

## **‘Bharat’ Narratives in South Rajasthan**

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India is a vast country with numerous cultural regions in which different languages are spoken and different art forms thrive. Although the Constitution of India has recognized only twenty two languages in the eighth schedule, there are a large number of languages in the country which have a rich treasure of literature in the written as well as oral form. These literary compositions form the fabric of our composite culture.

Rajasthan is the biggest state of India in terms of land area. It touches the boundary of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, New Delhi, Punjab and a big part of the international border with Pakistan. The area of Rajasthan is 132,139 Square miles which forms about 10.4 % of the total area of the country. The state has a population of nearly seventy million. A majority of these speak Rajasthani. Although it is not yet a part of the eighth schedule and the official language of the state is Hindi, a very rich literary tradition of Rajasthani literature exists in the state. D.R.Ahuja in his book *Folklore of Rajasthan* talks about the rich tradition of Oral Literature of Rajasthan:

Rajasthan Folklore is rich in oral literature which is divided in two parts, heard and seen. The prose and poetry comprise folk tales, proverbs and sayings, ballads and folk songs. The ‘seen’ literature is most important and is based on historical events. Khayals, a lyrical composition, are medium of entertainment, so are the puppet shows, most popular forms of entertainment for rural folk. (140)

The state is divided into several cultural areas based on different dialects of Rajasthani spoken in the region. They are Marwar (Marwari), Mewar (Mewari), Dhundhad (Dhundhadi), Hadoti (Hadoti), Vagad (Vagadi), Mewat (Mewati), Gorwad (Marwari) and Shekhawati (Shekhawati). A lot of literature, both written and oral, exists in these dialects.

In the Mewar region which constitutes the districts of Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara and Rajsamand Mewari is spoken by the masses. There is a rich reservoir of literature in Mewari available in the oral form besides what is available in written form. The oral literature is passed on from one generation to another through the word of mouth. This is a part of the folklore and is preserved by the masses. One of the folk forms popular in Mewar is called “Bharat”.

### **Etymology of the term “Bharat”**

“Bharat” has several associations in the literary sources of the classical traditions of this country. There are numerous stories suggesting the relationship between the mythological or legendary heroes and the name of this country. The literal meaning of the term “Bharat” is “One who is the provider or sustainer” - one who fulfills the needs of the people. In Hindi “Bharat” is also used in terms of “*bhartaa - Bharan - poshan karne wala*”. (Saddique Mohammed80)

In literary parlance, there is a change in the meaning. In folklore of Rajasthan “Bharat” is a poetic form which is sung on particular occasions. It is a species of Folk Ballad. The “Bharat Ballads” are sung in Mewar region of southern Rajasthan. This

includes the districts of Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand and Bhilwara. Bharat Ballads are sung during the *Navraatri* celebrations, nine sacred days of the worship of Goddess Amba. These Ballads have in them narratives about the heroic deeds of deities, legendary heroes and also some historical heroes who by dint of their feats of valour, courage, chivalry and sacrifice have become icons of worship.

Eminent folklorist late Padmashri Devi Lal Samar, who founded Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, an institute devoted to preservation and propagation of Folk Culture and art defined them as “Bharat” style of Rajasthani folk ballads. He equated the two terms “Lok Gatha” and “Bharat”. In his writings he said that the term “Lok Gatha” is used by urban educated class, the term for it commonly used by the rural masses is “Bharat”. Therefore “Bharat” according to him is a synonym of folk ballad or “Lok Gatha”. He categorically denied the relationship between the “Bharats” and the epic *The Mahabharat*. He said that they are not “Mahabharat”, rather they are “Ramayan Bharat” since they exhibit several ideal forms which reflect the conduct, rituals and way of life in accordance with the *Ramayan*. (Bhanawat, *Takha Ambav Ro Bharat*)

Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat, former deputy director of Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal and an authority on Folklore of Rajasthan, defines “Bharat” in terms of devotional narratives sung by the devotees during *Navraatri*. He says, “In our society the folk deities have been regarded as the incarnation of “Shakti”. There are many songs depicting their origin, growth and their heroic deeds. These ballads have become a part of public memory. During the period of *Navraatri*, the nightlong rituals are accompanied by the recital of the glorious tales of the folk deities and heroes. These glorious tales are indicated as *Bharats*”. (Bhanawat.Shaktigatha)

These Bharats have several synonyms which are popular among the village folk. They are *Yash Gatha* (Glory Tales), *Shakti – Gatha* (Power Tales), *Shouryaparak Yash Gatha* (Chivalry Tales), *Bharat Gatha* (Bharat Tales), *Veer Gatha* (Veer Tales), *Mataji Ke Geet* (Songs of Mother Goddess) and *Dhak Gatha* (Dhak Tales). The term ‘Dhak’ refers to a musical instrument played while singing the Bharat. It is a small drum with two faces of the shape of a Damru (of the shape of a sand clock). It is played by a stick in the right hand and the palm of the left hand. The Dhak is tied to the body of the singer near his knee. As the beat becomes fast, the pitch of the singing grows and finally the spirit of the deity is said to arrive and enter the body of the Bhopa, the local priest. The arrival of the spirit is said to be the success or accomplishment of the performance.

Several folk ballads (Bharats) are sung in Mewar region of south Rajasthan. Noted folklorist Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat collected them from Sisoda, Sayon Ka Kheda, Ooswas, Kunthwa, Dholinedi, Hureda, Arniya, Maal Khejdi and Palod villages in Mewar. These Bharats can be listed as follows:

S.No. Name

1. Badlya Ro Bharat (Bunyan Tree's Bharat)
  2. Purbaj Ro Bharat (Ancestors' Bharat)
  3. Pandavan Ro Bharat ( Pandava's Bharat)
  4. Rangdya Ro Bharat ( Rangdya's Bharat)
  5. Bharat Beedou ( Beedou's Bharat)
  6. Vela Vanya Ro Bharat ( Mad Trader's Bharat)
  7. Ram Devji Ro Bharat ( Ram Deo's Bharat)
  8. Meen Ro Bharat( Meena's Bharat)
  9. Vasak Ro Bharat ( Vasak's Bharat)
  10. Anmaj Ro Bharat (Anmaj's Bharat)
  11. Bheru Ro Bharat (Bheru's Bharat)
  12. Ambav Ro Bharat ( Ambav's Bharat)
  13. Nathu Rawat Ro Bharat ( Nathu Rawat's Bharat)
  14. Dharam Raj Ro Bharat( Dharam Raj's Bharat)
  15. Kalaka Ro Bharat ( Kalka's Bharat)
  16. Chavanda Ro Bharat(GoddessChavanda's Bharat)
  17. Rada Rupan Ro Bharat ( Rada Rupan's Bharat)
  18. Lalan Phoolan Ro Bharat( Laa Phoolan's Bharat)
  19. Thapna Ro Bharat ( Thapna's Bharat)
  20. Rebari Ro Bharat ( Rebari's Bharat)
  21. Maasi Maan Ro Bharat (Maternal Aunt's Bharat)
  22. Mama Dev Ro Bharat ( Mama Dev's Bharat)
  23. Takha Ro Bharat ( Takha's Bharat)
  24. Bhuna Mendu Ro Bharat ( Bhuna Mendu's Bharat)
  25. Chagotri Ro Bharat ( Chagotri's Bharat)
- (Bhanawat.Takha Ambav Ro Bharat 2)

Besides these there are a few more Bharats (Folk Ballads) which are very popular among the people. They are about the folk deities whom people worship for their worldly as well as spiritual needs. They include:

S.No. Name

1. Dev Narayan Ro Bharat (DevNarayan's Bharat)
2. Tejaji Ro Bharat( Tejaji's Bharat)
3. Kala Gora Ro Bharat( Kala Gora's Bharat)
4. Raika Ro Bharat( Raika's Bharat)
5. Ogad Ro Bharat( Ogad's Bharat)
6. Hanuman Ro Bharat( Hanuman's Bharat)
7. Deraveer Ro Bharat( Deraveer's Bharat)

8. Bhoot Ro Bharat( Ghost’s Bharat)
9. Galaleng Ro Bharat (Galaleng’s Bharat)
10. Latkali Ro Bharat( Latkali’s Bharat)
11. Meldi Ro Bharat( Meldi’s Bharat)
12. Sikotri Ro Bharat( Sikotri’s Bharat)
13. Kachha Ro Bharat( Kachha’s Bharat)
14. Chouth Ro Bharat( Chouth’s Bharat)
15. Dakani Ro Bharat( Witch’s Bharat)
16. Piplaj Ro Bharat( Piplaj’s Bharat)
17. Hathiya Ro Bharat( Hathiya’s Bharat)

The sum total of the list is forty one. There could be more. A cursory glance at the names of the Bharats reveals that characters from all sections of the society are chosen to compose the ballads about. Some of them are princes and chieftains but others include not just deities and noblemen but ghosts, witches and commoners as well.

Singing of these folk ballads ( Bharats) has a religious significance and it is believed that an incomplete rendering of Bharat is ominous and leads to ill effect. While singing Bharat, it should not be left incomplete. It is believed that an incomplete rendering of Bharat has the same negative effect as a break in “ Akhand Paath” or “ Uninterrupted recitation”. The complete Bharat is called “ Ghar Aasman Ka Bharat” and the incomplete Bharat is called “ Ubdu”.(Saddique 83)

It is interesting to note that the narratives of Bharat cross the bounds of time and space. The human world and the super natural world intermingle and the human and supernatural characters interact with each other. The literary, the mythological and the real, overlap to create such texts. The gods and goddesses, demons and human characters, birds and animals speak one language and indulge in the acts of passion, compassion, revenge and restoration. The action is very fast and the movement from one world to the other is frequent. The performance of Bharat singing is also a part of worship and is entered into to seek solution to the worldly problems of the devotees. The narratives border on fantasy and often sound unconvincing. But the purpose of these folk ballads is not secular nor are they meant to stick to an objective description of reality. Therefore the stories that are available as Bharat narratives can only be appreciated as fanciful creations.

#### **‘Bhilon Ka Bharat’ - Bharat of the Bhils**

One of the popular Bharats is called ‘Bhilon Ka Bharat’ i.e. Bharat of the Bhils. Bhils are one of the largest tribe in Rajasthan. Bhils reside in southern Rajasthan, Jhabua region of Madhya Pradesh and the northern Gujarat besides other parts of the country. They form thirty nine percent of the tribal population of Rajasthan. Tribal population constitutes 13.5 percent of the total population of Rajasthan which is 74,791, 568.

( <http://www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/rajasthan-population.html>)

Dr. Bhagwan Das Patel wrote a paper on the 'Bharat of the Bhils' and presented it at a National Seminar of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in 2004. The Bharat he refers to is sung in southern Rajasthan and northern districts of Gujarat adjacent to the border of Rajasthan. "Bhilon ka Bharath", he says, "is a folk epic of tribals popular among Dunkgri Bhil tribals of Khedbrahma Tehsil in the northern part of Sabarkantha District of Gujarat dwelling in the ancient Aravalli ranges."

Although late Padmashree Devi Lal Samar denied any relationship between Bharats and the Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharat*, the narrative of *Bhilon ka Bharat* has quite a good number of Characters who have been treated as the characters of Mahabharat. Dr. Bhagwan Das Patel's paper, translated into English by Pradeep Bhattacharya, mentions the names of the characters in Mahabharat as synonyms of the names used in the text of *Bhilon Ka Bharat*.

Dr. Patel uses the name Draupadi in bracket as synonym of *Dhophan*, Kunti in bracket as synonym of *Kutama*, Subhadra in bracket as synonym of *Hodaran*, Yudhishtir in bracket as synonym of *Jhethodar*.

The narrative is also modified. The portrayal of characters as we see in the *Mahabharat* epic is very different from what we see in this Bharat. In the Bharat the women characters seem to have been transformed into very powerful entities. The character of Draupadi ( *Dhophan* ) is depicted as very powerful. She is depicted as possessing supernatural powers:

Many of the socio-religious events have *Dhophan* (Draupadi) as the dispenser, ruling over all. Woman's power is shown in Kutama (Kunti) and Hodaran (Subhadra). They regard woman as dangerous and terrifying, hence referred to as "Daayan-devi" (witch-goddess). Their beliefs are known as the Great Path (Nijaar Path).

(<http://mahabharata-resources.org/variations/BharataoftheBhils.html>)

Draupadi acts with all her might and makes all the Pandavas subservient to her. She makes them act at her will and lets them suffer great humiliation. She is a *Devi* (Goddess) and makes Yudhishtir and Bhim bow down to her.

In the narrative described by Dr. Bhagwan Das Patel Yudhishtir is shown bowing down to Draupadi and touching her feet. This is so because perhaps he knows that Draupadi is not an ordinary woman but a Goddess. One night Bhim happens to see Yudhishtir bow down before Draupadi. He gets furious thinking however beautiful a woman might be, why the husband should touch his wife's feet. In his anger he thinks that he should either kill Draupadi, or Yudhishtir or himself.

Draupadi understands the mental state of Bhim as she, in the text, is not an ordinary woman but a Goddess. In order to make Bhim understand the truth, she takes him at night to a vermilion red Banyan tree. At midnight, in the presence of Ninety Million Dev and Devis, she assumes the form of a Devi riding a lion, with a thousand hands holding flaming lamps, swords and skulls. The narrative mentions that even the Supreme Creator himself rises from his silver throne and seats her on a golden throne. She then tells the creator that four of the Pandavas were ensnared while Yudhishtir

was left as he worshipped her daily. She tells Him that after killing all she would go to Baikunth to have His Darshan.

Seeing the grandeur of the spectacle and the power of Draupadi Bhim's male arrogance dissolves and is replaced by fear of the Devi form of Draupadi. Dr. Patel describes the change in Bhim's attitude after this revelation. Bhim seeks her blessings for the transformation to the form of Dev. The dialogue is very well summed up in the following words:

The next midnight Bhim, weeping, tells Draupadi in front of everyone, "Bhabhi, you are Daayan-devi. Our mother too is Daayan-devi. Bhabhi, placing your hand on the heads of all five of us, bless us and turn us into perfect Dev-purush (gods)." She replies, "You are still full of pride. You have understood neither the truth nor what is dharma. If you do only what we tell you to, then will you be able to find place in our assembly of devs. But you even insult the guru. If you obey what we say, only then will the lord come to our home. Otherwise you shall die guru-less and not a trace of you will remain."

Bhim, in the arrogance of royalty, had insulted Draupadi's guru Baalaa Harguraa as he belonged to a low caste. Hence, even the seventh sacrifice made by the Pandavas went fruitless and Pandu had to be born as a dog. The Pandavas realized that only Draupadi could ensure salvation of their father. Then accepting Draupadi as their guru, putting aside their pride of being her husband, with grass in their mouths, the Pandavas fell at her feet and with folded hands begged advice for the salvation of their father. Draupadi commanded them to perform the Shankhodvaar Yajna which only her guru, Baalaa Harguraa knew how to perform. The condition he made for coming was accepted by Bhim. He became a bull whose nose was pierced, a grass rope passed through it and he was yoked to a cart. They went to the banks of the Ganga-Godavari where the Guru was seated. He threw grass before Bhim, who got down on all fours and held it in his teeth. He drank water in which the guru's feet had been washed.

The narrative of this folk ballad presents the Pandavas as objects of pity who are punished by Draupadi herself for their arrogance and irresponsible behavior in the past. She takes revenge of not only her own humiliation but the insult of her Guru as well. It is interesting to note that Draupadi's Guru had been insulted by Bhim because he belonged to a low caste. It is a subversion of the original text. The punishment meted out to the Pandavas is due to their insulting a Woman and a Dalit, the two social categories which are vulnerable even now in the modern world.

Then Harguraa rides in the cart that is pulled by Bhim and they reach Hastinapur where the Pandavas drink water that his feet has been washed in and touch his feet. There is a twist in the narrative. It goes back to the incident of Draupadi's humiliation by Duhshashan. The golden tresses of Draupadi's hair fall on the ground. It is said in the Bharat that the Earth cannot bear the weight of Draupadi's golden tresses. Hence, earth splits and the golden tresses fall on the breast of the sleeping King Vashuki in Paataal. Awakened, Vasuki seeks out the golden-haired woman in the inner apartments of Hastinapur. As he enters he finds Arjun with Draupadi. Arjun and Vasuki enter a duel. Vasuki, the King of Pataal flings Arjun on the ground, mounts his chest and,

binding his hands and feet with a hair from his whiskers, hangs him upside down before Draupadi's bed. The narrative in Bharat as depicted by Dr. Bhagwan Das Patel depicts further humiliation of Arjun in the presence of Draupadi:

Queen Draupadi bathes Vasuki in a copper tub, feeds him from a golden plate. Then he approaches her bed dressed resplendently. Draupadi sprinkles flowers and musk oil on the soft bed. The king of Paataal makes love to her on the bed while poor Arjun helplessly watches the erotic sport. Dawn comes and Vasuki cuts the hair tying Arjun with his gleaming sword. Arjun drops with a thud on the ground, his pride and sense of being a husband destroyed. Draupadi's desire for a lover is burnt up after the erotic bout and thus purified she progresses towards salvation.

(mahabharata-resources.org/variations/BharataoftheBhils.html)

The characteristic features of these Bharats are that they are still not written and so they do not have a fixed text. Every recital or performance is unique in its own way. The singers are often the local priests and their followers. The places where they are sung are usually the small temples called Devra. Usually a Devra is a raised platform with a stone shrine not in any particular shape. In some cases a small icon of the presiding deity is also erected at one side of the platform. In some cases there is a roof while in several other cases there is no roof over a Devra. Sometimes Bharat can be sung at the residence of some devotee also. In such cases he invites the Bhopa ji (Local Priest) who comes along with his paraphernalia to perform. It is a religious act and so people residing nearby also join. It is also performed when somebody's wish is fulfilled. He invites the singers to his home and requests them to perform. This is called "Bharat Banchana" (Reading of Bharat). It is a part of the folk life in this part of the state and tribal as well as non-tribal population partakes of it.

Like all other forms of folk art there is a need to preserve this rich form of folk ballad and its performance. Documentation and recording in a digital form can preserve it for posterity but more important is its conservation in its live form as a part of the lives of the people.

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