CHAPTER – V

Social Composition of the Followers of the Folk-Deities
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In the preceding Chapter, we have discussed how over a period of time, the dominant sections of society in Rajasthan, particularly the Rajput ruling elite and Brahmans began to worship the popular deities from the 18th century onwards. In the process, these new followers of the folk-deities introduced many significant alterations, even innovations, in the ways in which these deities had hitherto been worshipped and perceived. We have also seen how the changes in the political circumstances provided a necessary space to subordinate sections, in particular the lowest caste groups to challenge the political and social hegemony of the dominant sections. One of the ways in which they did so was by trying to retain or retrieving the original cults. The process of Rajput and Brahmanical appropriation brought about significant changes in the social composition of followers of these deities. Pre-eighteenth century sources indicate that it was mainly the lower caste groups which had transformed their local heroes into folk-deities and initiated the process of worshiping them. The pre-eighteenth century sources also reveal that Muslims were among the original believers of these cults. Nineteenth and twentieth century sources on the other hand reveal that the cult of these deities draw their followers not only from among Muslims and lower castes but also from higher caste groups. Though, the number of followers belonging to lower castes and Muslim community still remains significant, they do not seem to enjoy a prominent position in the religious establishments where the

1 Approximately eighty devotees were interviewed at the fair of Guga held in the month of September, 1999 and at Ramdev's temple at Murasiya in Jodhpur on 9th October, 2001. The caste composition of the devotees who were interviewed suggests that the cults of the folk-deities under study attract widespread veneration from people cutting across caste and religious boundaries.
devotees throng in large numbers during fairs and ceremonies. The present chapter examines the nature of change in the social composition of the followers and how the process of this change was shaped during nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I. Traditional followers of the deities:

(a) Lower Castes and Untouchables

As examined in the chapter on emergence of deities, it was the lower caste groups who initially deified and worshipped Ramdev, Pabu, Goga and Teja. It is most likely the lower castes in general and Meghwals in particular who first integrated the worship of these deities in their religious system, which far from being abstract and otherworldly, was sustained by their mundane needs and material concerns. The new religious cults also became a medium for voicing their discontentment against Rajput-Brahmin combination, which had denied them a respectable status in the society irrespective of their numerical strength and role in the production process. Protections of community resources and as benefactors of the oppressed Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja became obvious choice for deification. Ramdev, refusing to live in accordance with Rajput values, was raised to the position of saint. Vanis and verses attributed to Ramdev suggest a deep influence of Gorakhpanthis, a non-Brahmanical heterodox sect, on his personality and teachings.\(^2\) Ramdev accepted Balaknath as his Guru, who again was a Nathpanth saint.\(^3\) Living in the company of lower caste followers by defying established caste norms and making Dali Bai, a Meghwal, his chief disciple provided a strong basis for the Meghwals and other lower caste to deify Ramdev for their expression of their religious beliefs and practices.

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\(^2\) Dr. Sona Ram Bishnoi, “Nath Sampradaay Aur Marwar Ke Panch Pir”, in Rajasthan Ke Nath Sampradaye Aur Sahitya, Rajasthan oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur, 1997, PP.1-7

\(^3\) Pema Ram, Op. Cit.
Rajput origin of these deities, barring that of Teja, must have emboldened their lower caste followers to stress the irrelevance of caste hierarchies and aspire for living a dignified life. Lower castes, which suffered from humiliation and degradation, found in the worship of these deities a way out of their social predicament.

Ramdev, among the four deities under study, seems to have strongest bond with the lower castes and untouchables such as Meghwals and Bhambis. The traditions suggest that Ramdev stood for the cause of these caste groups, spoke against caste discrimination, and advocated an egalitarian society. He rejected the caste system by visiting and singing Bhajans in the locality of the lower caste people on Tambura. One Meghwal girl, Dalibai was believed to have been brought up by Ramdev after the death of her parents. She used to accompany him, sing bhajans and ultimately took samadhi besides him. In fact, in the iconographical representations, Dalibai is shown by the side of Ramdev. It is possible that Meghwals feel close to Ramdev due to his association with one of their ancestors, especially Dalibai, who has also acquired the status of a saint. There is a separate temple of Dalibai besides the Ramdev temple in Runicha. Ramdev’s association with Meghwals and other lower castes and his rejection by his Rajput brethren led to his emergence as a deity of lower castes alone. Popular phrases used until this day denotes this fact. A popular phrase “Ramdev ne milya dhed hi dhed” (Ramdev found only the untouchables as his friends) speaks the volume for his association with the low caste companions. Ramdev is commonly addressed as Dhedho Ka dev (the god of untouchables), which indicates that traditionally, the lowest caste groups formed the bulk of Ramdev’s followers.

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4 Pushapa Bhat, *Rajasthan ke Lok Devta avam Lok sahitya*; Kavita Prakashan, Bikaner, 1996 pp. 127
Ramdev had also established a Sant Math a sect for those who were ostracized in the society owing to their lower position in the caste hierarchy. The panth later began to be called as Kamdiya Panth. Members baptized in this sect had to keep Beth (small stick) in their hand. The word Kamad has its origin in a Marwari word kamadi meaning a stick. In the contemporary period, it has become a sub caste known as Kamdiya. The Kamdiyas wear saffron coloured Feita-Pagri (a type of Turban) and present Jama Jagran, (devotional singing of Ramdev’s hymns throughout the night) night awakening hymn singing of Ramdev. Presently, it is also known as Kunda panth.⁵

Teja, a Jat by birth, had died of snakebite while protecting the cattle of a lower caste women belonging to the Gujar caste and was deified by the Gujars and Jats who comprised his initial followers. Pabu had Thoris and Raika caste groups as their traditional followers and Goga was worshiped both by Jat peasants and other lower caste groups.

The fact that Rajput and Brahmins did not constitute the significant part of the following of these deities in the pre nineteenth century Rajasthan is evident from several popular legends. Association of Goga, Ramdev and Pabu -who were all believed to have been Rajputs-with Muslims and lower caste groups, was bitterly opposed, suppressed or despised by the ruling elite. Rajput ruling elite viewed this association as a threat to their pride, legitimacy and hegemony. Caste hierarchy, an instrument of legitimization of political and social authority of Rajputs and other upper caste groups, was under threat because the association of higher caste Rajput warriors with low caste groups blurred caste boundaries and deviated from existing social norms. The ‘purist’ concerns of the

⁵ Mulchand Pranesh, “Baba Ramdevji”, in Vishambara, Hindi Vishvabharti Anusandhan Parishad, year 17, number 23, April-Sept 1985
Rajput elites found their expression in the oral traditions of various genre. Many Rajput Jagirdars and Thikanadars refused to marry their daughters to Ramdev owing to his association with Dhedhs and Mlaechha. Thakur of Pugalgarh refused to send his wife Sugna (Sister of Ramdev) to attend Ramdev’s marriage as it could bring disrepute to him. There are other such representations which reflect the abhorrence of the upper caste groups for the Ramdev cult during the pre-eighteenth century period. In one such episode, Ramdev is shown as sending a message to the Thakur of Pugalgarh to whom his sister Sugna was married. The messenger intended to bring Sugna with him to attend marriage of Ramdev. After reaching Pugalgarh, the messenger reveals the purpose of his visit to the guard placed on duty at the gate of the Thakur’s palace. The conversation between the Deodidar (Guard) of Thakur of Pugalgarh and messenger of Ramdev suggests that upper caste groups in general despised him. When the messenger of Ramdev informs the purpose of his visit, the Deodidar replies, predicting the answer of his master that Thakur would not send his wife to attend Ramdev’s marriage as he socialized with lower caste people. Goga, a popular myth suggests, was considered an untouchable by the Brahmans. The narrative records that once Goga was out in the desert for hunting. Tired by heat and feeling thirsty, he approached a well and asked a Brahman woman to give him some water to drink. The Brahman women refused to give him water on the ground that her pitcher would be defiled if he drank water from it. Angry at her refusal, Goga invoked Guru Gorakhnath and broke her pitcher with an arrow so that the

6 Usha Gupta, Baba Ramdev, Panchsheel Prakashan, Jaipur, 1991, PP.14-15
7 Usha Gupta, Baba Ramdev, Panchsheel Prakashan, Jaipur, 1991 P15
water drenched her body. The myth shows that higher caste groups did not regard Goga as a Rajput. He was considered either belonging to a low caste or someone who had lost his caste owing to his association with Muslims or lower caste communities. The myth also hints at the obscure origin of Goga and doubts his Rajput credentials for the pitcher could only be defiled if touched by somebody belonging to an extremely low caste.

Nainsi in his Vigat records a popular tale where Pabu’s sister was beaten up by her husband for defending Pabu’s association with Thoris, a low caste. Association of Ramdev and Pabu with people of the lower order in the caste hierarchy indicates that they, despite being Rajputs, defied the established social norms according to which the Rajputs and other upper caste groups required to keep distance from the untouchables and other lowly placed people and even disown them. It is perhaps their defiance and violations of the principles of caste hierarchy that endeared Goga, Pabu and Ramdev to the locally oppressed groups.

(b) Caste Proliferation in 16th and 17th Centuries: The Artisanal Groups
The 16th and 17th centuries witnessed an increase in agricultural and non-agricultural activities in western Rajasthan. As a consequence, new professions also came into being and new professional groups were formed. Sixteenth and seventeenth century witnessed extensive proliferation of artisan groups, primarily among them were artisan dealing with leather and weaving of clothes. Some of the artisans referred to in these centuries include Kumbhars (potter), Bhamhis (leatherworker) Nais (barber), Luhars (ironsmith) Suthars (carpenter), Dhobis (washerman) Sargaras (ropemaker), Darjis (tailor), Mehtars

8 H. A. Rose, *A glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West frontier Provinces*; Vol. I; 1919; P. 174
9 Nainsi, *vigar*; Vol. III, P. 63
(sweeper), Sonars (goldsmith) Sigligars (sharpener), Mochis (cobbler), Dhedhs (leather workers), Mawals (bearer of burden) and Pinjaras (cotton carder) and Julahas (weavers).\textsuperscript{10} Munhta Nainsi in his Vigat of Jodhpur Parganas has recorded the population of artisans and other groups. In Pargana Jaitaran and Merta the Julahas formed 24.67 and 23.30 percent respectively of the total artisans. In Sojat, the Julaha population was second only to that of shoemakers, the Mochis, forming 6.88 percent of the artisan population. The shoemakers themselves formed the second largest group of artisans in the towns of Jaitaran and Merta.\textsuperscript{11} The artisans by this time had formed an important segment of the Rajasthan society. Bambhi, Raigar, Meghwal and Dhedh, and other caste based groups, who were scattered all over Rajasthan and worked on skinning of dead animals and hide proved backbone of the commodity production in towns as they supplied the necessary raw material. The manufactured items then were used extensively by the ruling groups for military and other purposes and by other communities.\textsuperscript{12} Though, the rural bhambis and chamars were the important functionaries in the chain of commodity production, they could not be the ultimate beneficiary as the distribution of profit was closely linked to one’s status in the caste hierarchy.

The proliferation of lower caste artisanal groups was a process that went hand in hand with the consolidation and centralization of the Marwar state. The growth of the centralized Jodhpur state led to expansion of its economic base and many new groups were incorporated into the framework of its surplus appropriation network and into its

\textsuperscript{10} B.L Bhadani, Peasants, Artisans and entrepreneur: Economy of Marwar in the Seventeenth Century, Rawat Publication, N. Delhi; 1999; P.145

\textsuperscript{11} Parita Mukta; Upholding the Common life: the Community of Mirabai; OUP, 1997, P.75

\textsuperscript{12} In seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ruling elites required items such as saddles, bridles, scabbards of swords and covers of books, which were manufactured by these artisanal groups, in Parita Mukta; Op. Cit., P76
administrative-military apparatus. The Rajput rulers employed some Meghwals as messengers for calling people to the darbar (court). This led to the formation of a new caste called balai. The term was derived from bulana (to call). The overarching Marwar state introduced new professions. People of this caste were now required to make public announcements on behalf of the State on regular basis. Chowkidars for the security of the forts, big and small, had now become a necessity. These and many other new professions gradually created new caste identities. There emerged new caste groups such as dankedar (Responsible for making public announcements), Hukedar (responsible for serving Hukka to the guests during the feasts, ceremonies and otherwise) and Kiledar (Fort Chowkidar) etc.\textsuperscript{13}

Many low caste groups, along with their artisanal occupation, worked as agricultural labourers in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The nais worked as forced labourers on the fields of the Rathor landed gentry in Jalor. While dhedhs in the same Pargana were forced to weed out grass from the pasturelands of the bhumias (zamindars or local aristocrats).\textsuperscript{14} The dhedh and nais performed veth-begar- cutting grass for the bhumia's horses. It would seem that persons of the lowest strata had to render begar (unpaid labour). Bhumias were authorized to take begar from Kumbhar, Bhambhi and Teli.\textsuperscript{15} Bhambis, apart from working as leather workers undertook weaving. Skinning of dead animals, which they got in return for performing general work of the village, formed their primary occupation. The general work of the village included dragging dead animals out of village and performing other menial jobs whenever the village community directed

\textsuperscript{13} S. Gokul Das, P.61
\textsuperscript{14} Bhumias were basically from among Rajputs and mainly from Rathor clan followed by Chauhan and Bñatis in some villages, See, B.L Badani, \textit{Op. Cit.} P180,
\textsuperscript{15} B.L, Bhadani, \textit{Op. Cit.} P. 172-175
them to do so.\textsuperscript{16} Since, people from lower castes were employed to perform these tasks, the new caste groups, which had emerged from lower castes themselves, were not assigned a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Most of these new professional groups were placed at the lower level in the caste hierarchy. Social base of the folk-deities that had so far remained confined to some select low caste groups now began to expand. Increased commercial and mercantile activities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to the growing economic differentiation in Rajasthan society. The expansion of craft production and the maritime trade from Gujarat to Sind coast brought several artisanal groups into the framework of international economic network. This, however, did not change their position in the caste hierarchy. Their social status remained at par with Meghval and other lower castes. Since the new artisanal castes were offshoots of either Meghvals or other lower caste groups, they continued following the religious beliefs of their parent caste groups. As a result, Ramdev, Pabu and Goga became chief deities of these newly formed castes. A tale explains as to how a \textit{darzi} (Tailor) another lower caste became followers of Ramdev. A \textit{darzi} had made a stuffed horse of cloth for child Ramdev. As Ramdev began to play with it, the horse came to life. When the news reached the Jagirdar of the area, he called the same \textit{darzi} and ordered for a similar horse. When the horse showed no sign of life, \textit{darzi} was arrested. \textit{Darzi} remembered Ramdev and the horse came to life. \textit{Darzis}, we are told became Ramdev’s followers after this incident.\textsuperscript{17} The caste proliferation, therefore, in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries expanded the following of the deities among the lower castes.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Rajputana Census}, 1901, p. 139, 147
\textsuperscript{17} Mahopadhyaya Manak Chand Rampuriya; \textit{Baba Ramdev Ji}; Bikaner, 1995, PP.65-69
(c) The Muslim Followers of the Folk-deities

The examination of social composition of followers of the deities under study can not be complete without looking at its Muslim component. Muslims, in large numbers, are found as believers of Guga and Ramdev. Though, believers of Teja and Pabu also include Muslims, their number is not significant. The structural and iconographical representations of Goga and Ramdev in places of worships is marked by interesting combination of mazar\textsuperscript{18} and engraved image on the stone slab where the deities are shown to have seated on the horses with spears in their hands. Goga and Ramdev, as is clear from the study of traditions, have been perceived until recently and still perceived as being endowed with Hindu-Muslim personality. Ramdev’s temple at Ramdeora-Runicha (near Pokran, between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer) is referred to as dargah (‘royal court’, implying a Muslim shrine sheltering a tomb or relics) by some devotees\textsuperscript{19}.

The devotees generally explain this phenomenon by regarding Goga and Ramdev, like many other medieval saints, as ‘beyond castes and sect’ (jat-panth). Guga and Ramdev are also known as pirs (Muslim saint). In the popular perception as the Muslim believe, they were buried according to Islamic rites, though their tombs are now referred to as samadhis (funeral monument of Hindu-Jain ascetics and saints).\textsuperscript{20} It is interesting to note here that even today the Meghvals, bury their dead.\textsuperscript{21} The fact that Muslims are followers of the cults of Goga and Ramdev compels us to demarcate these deities from other gods of Hindu pantheon.

\textsuperscript{18} The Qabre or simple grave is transformed into mazar once a dead person begins to be venerated as a saint. See A.R Saiyed, Saints and Dargahs in the Indian subcontinent: A Review, and Christian W. Troll eds., Muslim Shrines in India: Their character, History and Significance, pp. 242

\textsuperscript{19} D. Sila Khan; Op. Cit. page 18

\textsuperscript{20} D. Sila Khan; Op. Cit. page 18

\textsuperscript{21} The Rajputana Gazetteer. Vol II; p. 281
Some scholars explain the following of these deities among Muslims by employing such concepts as ‘cultural synthesis’ and ‘folk religion.’ The exchange of ideas between Muslim sufis and Hindu saints and yogis, as well as the ‘natural tendency’ of the indigenous population—especially the lower classes—to absorb foreign elements have been proposed as explanation for this phenomenon. In case of Ramdev, his charisma to impress both Hindus and Muslims along with his love for all human being irrespective of caste and religion have been shown in some modern traditions and writings as reasons for his following among both the communities. However, the popularity of Ramdev and Goga among the Muslims cannot be explained merely in terms of their charisma and saintly virtues. We will have to examine the concrete historical and material circumstances that attracted the Muslims to the cults of ‘Ramsa Pir’ and ‘Goga Pir’.

The cult of Goga and Ramdev with their following among both Hindu and Muslim communities has also been viewed in the framework of ‘syncretistic religious cult’ in which Hindu and Muslim elements seem to have co-existed within a single tradition and where the progenitor of the cult had a dual identity. This syncretism must have been a result of a complex process of interaction between two religio-cultural systems. Goga is also known as zahar pir and Ramdev as Ramsa Pir. P.W Powlett makes his observation in Rajputana Gazetteer that at Dadrewa, a fair in honour of a Musalman Chouhan Saint, named Goga is held. It is probable that Powlett had made this observation based on popular perception in which Goga was looked upon as Muslim. The dual representation

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22 For details on the subject see D. Sila Khan; Op. Cit. P.21
23 D.Sila.Khan; Op. Cit. page 21
25 Powlett, Rajputana Gazetteer; Bikaner State, 1874, P.
of these deities had emerged during the course of medieval centuries owing to the composite nature of their followers. In other words, the identity of Goga and Ramdev as Muslim pirs is the outcome of their already existing popularity among Muslims. One will, then, still have to explain the reasons for their popularity.

In case of Ramdev, scholars have only attempted to categorize him either a Muslim pir or a 'Vaishnavite Bhakti Saint'. Thus D. Sila Khan, for example, points out that Ramdev was converted to Islam from Hinduism, became disciple of pir Satguru, an Ismaili saint and had been deputed among the lower castes to propagate the teachings of Nizarpanth, a sect of Islam. Ramdev movement has been perceived by the author as a forgotten branch of Indian Ismailism. Nizari sect was a branch of Ismailism, which originated from Shia Islam. Ismailism travelled from central Asia and first headquarter of it was established in Gujarat during the twelfth century. In western parts of Hindustan it was known as Sat Panth (True Sect). Similar explanation has also been put forth by scholars in the case of Goga. It is suggested that Goga was born as Hindu and afterwards became Muslim. Such inferences, however, are based on speculative evidence and the Muslim antecedents of Ramdev and Goga are by no means clearly established.

Some myths of more recent origin and probably inspired by modern communal consciousness have sought to explain Ramdev’s popularity among Muslims by trying to establish his superiority over orthodox Islam. According to a popular myth, Ramdev had

27 Sona Ram Bhishnoi, Baba Ramdev: Itihas Avam Sahitya, Scientific Publishers, Jodhpur, 1989 particularly Chapter II
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid. p.31
31 Ibid. p.44
32 G. W Briggs, The Chamars; Low price Publications, Delhi, first Published 1920,p151
become famous for his miraculous powers and his name reached as far as Mecca. Upon hearing about Ramdev, five famous pirs of Mecca decided to test his powers and came to Runecha. Ramdev invited them to his house with folded hands and offered them food. The pirs expressed their inability to eat food without their own plates, which they had forgotten, at Mecca. Ramdev, using his miraculous powers brought the plates from Mecca. Seeing this, the five pirs accepted his powers, declared him as pir, and announced that Muslim should also follow him. The emphasis on Mecca, in the tradition, impresses upon the people that the pirs were no ordinary Muslim saints and Ramdev, who fulfilled their wishes miraculously, deserved to be an undisputed pir of the Muslims. The desire to project Ramdev as saint superior to the pirs of Mecca reflects some tension between orthodox Islam and the unorthodox cults of Ramdev as it exists today. The tale must have originated during the periods of communal antagonism in the 20th century.

The oral traditions originating from within the Muslim followers of Goga explain the popularity of his cult and his mazar in terms of his being converted to Islam. It was because of this that Goga was buried and a mazar was constructed at the spot of his burial. Other oral traditions explain existence of mazar as a result of Goga burying himself alive. According to these traditions, Goga was warned by his mother not to show his face to her as he had killed his cousin brothers. Goga, however, kept visiting his house to meet his wife clandestinely. One day his mother caught him. Not able to withstand the humiliation, Goga buried himself alive. These traditions and myths, however, do not throw adequate light on the causes of the following of Goga and Ramdev.

33 Usha Gupta, Baba Ramdev; Jaipur, 1991, PP.21-24
34 Sagarmal Sharma, Rajasthan Ke Lok Devta; Shekhavati Shodh Partisthan; P. 69.
among Muslims. They seem to be popular explanations for such a following and do not indicate the historical factors responsible for the composite following of these deities.

Western Rajasthan, particularly Nagaur region had been under the rule of Turks from 12th century onwards. Nagaur area came under Turkish rule for the first time in the first wake of Ghaznavide expedition during the reign of Bahram Shah, the king of Ghazni (1117-58 A. D.) Muhamad Bahlim, the Governor of Bahram Shah had revolted and had shifted to Nagaur.\footnote{Elliot and Dowson, \textit{History of India as told by its own Historians}; Vol. III, PP. 279-280. \textit{Cambridge History of India}; Vol III, P. 35, Dr. Dashrath Sharma, \textit{Rajasthan Through The Ages}; Vol. I, P. 257 and \textit{Early Chauhan Dynasties}, P. 40} From thirteenth century onwards, Nagaur had emerged into a prominent centre of the Chisti Sufi order. As per the information contained in an old anonymous text \textit{Prasati}, Shams Khan, who ruled Nagaur during early fifteenth century, was one of the four sons of Ujjihala who appears to have been converted to Islam by Firuz Shah.\footnote{Dr. Dashratha Sharma; “The Khanzadas of Nagaur”: \textit{Their Origin and History}; in \textit{Proceedings of Rajasthan History Congress}, Vol. V, Ajmer, 1972, January 1973, P.32-38} The above fact has been confirmed and in some way supplemented by the \textit{Mirat-i-Sikandari} and the Sanskrit works written under the patronage of Madanpala.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

The establishment and continuation of the rule of Indo-Turkish rulers and Muslim converts over parts of western Rajasthan exercised its profound impact on the cultural and religious lives of the people. The ruling Rajputs who opted for conversion to Islam were known as Khanzadas. Non-Muslim Rajputs did not consider these converts foreigners or outsiders as they shared a common religio-cultural heritage. This becomes explicitly clear from the fact that even matrimonial alliances between the Khanzadas and their Rajput rulers were not unusual.\footnote{D. Sharma, \textit{Op. Cit.}}
Contact with Islam, through Muslim rulers and Chishti sufi saints of Nagaur and Ajmer became the factors responsible for adding Muslim component to the ranks of followers of these deities. Goga, who belonged to the Chauhan Dynasty of Rajput rulers, was succeeded by a branch of his family that, after its conversion to Islam, came to be called Kyamkhani Muslims. The available sources indicate that a branch of Chauhan, to which Goga belonged, converted to Islam. The important sources, in this regard, is a work entitled ‘Kyamkhan Rasau’, which a Poet, named Jan wrote during the latter half of the seventeenth century. Poet Jan was the son of Nawab Alaf Khan who ruled Fatehpur during first half of seventeenth century. Jan, during his fifty years of active writing carrier is believed to have produced seventy-five literary works. Many of them are important from the historical point of view. Jan was the disciple of Shekh Muhamad Chisti, a Sufi saint of Hansi. He wrote Kyam Khan Rasau in 1691 A.D. The author, in this work, describes in detail the dynastic tree of Chauhans, where name of Goga figures prominently.39 The author argues that approximately after twelve generations of Goga Chauhan, his descendant Karamchand became a Muslim. Mote Rai, father of Karamchand ruled Dadreva, which was once ruled by Goga. After conversion of Karamchand to Islam, his descendants were known as Kyam Khani Chauhans. This stream of Chauhan Rajputs, though it had adopted Islam-did not give up their belief and customs completely. The old and new religious and cultural identities remained vague and overlapping. Even after becoming Muslims, they did not give up their title and continued worshiping their erstwhile deities. But the mode of worship and making offerings changed over a period of time and they turned their family deity into a pir. A

39 Kavi Jan, Kyam Khan Rasau, P.14-15
mazar must have been constructed at the place of his burial under the patronage of Kyam Khani rulers of this region. This appears to be plausible explanation for the popularity of the cult of Goga among certain sections of the Muslims.

In pre modern society, religious identities among majority of the population remained vague. Many lower castes, untouchables and tribal were never considered part of the “Hindu society’ by the upper caste groups nor did they look upon themselves as Hindu. Worshipping the Hindu gods in temples and participation in rituals pertaining to Hindu religion for lower caste were a taboo. Citing various examples from 19th century Punjab, Harjot Oberoi mentions that hundreds of thousands of Hindus regularly undertook pilgrimages to what were apparently Muslim shrines while vast numbers of Muslims conducted part of their life cycle rituals as if they were Hindus and equally, Sikhs attended Muslim shrines and Hindu sacred centres.40

Interaction between Sufi sects of Islam and non-Brahmanical sects of Western Rajasthan must have helped in bringing the lower caste groups closer to Islam. One such popular non-Brahmanical sect was the Nathpanth. The fact that Nathpant was a non Brahmanical unorthodox sect is explicitly brought out by the method of initiation of a new member into the sect. The prospective disciple, on a pre-decided day, offered presents to his guru. A two edged knife to split the ears was presented to the candidate. The candidate then took the vow not to engage in trade, not to take employment, not to keep dangerous weapon, not to marry and to protect his ears. Then, a barber shaved his

40 Harjot Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition; Oxford University Press, Delhi,1994, pp.3-4
head and the scalp lock (*chutiya*).\(^{41}\) In some cases, the prerogative of cutting the scalp-lock remained with the guru,\(^{42}\) a clear defiance of an established Brahmanical custom. Among upper caste Hindus, in the north Indian society, cutting the scalp lock was considered a non-Hindu activity amounting to polluting one’s religion. Those who did not keep the scalp lock while shaving off their head were generally equated with Muslim and looked down upon by the upper caste Hindus. Gorakhpanthis buried their dead and rarely, if ever, employed the service of Brahmins. The fellow yogis performed the last rights.\(^{43}\) Gorakhpanthis did not recognize caste hierarchy. Within the sect, there was no caste restriction upon eating, drinking and smoking together.\(^{44}\)

The history of interaction and exchange of ideas between Muslim sufis and Hindu saints and yogis goes back to thirteenth century. Sufism particularly the orders such as the Chishtis adapted itself quickly to the Indian way of life. Some kind of interaction among the *Kanphata* (split eared) yogis or followers of Gorakhnath and the Indian Sufis was evident. Shaikh Nizamud-Din Auliya’s description of his conversation with yogis shows that he was impressed with some of their theories.\(^{45}\) Yogic postures and breath control became an integral part of Chishtiyya sufi practice, and controlled breathing was incorporated finally as a vital aspect in the sufi orders.\(^{46}\) Medieval Rajasthan witnessed numerous settlements of sufi saints. Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti was the first sufi to settle in Rajasthan in late twelfth century. Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri was another famous Sufi saint who settled in a village Suwal near Nagaur in thirteenth century. He lived like an

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\(^{41}\) George Weston Briggs; *Gorakhnath and the kanphata yogis*; Motilal Banarsidas, First edition Calcutta, 1938 p.28

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 39

\(^{44}\) G.W. Briggs; *Gorakhnath and kanphata yogis*; Motilal Banarsidas; First edition Calcutta, 1938 p.27


\(^{46}\) Ibid. 256
ordinary peasant, which must had facilitated his interaction with common people in the area. The distance these sufi saints of the Chishti order maintained from the ruling group was an important factor in facilitating the association of common people with them. Like most of the villagers, amongst whom Nagauri lived, he was a strict vegetarian and strongly advocated that no harm be done to any form of life.47

Sufi practice, establishment of numerous tiny rural mosques and shrines in the interiors of western Rajasthan must have served as the basis for acquiring Muslim identity by numerous people belonging to lower caste which had remained outside Brahmanical fold.48 From a religious perspective, these same institutions helped the diffusion of uniquely Islamic conceptions of divine and human authority among people and groups under their socio-economic influence. This explains categorization of numerous lower castes in the census conducted by British officials, under Hindu as well as Muslim heads.49 Rajputana Gazetteers that was compiled in 1909 records that among Muslims, there is a significant size of Rajput converts to Islam. Rajputs in Jodhpur region are one eleventh of the total population. About 4% of them are Rajput Muslims, found chiefly in Mallani, Nagaur, Sanchor and Sheo. They, however, scarcely differ in their customs and manners from their counterparts- Hindu Rajputs.50 In early twentieth century Rajputs numbered 2623 in Bikaner city which included 653 Muslims. In the entire Bikaner region, however, the strength of Muslims was more than 66000 (sixty six thousand).

47 S.N. Dubey; Religious Movements in Rajasthan: Ideas and Antiquities; Jaipur, 1996, P.93
48 In Nagaur a Dargah of Hazrath Sufi Tarkin Sahib has been in existence for last 700 years. Every year a fair known as Urs fair takes place at Dargah. Alms to the Fakirs and prizes to the Quawals and other musicians are distributed, see, Mehmnakhas; Jodhpur, C2/9,vol III,1940-46, RSAB.
49 Lower castes such as Balai, Bhambi, Chamar, etc are included both in Hindu and Muslim religious categories, in Census Of India; 1901, PP. 166-69
50 Rajputana Gazetteers; The Western Rajputana State Residency and the Bikaner Agency; Vol. III A; 1909; P.86
Again their customs and beliefs were not significantly different from Hindus. Muslims in the vicinity of Bhatner have claimed themselves as descendants of Bhati, Chayal and Johiya Rajputs. In Hisar region Muslim descendants of Rajputs are called Pachhadas. Among Muslim tribes, there are several Rajput converts to Islam. Khairawi, Jhungira, Under, Bagria, Deswali, Manglia, Rajar, Sumra are some of them. Gradual adoption of Islamic practices and religious beliefs by these groups did not lead them to give up earlier belief system, customs, and practices.

The term 'conversion' ordinarily connotes a sudden and total transformation in which a prior religious identity is wholly rejected and replaced by a new one. The religious process in western Rajasthan could not be different from other parts of South Asia where the process of Islamization, as a social phenomenon, proceeded so gradually as to be nearly imperceptible. Thus, it will not be wrong to conclude that those, who adopted Islam, along with it, continued to worship Ramdev and Goga, whom they had deified. The only change, however, was that these deities for them now were not gods but pirs (religious divines)

II. Change in Social Composition of followers of the Folk-deities during 19th and 20th Centuries

Sources and traditions of nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal that the deities under study no longer remained the deities of lower castes, artisan, and Muslims alone. Recent

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51 Rajputana Gazetteers; The Western Rajputana State Residency and the Bikaner Agency; Vol. III A; 1909; P.86
52 M.A Sherring, Hindu tribes and Castes, vol. III, Cosmos publication, Delhi, 1974, P. 90
53 Many of the descendants of the old converts still retain their ancient Hindu customs and practices. The local saints and folk-deities are regularly worshiped, the Brahmans officiate at all family ceremonies alongside with the Musalman priests, and if in matters of creed they are Muslims, in matters of form they are Hindus. in Census of India; 1901; Rajputana; P.49
anthropological studies also provide insight into the significant changes that occurred in the social composition of the followers of the deities in question. Both the lower caste as well as higher caste groups have claimed these gods as their own in official surveys also.

(a) New Followers of Ramdev, Goga, Pabu and Teja

At the turn of the twentieth century, Ramdev was predominantly the deity of balais, bambhis, raigars, meghwals, dhedhs, darzis, gadarias, kumbhars, and nais and other similar groups. According to the Census of 1901, these castes were included in the fifth and seventh groups in social precedence. Nai, darji, rabari, gadaria and kumbhar were classified fifth in the hierarchy of castes, tribes and races and the rest of the castes were classified as untouchables in the seventh group, which contained mainly the leather dyers and tanners. The meghwals were also referred to as chamars or bhambi, meghwals were well known as an occupational group engaged in tanning of hides although they also engage in farming and work as agricultural labourers. The meghwals specialize in leatherwork particularly in shoe making with different designs. The caste has acquired the title Meghwal from Megha Rishi believed to have been their common ancestor.

They are also called, in a somewhat derogatory manner, dhedh or dhedha, as they drag away dead animals. The word dhedha has been derived from the Gujarati word dhayadavan, to drag. It is evident from the census that Ramdev has been venerated primarily by the Meghvals. But the religious beliefs and practices of castes and communities recorded in census report of 1891 show that many sub groups of upper caste

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54 Census of India 1901, Rajputana, Census of India, 1911 vol XXII Rajputana and Ajmer Merwar a part I, Report by E.H Kealy, Ajmer, Report Murdumshumari Rajmarwar, 1891
55 K.S Singh, People of Rajasthan, part two, vol xxxviii, 628 to 631.
56 Swami Gokuldas, Meghvansh Itihas, Phulchand bookseller, Ajmer
57 R.E. Enthovan, Bombay, Govt central Press:1922,pp 43
had included Goga and Ramdev in the list of their deities. It illustrates that many Rathors worshipped Goga and Ramdev along with Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.\footnote{Munshi Hardayal Singh; \textit{The Caste of Marwar}; Jodhpur, 1894, P.28} The Rajputs are also shown to have been the followers of Ramdev in the traditions narrated, sung, and preached by devotional singers during nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is suggested in the traditions that untouchables can not only be the disciples of a Rajput preacher but also be a co-disciple along with the Rajput followers.\footnote{D. Sila Khan, Conversion and Shifting Identities: Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan, Delhi, Manohar, 1997, p. 97} This constant, rather `unorthodox' association of members of clean and unclean castes has been a characteristic feature of the Ramdev tradition illustrated in a famous \textit{bhajan} composed by Likhmoji Mali- a low-caste devotee of Ramdev.\footnote{D. S. Khan \textit{Op. Cit.}, P.97} Interaction with a number of low caste followers of Ramdev at Runecha on 5\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2001, revealed that Ramdev is considered a universal pan-Hindu god even by the untouchables. Their understanding undoubtedly is based on their interaction with the upper caste followers of the Ramdev cult in their villages.

It appears that in western Rajasthan Rajputs, Brahmans, Baniya, Jains and others who traditionally were not the followers of Ramdev began to worship him. However, they did not worship Ramdev as a universal leading deity but as a god with `special' magical powers to be invoked on certain occasions for certain specific needs.\footnote{Mira Reym Binford, \textit{Mixing In The Color Of Ram Of Ramuja}, Po. Cit., PP.120-142} These groups, therefore, can be called only as occasional devotees of the Ramdev cult. The existence of Ramdev temples in most of the cities of Rajasthan and in metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Madras and Bombay testify to the spread of the Ramdev cult along with the
migration of devotees to new places in search of livelihood and employment. Ramdev, who had been a minor god for Baniya and Jain communities, has assumed greater importance in the day to day religious life of these sections after their migration to the cities. Folk tales of comparatively recent origins suggest that by nineteenth and early twentieth centuries different upper caste groups such as Mahajans (Merchants) and Rajputs had joined the ranks of Ramdev's followers. According to one such tale, a Mahajan of Runecha was advised by Ramdev to trade overseas. On his way back, the ship of Mahajan began to sink. Ramdev, who was at Runecha at that time, saved the ship using his miraculous powers. The Mahajan became his follower. Harji Bhati, a Rajput devotee of Ramdev is shown in another story, to have been arrested by a Rajput Jagirdar. The Jagirdar became follower of Ramdev when Harj Bhati was released by the divine powers of Ramdev. It is clear that these tales were coined to legitimize the acceptance of the Ramdev cult by the persons belonging to the upper castes.

Apart from upper castes, the tribal people who had their own deities gradually joined the ranks of the followers of Ramdev. A popular tradition depicts a group of Banjaras becoming followers of Ramdev after witnessing his miraculous powers. These Banjaras, a tribe and traders by profession, once reached Runecha with bullocks loaded with sugar. Near a pond, they met Ramdev who asked them what they were carrying on the bullocks. Banjaras hesitated and lied to him that it was salt which they had brought for selling. After Ramdev had gone, Banjaras discovered that their sugar had turned into salt. They realised their mistake and went to Ramdev. Ramdev sermonized them that

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62 Ibid.
63 Laxmi Dutt Varath; Shri Ramdev Lilamrat Katha; Jodhpur, date of Publication not given, PP.13-15
64 Usha Gupta; Baba Ramdev; Po. Cit., PP.31-32
lying was a sin which they should never commit again in future. Banjaras, thereafter returned to their bullocks and found that salt had become sugar again.\textsuperscript{65} The sources indicate that Bhils, who were not the traditional followers of Ramdev also, began to worship him. An early twentieth century reform movement among the Bhils, known as Bhagat movement, brought them in contact with religio-cultural practices of other castes. As a result, many of them became followers of Ramdev.\textsuperscript{66} Kamdia or Ramdev \textit{panth} as it is called is a sect of Dasnami Bhagats. Ramdev is also known as Jargaji among the Bhils. Interestingly Jargaji is assigned a lower status in the hierarchy of gods than the position according to the original deities such as Bheru and Megra Baba.\textsuperscript{67} Although the Bhagat movement was aimed at sanskritizing the Bhils, the traditional deities and forms of rituals continued to retain position of prominence.

The \textit{chamars} largely have been the believers of Goga in twentieth century.\textsuperscript{68} The tanners, the skinners, manufacturers of leather articles and the shoemakers were categorized under the general term \textit{chamars} in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{69} Besides \textit{chamars}, Goga is also associated with \textit{jogis} and \textit{bhagats}. The \textit{jogis} are the followers of \textit{Gorakhnath}, whom they believe to be still living. Besides \textit{jogis}, popular traditions mention Goga’s popularity among peasants. Many customs of peasants reflect the importance of Goga in their daily life. For instance on the first day of ploughing the field, a thread known as \textit{Goga rakhdi} was tied to the plough and the peasants uttered ‘\textit{hali baldi gogo rakhvalo}’.\textsuperscript{70} Goga was

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\item \textsuperscript{65} Usha Gupta, Op. Cit.,PP.25-27
\item \textsuperscript{66} R.S Mann; “Structure and Role Dynamics among the Bhils of Rajasthan: A case of the Bhagats”, in K.S Singh eds., \textit{Tribal Movements in India}-vol. 2 Manohar, Delhi, 1983.p.13
\item \textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid}. pp. 319
\item \textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid}. pp178
\item \textsuperscript{69} G.W. Briggs, \textit{The Chamars},1920,pp11
\item \textsuperscript{70} Goga would protect the peasant and bullocks from snake bites, the snakes usually appeared when the soil was upturned by the ploughshare; \textit{Report Murdumshumari Raj Marwar} 1891 page 14
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\end{footnotesize}
venerated among the Jat peasants who were the cultivating caste throughout Marwar.\textsuperscript{71} If the castes of numerous believers recorded during an interview at Goga Meri fair in the year 1999 is taken as basis for extrapolation, it can be concluded that the Jats still constitutes the significant chunk of Goga’s followers. Ethnographers have also mentioned the Mirasans, a snake tribe worshipping Goga as snake god.\textsuperscript{72} Most of the castes following the cult of the deities under study fall into the category of what presently are characterized as scheduled castes and backward castes. By middle of the nineteenth century ordinary Rajputs had began to join the rank and file of Goga’s followers. \textit{Punjab Notes and Queries}, a nineteenth century report records that Goga was worshiped by Chauhan Rajputs.\textsuperscript{73}

By the middle of the twentieth century, Goga had acquired the status of the god of all castes and communities. A new dimension to his worship was also added. He was no longer worshiped for his traditional specificities alone. The historical process of expansion and change in the social composition of followers in terms of caste and communities was accompanied by a simultaneous process of assumption of a higher and universal status by the deity. Both the processes, it seems, reinforced each other. The traditional specificities of Goga as a deity limited the scope of the expansion of the cult among new groups Introduction of new social groups as believers helped him rise to a higher level, where he began to be worshipped both for specific and general purposes. The higher status attained by the deity, in turn, enabled him to attract more followers, particularly from the upper castes. Maheshwari, a Brahmin by caste from Suriya village

\textsuperscript{71} B.L. Bhadani, \textit{Peasants, artisans, and Entrepreneurs. Economy of Marwar in the seventeenth century}, Rawat publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, p153
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Punjab notes and Queries}; March 1885 vol. II
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. P. 30
of western Uttar Pradesh, who had visited the shrine of Goga on 5th September 1999, informed during a personal interaction that he believed Goga to be a Kasht Nivarak (The one who removes all pains and sufferings). Meheshwari was not aware of Goga’s association with snakes. A section of upper caste people, who had been traditionally worshiping gods of Hindu pantheon have joined ranks of Goga’s followers owing to the attributes of Goga which make him resemble a Brahmanical deity. Maheshwari considered Goga no different from other gods of Hindu pantheon. The religious discourse carried out through professional and social association of believers has been an instrument of dissemination of religious beliefs. His peer group in his locality introduced Maheshwari to Goga worship.

Most of the upper caste devotees of Goga, in their interaction during the fair at Goga’s shrine in September 1999, revealed that either they had turned believers recently or had been worshiping Goga for a few generations. Devotees from lower orders of caste hierarchy on the other hand were found to be traditional followers. Their claim to this effect was borne out from several personal observations of the present researcher. Unlike upper caste believers, all of them had come with their families from far off regions. For many of them, it took two days of travel to reach the shrine. Most of them stayed at the shrine in the open for two to three days. Not able to buy food, owing to their poor economic conditions, they brought raw food material and utensils with them and stayed in the open. Such devotional commitment, however, was not visible among the upper caste devotees for whom Goga was just one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon. For the lower caste devotees, on the other hand, Goga was the chief deity. Hence, he deserved complete devotion. The awareness of lower caste devotees about the traditions associated
with Goga explains their intimate relationship with their deity. Shamli, a teli (low caste) narrated the story of Goga’s birth and offered an interesting explanation as to how different communities perceived Goga. Hindus, according to her, addresses Goga as Jahar Vir, Vir meaning brave. Muslims calls him pir and Sikhs worship Goga as bir (Brother). Though, the composition of followers in terms of castes and communities have changed significantly in recent times, the traditional devotees, belonging to lower social order, are holding on to those traditions in which Goga still occupies the place of chief deity.

Thoris, a lower caste, revere Pabu as their chief deity. They, according to a colonial ethnographic account, are also looked down upon as notorious robbers.\(^{74}\) A nineteenth century narrative depicts them as a group, ‘which engrossed the distinctive epithet of evil spirits and were even called sons of the devil’. They have been ranked with bawuris, khengars and other professional thieves scattered over Rajasthan.\(^{75}\) Pabuji is also the main deity of the rebaris, also known as raikas. Camel breeding was the main profession of the raikas.\(^{76}\) While examining the change in the composition of followers, a distinction has to be made in case of Pabu. Unlike Goga and Ramdev, change in caste composition of in case of Pabu’s follower does not seem to be significant. However, this is not to suggest that Pabu is continuing as a caste specific deity. The higher castes do repose faith in him and do not deny his existence. Faith of higher caste in case of Pabu, nevertheless, remains passive. They would neither make an effort to visit his temple especially for making offerings or performing puja. However, if the temple happens to be on their way,

\(^{74}\) M.A Sherring, *Hindu tribes and Castes*, vol. III, Cosmos publication, Delhi, 1974, pp. 63
\(^{76}\) Rajputana Gazetteer, the W.R.S Residency and Bikaner agency, vol. III-A 1905.
they might just stop and pay obeisance. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find some higher caste families worshipping Pabu on regular basis. A Brahman family in village Gadhwala in Jodhpur region not only worships Pabu on regular basis, but has also built a platform dedicated to the memory of Pabu. This act of the family, however, has not encouraged other higher caste family in the village to follow the suit. Though accepted by higher caste, Pabu still remains family-specific deity. The passive faith of other members of the higher caste families becomes active only under specific circumstance where cure for cattle diseases are sought.

Teja’s case is also not very different. Deified by Jats and Gurjars initially, Teja enjoys his following primarily among Jats. Evidence of Teja worship among higher castes is very rare. Personal interaction with people belonging to the Jat caste in Pali in Jodhpur region and village Runia near Bikaner has revealed that they visited the temples of Teja and worshipped the deity only to make vows and to make offerings if the wish was realised. People belonging to Brahman, Rajput, and other higher castes rarely visited these temples.

(b) The Priests of the Cult: The Claims of Old and New Followers

It is not only that in pre-eighteenth century, the devotees of these deities were from depressed castes, but the pujaris also came from lower caste groups. The priests of the bhambis and other lower castes, were variously called garo, garuda or gurda, who enjoyed a higher social rank among the lower castes in the region. The pujari in

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77 Vinay Kumar Srivastava; Religious Renunciation of a pastoral People; OUP, 1997; P. 56
78 Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Op. Cit., P. 56
79 Sukhvir Singh Gahlot, Bansi Dhar, Castes and tribes of Rajasthan, Research Publishers,Jodhpur,1989, p.199
Ramdev's temples was mainly from the *kamad* caste.\(^8^0\) During a personal correspondence with some families in a village, 'Khariya', bordering western Rajasthan, it was found that the Ramdev temple in the village was still managed by a priest belonging to *chamar* community. Managing the temple and performing *puja* in Ramdev temples, an exclusive prerogative of lower castes, came under tremendous pressure from higher caste groups who by late nineteenth century began to insist on having their own priests. A number of Ramdev temples were visited in the regions of Ganganagar, Bikaner, and Jodhpur. Several of them, as informed by their priests, were eighty to hundred years old and were managed by priests belonging to Brahman or Rajput castes. Majority of temples, however, are still managed by lower caste priests, dominantly by *chamars*. The Ramdev temple at Masuria hill near Jodhpur is still managed by the trust of *darji* (tailor), community.\(^8^1\) The official informed that in past the priest of the temple was recruited from *darji* community, but from last twenty-five years a Brahmin priest has been assigned the task of performing *puja* in the temple.

In the case of Pabu, the community of *bhopas*, who are from *nayak* caste, act as priests. Bhopas derive their name from the respective deity they worship. *Pabuji Ra-Bhopa* are a community by themselves who are the worshippers and propitiators of Pabuji who, it is believed, is the protector of their community.\(^8^2\) *Bhopas*, over the centuries have become a caste in themselves and earn their livelihood from performing *pujas* and recitation of *phad*. Their services are also sought for curing cattle. They seek to cure the animals by invoking their deity- Pabu. They are also categorized as lower caste.

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\(^8^0\) Kamads are an offshoot of the Meghwal caste. Their profession is singing and they usually sing bhajans of Ramdev and play *Tandura* and *Manjira*, Report Murdumshumari Raj Marwar 1869

\(^8^1\) Personally visited and corresponded with an official of the temple trust on 9\(^{th}\) Oct 2000

\(^8^2\) *People of India* p.179
Pujaris in the temples of Teja are also known as bhopa. However, there is an assistant of the chief bhopa called hajuria. Hajuria is responsible for cleaning the temple and preparing the material for ritual healing. He also helps bhopa in remembering case histories and assisting bhopa in treating the patients. Hajurias of many temples of Teja are also from Rajput caste.83 Bhopa traditionally belonged to lower castes, and performed healing rituals in temples or platforms of Teja. During her field survey, Natalie Sarrazin had come across a temple of Teja that was managed by a Rajput priest. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that higher caste persons working as priests of Teja is not an uncommon site.

Similarly, bhagats are known as priests of Goga, who popularize the worship of Goga in their respective villages, receive alms on his behalf, conduct related rituals and play a leading role in disseminating the traditions associated with Goga. They are usually recruited from among the lower castes. It is not uncommon to find members of jogi caste serving in this capacity. Their position as bhagats rests on a mythical association between Goga and a particular school of yogis led by Guru Gorakhnath.84 Twentieth century, however, has witnessed Brahmans taking over the role of priests of Goga in main shrines. At Gogameri, the main shrine of Goga, worship is mediated through a Chayal Muslim priest for eleventh months a year. In the month of Bhadon (August-September) when the devotees visits the temple in lacs, a Brahman priest joins the regular priest.85 There are two sanctorum inside the temple for both the priests who perform puja. The two priests

83 Natalie Sarrazin, "Singing Khyala: Ritual Music and Trance Healing in a Tejaji Temple" in Varsha Joshi eds. Culture Communities and Change; Delhi; 2002; P271
85 Munshi Sohanlal; Tawarikh Raj Shree Bikaner;; P.38, RSAB
divide the offerings made by the devotees.\textsuperscript{86} Although the priests belonging to the upper caste groups have increasingly begun to mediate the worship of the folk-deities in their shrines, the desire on the part of lower caste devotees to maintain their traditional religio-cultural identity remain equally strong. The low caste devotees of the folk-deities express this identity by sticking to the traditional rituals and modes of worship—the subject matter of the subsequent chapter.

\textsuperscript{86} Personally observed. Also see Balram Sharma; \textit{Gogaji Itehas}; Rajasthan; 1992; p. 69