etc put at some distance in that direction the previous day. Married daughter would never go to her in-law's place on a Wednesday. It was said that "*budh beti, kadi na bheti*", meaning "a daughter let go on Wednesday would never meet again".

Presence of a widow was considered inauspicious during a wedding or other auspicious occasion. If someone is going to another town for some important business, and if he meets a cow, a girl or a woman with pots full of water, it was considered to be a good omen.

Home was not swept after someone has left home or during dusk. No monetary transactions were done during dusk. Newborn boy's sixth day ceremony was not done on a Wednesday. If someone has passed away, people would not go on a Wednesday or a Sunday for the first time.

If someone has inadvertently caused the death of a cat, he had to make a golden token cat and donate it at the Narayan Sarovar temple. If someone is sleeping no

one would step over him/her.

If something is lost or someone is anticipated to come back from other place, then special ritual with lines and numbers was done to speculate. If a single line appears in the end then a favorable outcome was speculated and unfavorable if a double line appears in the end.

Maheshwaris too believed in many such superstitions. Women folks would believe more than the men folks.

## **21.2 Untouchability**

There are four main castes in Hinduism. Out of these, Shudras were considered the lowest caste. Other caste people would stay away from Shudras. They would be careful not to touch them or won't let their shadow fall on them.

In Thar, if Maheshwaris and/or Brahmins would touch people from communities such as Meghwal, Bhil, Koli, Bajir, Bhungi etc. then they would go home and take bath or dip some gold in water and sprinkle it on themselves.

If a Maheshwari invites someone from non-vegetarian community such as Luhana, Muslim, Khatri, etc, then the meal was served in silver or ceramic vessels. Silver was considered unaffected by anybody's touch. If brass vessel was used then it was washed with hot charcoals.

If someone from other community is to be given water, the vessel was held by the host and he would pour the water over other person's palm and the other person would drink it from the palm. The vessel was kept at a height so that there is no droplet touching the vessel. If buttermilk is offered, it was poured in the receiver's vessel from a distance above.

If someone has touched a bone by mistake, they had to take a shower or had to sprinkle gold dipped water.

After cremation, the participating person had to take bath without removing clothes.

A woman in her menstrual period could not touch anyone in the household. She could not touch anything in the kitchen and anything related to water. After two days, she would wash her head following which she could work in the kitchen.

## Chapter 22

### Bhat, Choba, Panda, Gor

Every community has special people who are responsible for record keeping of the community and hence maintaining its history over time and keeping its heritage safe and secure. Such communities are known as Charans, Bhats, Barots, Gadhvi, etc.

Such Bhats or Jaagas are described in the evolutionary tales of the Maheshwari community. These Bhats (aka Bhat Raja) live in Rajasthan. They record the family ancestry and history of Maheshwaris in their record keeping books. These books are written in unaccentuated (without any accents) Hindi language.

When Maheshwaris migrated from Marwar to Thar, at that time, Bhat rajas also migrated and depending on convenience and hosts, they also distributed families among themselves. The names and description of their last generation and towns they were in charge as of latest information is as shown in table ??

Bhats would visit Thar towns every 3-4 years and would stay in a *dharamshala*. Then he would visit each Maheshwari family and record any new births and demises in the family. What kind of rituals were done after the passed away person, eg. offered meals to **Mahajan-Maastaan**, organized vaikunthi, donations of cows and camels, organized *varghodo* in weddings etc. would be recorded. He would also sit all the family members together and read their ancestry and have meal with them. He would receive “**seekh**” from the family. This “seekh” would include cash money, golden ring or bud or other jewelry and some kind of cloth. Every family would give something appropriate to their financial reach and Bhat raja would gracefully accept. If someone has the occasion of boy child birth he would get some more.

Some Maheshwaris migrated to Kutchch from Marwar. Initially, some Bhats used to visit them but later, because of a difficult course to reach between the desert, they were not able to reach and many family’s details could not be recorded. Some Maheshwaris merged with the Jains of Kutchch and were called ‘dasa’ or ‘visa’.

Name of Bhat Raja and their brothers along with their town	Their Children	Which towns did they visit in Thar
Kaluramji, Narandas, Gangadhar. Town: Nandsha Jagir, district Bhilwada, Rajasthan.	Bhawarlal Kaluram, Chatrab-huj Bhawarlal	Umarkot, Veralo, Sundro, Nadlasar, Banra.
Devilalji. Town: Singapura, district Bhilwara, Rajasthan.	Bhavanishankar Devilal, Babulal Bhawanishankar, Madanlal Devilal, Girishkumar Madanlal, Bhagwatiprasad Devilal, Kalpeshkumar Bhagwatiprasad	Mithi, Bhorilo, Tando Al-lahyaar.
Mukundlalji	-	Lilmu, Parnom, Chelhar, Kan-tyo.
Jagannathji and Prabhulalji	-	Chhachhro, Bugul, Arabliyar.
Khubchand Ravji. Town: Jhandol, district Bhilwara, Rajasthan.	Amrutlalji	Chhod etc.

Table 22.1: Bhats and their details

However, they have maintained their ancestry. Apart from Kutchch, some Maheshwari families also live in Mumbai and Panvel but the contact with Bhat Raja is broken.

After the partition of India and Pakistan, Thar's Maheshwaris live in 350-400 towns and villages of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Bhats still visit and do record-keeping in towns where population is significant. After the partition, Bhats have also visited Pakistan's Thar area villages and towns with Passport-Visa.

In addition to Bhats, for pilgrimage related services of Maheshwaris, **Chobas/Pandas** lived in various pilgrimage places. These Chobas/Pandas still exist and their details are described as follows:

**Mathura:** Holy men serving in Mathura are called Choba. As soon as some pilgrim drops down at the station, 8-10 of them would surround and ask about their hometown, ancestry etc. After knowing the right Choba for their town, they will enable a contact with them. This Choba will help them find a place to stay and will take them along for sight seeing and to various temples of Gokul and Vrindavan. The visitor will offer them a suitable donation.

Earlier, one Mr. Rughnath Dasaram was the Choba. Now one Mr. Viththalnathji

Vinodkumar Chaturvedi is the Choba. They consider themselves as teerth purohit.

**Haridvar:** They are called Panda here. They also find the visitor and take them along. Especially, in Hridvar, people come on the eleventh day to do the ossification of their relatives who have passed away. After finishing the rituals and offering meals, Panda would receive some donation. If the host could not visit in person then the ossified remains would be sent by post-parcel. Alongside, some money as donation were also sent via Money order. Panda would do the rituals on behalf of the host.

Earlier Mahanand Baldev was the Panda. Nowadays, Makhan Chakhan is Maheshwaris Panda.

**Badrinath:** There are Pandas for rituals for the visiting pilgrims. They also have a separate Panda for Dharti people.

Currently, there is Pandit Dinanath Panchpuri. He stays in Badrinath, (district Garhwal) PIN 246422 between 10th May and 15th November. The temple at Badrinath remains open only in these days or the year otherwise the temple remains closed due to winter's cold. Other times the Panda live in Devprayag (district Garhwal) PIN 249301.

Such Chobas-Pandas would frequently visit Maheshwaris in Thar towns and get some donations. The hassling between these Chobas and Pandas at Mathura and Haridvar station often becomes a nuisance for the visitors.

**Shri Nathdwara:** Sometimes Shri Nathdwara's Gusain would also visit. They would drop down at Chhod or Naukot station. They would not travel over horse or camelback. Since there were no chariots in Thar at the time, people would carry them over their shoulders to take them from one town to other.

**Gor:** In Thar's towns where Maheshwaris lived, each town had a Gor serving a particular ancestry. Gors would do appropriate rituals during occasions such as birth, wedding and death. Maheshwaris Gor were Pushkarna Brahmins Vaus (3 ancestries), Chhangani (5 ancestries) and Paliwad - Dhamat (7 ancestries). People would consult with them for auspicious days for organizing various ceremonies as well as general enquiries about upcoming special days according to lunar calendar. They would also tell religious stories in a congregation.

Sometimes, other holymen would visit towns. Specially, sadhus with small pots. They would stand at the gate of homes and chant "**bhar de lota**" meaning "fill the pot". People would fill the pot with grains or flour. These sadhus were often called "bhugat wala" by the local folks.



### **“Definition of the word Maheshwari”**

We all Maheshwaris have born and evolved from the divine powers and special blessings by lord Shiwa. Every syllable of the Maheshwari word has its own special meaning. This meaning is still relevant in the modern systems and situations.

**Ma:** The first syllable of the word Maheshwari is an indicator for respect to self and others. We respect others and gain respect in return. In practice we receive what we give.

**He:** This syllable indicates to progress despite any situations. Meaning find convenience in the face of inconvenience and make progress. Get rid of the food and behavior which is understood to be harmful.

**Sh:** This syllable is a symbol of peace and coolness. Obtain the Shiwa element in peace and simplicity. If speech is sweet as sugar and behavior is clean then all will be assimilated well. Because of this quality, wherever we went, we became a part of their culture and systems.

**Wa:** This syllable indicates towards our main karma, that is business. We have obtained wealth with our hard work and perseverance in all kinds of adverse conditions. We have served our duties and helped in strengthening the economy of the country.

**Ri:** This syllable is the symbol of pure customs and policies. Our society is an ideal one with a rich culture. Because of a spirit of love, selflessness, unity and respect, while following one's duty, we have been able to make and maintain our own distinct identity.

# Chapter 23

## Tradesmen

Every town where people from upper caste live, there are people from other castes who move in. These people are called tradesmen. In Thar, along with Brahmins, Maheshwaris and Luhanas, such tradesmen lived such as:

**Gardener:** Would let woman fetch water from their well. Would get bags of water to home. Would take marriage proposal to bridegroom's place.

Gardener would receive money annually for well water. He would receive some money for water bags. During weddings he would receive some money and other gifts from both sides: bride and bridegroom.

**Barber:** Hindus called them naai and muslims would call them hajaam. They would come to someone's home and would sit outside on a platform. People from around the place would come to get their hair dressed or for shaving. They would receive money or food in return once a year from each family. During the wedding barber men/women would serve bridegroom/bride. At the end of the wedding they would receive soiled cloth and shoes from bride/bridegroom. They would also do minor dressing over boils etc. They would get some gifts during weddings. Barber women would also aid in childbirth.

**Cowboy:** Take cattle to feed and also go to needy people's home to milk their cattle. He would get some money and occasionally gifts and food grains.

**Potter:** Potters would make and sell clay pots, lamps, pans etc. He would supply clay made materials during wedding and would receive a good deal of gifts.

**Drummer:** A person who would beat drums during special occasions such as during wedding, or at the time of giving gifts to daughter after childbirth or at the time of various other ceremonies. He would get gifts, money and food grains.

**Carpenter:** He would also make various wooden items for weddings. He too would

be made happy on these occasions.

Similarly Tailors, Khatri, singers, eunuchs etc. would be given their fees and gifts based on their services. Cash was seldom used.

Tradesmen were called **kasabi** in Thar. They would work happily and were content in what they earned.

## Chapter 24

### Content and Happy Thari

In today's modern world, the conveniences and facilities that we enjoy were not even imagined by the people of Thar 50-60 years ago. In those days Maheshwaris (and other communities as well) lived in a very simplistic manner and their needs were also very little. There were hardly one or two millionaires and only a very few people had more than a thousand Rupees in savings but were content. Wealth was obtained and accumulated with frugal lifestyle and was spent on wedding and demise occasions. Comparing those times with today's, it is crucial to understand and know what were the materialistic objects that were lacking in those times. However, some things were invented later.

Material objects which were done without in Thar	Note
(1). Electricity and electrical equipments such as bulb, tubelights, fans, bell, iron, heater, geyser, mixer, mills, radio, television, tape-recorder, washing machine, hair dryer, computer etc.	Lamps, lanterns were used. Hand held fans were used. Water was boiled on stoves. Grains were milled at home.
(2). Toothbrush and paste.	Some government employees used. Other than that all would use Neem or Baol sticks called <i>Datun</i> .
(3). Water tap.	Women folks would fetch water from well or lake.
(4). Water handpumps, dunky, bore and motors.	Water tanks were filled with rainwater.

(5). Calculator.	Students were so fluent in multiplication tables that regular calculations did not require a calculator. Calculators were not invented then.
(6). Ball point pen.	Students would dip holder in ink and write. Government employees used fountain pens. Ball point pen did not enter the market.
(7). Xerox copy.	Carbon papers were used. A carbon paper was put between 2-3 papers and written with pressure.
(8). Gas stoves, Cylinders, lighters and kerosene stoves.	Simple stoves with wood and dried cowdung were used. Burning coals were buried in stove for reuse. If the coal are not burning then some burning coals were brought from the neighborhood. Matchsticks were used frugally. Smokers kept matchboxes.
(9). Milk in bottles/bags.	Milk was obtained directly from cattles. Milk was not available for sale. Buttermilk was given away for free.
(10). Flour Mills.	Women milled grains at home.
(11). Cooking oil.	Oil was not used in cooking. Ghee was used.
(12). Tea, coffee, ice, ice-cream, cold drinks etc.	There were no restaurants. Tea and coffee were not consumed at homes. There were no icecreams without ice.
(13). Various savory food items.	Thick savory fried noodles (sev) and fried dumplings were available. Roasted chickpeas, piperminits, salted peanuts were given to children. Last J.B. Mangharam and Company's biscuits would be consumed. Puffed rice or mouthfreshners were not available.
(14). Ghee boxes.	Hardly seen. Ghee was stored and transported in leather bags.
(15). Cloth bags.	Household grocery were brought in a pouch made up of shirts. If more things are there they would use a piece of cloth.
(16). School bag/Aluminium bag/water bottle	Children would take books in cloth bag called <i>bujki</i> . They drank water at school itself.
(17). Washing powder, soap, shampoo, etc.	Laundry was done using clay or ordinary soap. Fuller's earth was used to wash hair. Few people used fragrant soaps. Woman would put some soap with clothes for their fragrance.
(18). Shirt/T-shirt.	Simple half- or full-sleeved double-cuff shirt was worn. Readymade clothes were not used.
(19). Saree.	9 feet sarees were used.

(20). Leather or rubber footwear	Regular plain slippers were available. Few wore laced shoes. Locally made shoes were available.
(21). Spectacles/Goggles.	Because of good food and environment, there were no glasses for sight correction. As an exception, 1-2 people used glasses and were criticized as “blinds”. However, elderly people wore glasses.
(22). Bags to store clothes.	Clothes were stored in large clothbags. Iron trunks were used.
(23). Newspapers-Magazines.	Hardly one or two newspapers would be found in high school. Nobody subscribed to newspapers or magazines personally.
(24). Calendar.	Women folks remembered dates-days. If required Gor would look up the calendar.
(25). Bangles.	Women wore rubber or ivory bangles. Married woman would change them every 3-4 years.
(26). Telephones/Mobile phones etc.	Postcards/envelopes were sent for communication. In-land letters were not available. Telegrams were sent when absolutely required (specially to send news of someone’s demise).
(27). Vehicles such as bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, car, bus, autorickshaw, truck etc.	Camels and horses were used. Those who visited Sindh had seen buses. Sindh also had horsecarts.
(28). Train.	There were two towns with railway stations: Chhod and Gadhado. If someone had to catch other trains then one had to go to Naukot or Kunri. People traveled by train to Jodhpur for hospitals and pilgrims such as Nathdwara, Pushkar, Haridwar.
(29). Bathroom-Latrine.	Small wall was made in a corner which was used as a bathroom. Men and women would go into the forest for latrine.
(30). RCC houses.	Bricks were used for walls but no RCC was used in roofs.
(31). Plastic made household and other things.	There were no items made of plastic. There were no plastic bags either.
(32). Different types of contemporary toys.	Wooden toys were used. Simple but durable toys from Japan and Germany were also used.
(33). Sofa, dining tables etc. furniture.	Some people had wooden furniture and government employee had 2-3 chairs. Wooden cots were used to sit in the yard of house.

(34). Plywood, Fevicol.	Strong wooden panes were used. Nails were used to tie them.
(35). Steel utensils.	Copper, brass, bronze, and German Silver utensils were used. Poor people used clay utensils. Some communities were served food in silver utensils (because of untouchability).
(36). Childbirth-delivery.	Experienced midwife would come to home for childbirth. There were no maternity hospitals. There were no Cesarean section operations.
(37). Ambulance.	Coffin was taken over shoulders. Sick people were taken over camels by tying special “kajaa” on camel back.
(38). Roads/Streets.	Paved, tar roads were usually 25-30 miles from towns. Small footpaths were used in order to travel through dunes from one village to other. People would walk or used camels.

Some items might be missing from this list.

We were basically the farming and business people. However, our standard of living improved over the 200-250 years of history. Marwars farmer and farmer-women were content and happy with minimum needs. Here is a couplet showing how content these farmers and farmer-ladies were:

Farmer	Farmer Lady
nave manju ri khat, ke na chuve tapri, bhensadle do char ke duze baapdi, bajra handa bat, dahi me olana, itra de kirtar, fer nahin chavna.	uthe hi piyar hoy, uthe hi saasro, athuno hoe khet chuve nahin aasro, nala khet najik, jathe hal kholna, itra de kirtar, fer nahin chavna.
Ohh god! Give me a nine-thread cot, non-leaking roof, 2-4 milking buffaloes, Curd and pearl millet roti. I do not wish more.	Ohh god! Let my parent's and in-law's be in the same town. My field be in the west direction (so that sun stays in the back during morning trip to and evening trips from the field), a non- leaking roof and a small place near field to put equipments. I do not wish more.

Table 24.2: Content people of Marwar



# Chapter 25

## Conclusion

The details given so far has been about the last 300 to 50 years old. After that, because of partition between India and Pakistan, some of the Maheshwari community migrated from Pakistan to India at different times. Many Maheshwaris living in Thar moved to Sindh's cities for business and livelihood, however, they maintained contact with Thar.

Many changes have happened in these last 50-55 years. New horizons are opening with everyday science inventions. Electronic equipments, transportation, higher education, cinema, radio, T.V., computers, internet, etc. have advanced and there is a clear influence of Western culture over the younger generation. It is natural that they do not prefer our old culture in today's modern world.

Urbanization have opened the gates to progress and development but because of this, our culture, systems, customs, food has been polluted which is not appropriate. Criticizing simple food and traditional dressing has given way to new style dressings and food which is not a modern culture but in a way danger to our culture.

These days, respect for the elderly is diminishing. Too much freedom to children has resulted in anarchy. Old principles are being forgotten and loyalty to the self and community is dying. False showoff, pretentiousness, disapproval and corruption is on the rise. Modesty is on the fall. Unity is not maintained in the community.

For this we cannot escape blaming today's young generation. In the last 50 years, we have entered a new world, became wealthy and in the process, have gradually changed our behavior which has left an impression on the next generation and has expanded.

In Thar, Maheshwaris lived in a small towns with limited diversity which maintained to culture and traditions but in today's big cities and diverse group, some of the influence of others is clearly seen.

Change is a demand of time. We must also change but during these changes we must adopt good practices and leave the rest. We are being pulled towards a mentality of poor character and losing all the good qualities because of showiness.

Time is still in our hands. We are responsible to build our character and can turn back from here. We pray that the Maheshwari community which is a treasure of qualities and character with its exemplar and illustrative past must stay as it is for the time coming.

My heartfelt apologies if during these descriptions and discourses, something inappropriate for the elders or youngsters has been uttered. With this, I finish this section of the book.