CHAPTER – VII

Conclusion
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The religious cults of four popular folk-deities-Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja-emerged and grew, primarily among the lower caste social groups, in western Rajasthan during the period between 12th and 15th centuries. The growth of these cults was shaped and sustained by unique ecological conditions and prevailing political and social conditions. The emergence of the cults of the deities in the nearly ‘rainless’ tract of Rajasthan has necessitated investigation of the relationship of this phenomenon with the physical, social and religious environment of this region. The ecology of the region, defined by semi-arid desert, scarcity of rainfall and water, was an important factor in shaping religious-cultural lives of the people. Confronted with the precarious living conditions created by the harsh ecological conditions, people of this region evolved pragmatic strategies of survival but, more importantly, negotiated the harsh environment by evolving multiple cultural strategies of which the widespread belief in the beneficent powers of numerous folk-deities was an integral feature. Being out of the ambit of the Brahmanical religion, the lower castes and other subordinate and marginal groups elevated their heroes and historical legendary figures to the status of deities by identifying them as supernatural beings who could be invoked through worship, ritual and pilgrimage to offer help, protection and nourishment in distress and adversity. These deities were desired to mitigate the threats caused by the hostile ecological environment, and therefore their representation in the folk-lore, rituals, and other traditions became rooted in, and was shaped, by the ecological characteristics of the region. Protection from the snakebite,
welfare and protection of cattle wealth and other community resources, and curing of diseases were some of the important everyday concerns of the local communities living in this part of Rajasthan. Association of Goga and Teja with snakes and belief in the, power of these deities to cure snakebite, and propagation of this association through popular myths and tales reflect the popular anxieties pertaining to uncertainty of life and the popular strategies to seek supernatural help.

The physical environment does not, however, explain why these cults originated and grew during a particular period. This necessitates an investigation into the process of historical change in western Rajasthan during the pre-eighteenth century period. The cults grew against the background of such political developments as invasions of the Turks and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, Rajputization of various emerging groups who captured territory and political power, and, finally, the emergence of the powerful Rathor state of Jodhpur (and also that of the Bikaner state) in the midst of political anarchy, confusion and warfare between various clans and tribes. These changes along with the consolidation of Brahmanical social structure and partial peasantification of pastoral communities formed the necessary backdrop against which the cults of the folk-deities took concrete shape.

We have sought to establish that the four deities under study were actually historical figures who flourished in different parts of western Rajasthan at different points of time in the period between 12th and 15th centuries. All four of them identified themselves with the everyday concerns and anxieties of the oppressed groups of the society. Three of the,-Goga, Pabu and Ramdev are believed to have been Rajputs but by associating themselves primarily with the lowest caste groups, they violated the norms of
Brahmanical caste system and the Rajput code of conduct. This seems to have been the initial basis of their being glorified by the non-Brahmanical, non-Rajput sections of the society. The thesis has made an attempt to establish that these historical personalities did not conform to the values of the ruling Rajput elites and rather emerged as champions of the interests of the lower caste peasants and pastoralists by protecting their lives and cattle against the plundering raids of the invaders-whether Rajputs or Turks.

In course of time, as their posthumous popularity increased and demand for more information about their activities grew, various legends surrounding their lives came into existence. At the same time, from heroes they were transformed into supernatural figures and became objects of deification. The original followers of these deified figures mainly belonged to the subordinate and oppressed social groups. However, by the seventeenth century, the Charans – as the ideologues of the ruling Rajput dynasties, had began to incorporate these legends. When the intensifying internal and external crisis of the Rajput state forced their rulers, nobles and ideologues to co-opt the cults of the folk-deities into their religious system and as an integral part of the Rajput Dharma. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Brahmans followed suit by appropriating these deities as their own in the wake of the growing strength of the lower-caste movements that challenged the very basis of the Brahmanical ideology.

However, as we have seen, the modern processes of Rajputization and Hinduization could suppress the original version of these cults that prevailed among the lower caste peasants and artisanal groups. Time and again during the last two centuries, the lower caste followers of the deities have increasingly asserted the authenticity of their system and mode of worship and have resisted the attempts f the Rajputs and Brahmans
to homogenize the modes of worship of the deities. To conclude, there still exist and prevail various vibrant non-Brahmanical cults of the folk-deities despite the numerous attempts of the ruling classes and dominant Brahmanical groups to suppress and reform the non-Brahmanical components of the cults.