CHAPTER – I

Introduction
Chapter-1

Introduction

The study explores the emergence, growth, and transformation of the non-Brahmanical, lower caste religious cults based on the worship of four popular folk-deities in later medieval and modern Rajasthan, particularly in its western part. These four deities are Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja. The widespread religious phenomenon centring around the cultic worship of these deities among non-Brahmanical social groups- and later even among the Rajputs and Brahmans- has been examined against the background of prevailing ecological conditions in the desert region and also in the context of changing political, economic, social and religious circumstances. The thesis focuses on the ability of the subordinate social groups such as pastoralists, peasants and artisans to constantly innovate new religious beliefs and practices to respond to the harsh environmental milieu and to a socio-political structure based on the hierarchies of caste, class and relations of dominance and subordination. The study lays emphasis on both the process of change and resilience in the cults of Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja, and argues that despite various attempts on the part of the Rajput ruling elites and Brahmans to appropriate these cults in the last two or three centuries for politico-ideological legitimation and for reinforcing their hegemonic position, the oppressed and subjugated classes and castes have continued to uphold and practice a version of these cults that is essentially non-Brahmanical, contestory, and resistive of all attempts of the elites and Brahmans to make the cults appear as their own.

The guiding principle of the thesis is that although the Brahmanical religion and the ‘folk’ religion of the lower classes never existed in isolation from each other, and
frequently drew upon the cultural forms and resources of each other. They stood in direct opposition to each other due to their association with different, and even antagonistic, social groups. Similarly, while the thesis gives due consideration to the theme of interaction between elite culture and the popular culture- an interaction that may alter and modify them both-yet it seeks to emphasize that the penetration of the Rajput value system into the cults of folk-deities did not fundamentally change their subaltern character.

Rather than viewing the cults of Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja as part of Hindu religion and religious reform movement within it, the thesis lays stress on identifying the non-Brahmanical sources of the worship of these deities. It seeks to explore those numerous non-Brahmanical religious traditions that shaped, and were, in turn, shaped by the popular cults of folk-deities. With the exception of few, most of the modern scholars, particularly modern Rajasthani historians and experts on religious traditions, have studied the cults of folk-deities either as part of Hindu religion (as “little traditions” of Hinduism) or as a theme of Hindu-Muslim religious interaction (‘syncretic’ cults) or as part of religious reform movement. Hardly has any scholar addressed the issue of the difference, even opposition, between the religious traditions associated with the cults of the folk-deities and the basic features of the Brahmanical religion.

1. Chapterization

The remaining part of this introductory chapter addresses two important themes: defining ‘popular’ religion both in general, theoretical terms and in the context of Rajasthan, and secondly, the critical survey of primary sources and secondary literature on the subject. A brief critical discussion of recent works by historians and
anthropologists on the theme of 'popular' religion is followed by an analysis of the applicability of the concept to our field of study. The last section in the Introduction examines the primary sources used for the study—bardic literary and oral sources, archival sources (available mainly at Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner), modern colonial-orientalist ethnographic accounts and census reports. Wherever required the present scholar has also drawn upon her personal observations (during the course of fieldwork) and her interaction with the devotees of the cults of the folk-deities.

Chapter II deals with the ecological, political and socio-economic milieu of Rajasthan during the period between 15th and 17th centuries—the period during which these cults initially emerged and grew. The four deities chosen for the present study are revered, like many other gods, in western and central Rajasthan—a region dominated by the overwhelming presence of the Thar desert. The emergence of the cult of the four deities cannot by understood unless located against the background of this ecological setting and the emerging political and social structure. The desert affected every aspect of the life of the peasants and pastoral communities. The sphere of their religious beliefs and practices could not have remained untouched by the harsh presence of the desert which made life a continuous struggle. It is our contention that many aspects of the cults of the folk-deities reflect the everyday material needs and concerns of the agriculturists and herdsmen who had to struggle for sheer survival in the harsh natural environment. The Chapter also discusses the dynamics of political change in western Rajasthan in the period between 15th and 17th centuries and then sets the activities of the historical figures (who were later deified by their followers) against the background of the processes of political conflicts and Rajput state formation, particularly the formation of the Rathor
state of Jodhpur. The socio-economic transformation of the region, as characterized by such processes as growth of agricultural settlements and partial change of Jat pastoralists into peasants, has also been touched upon in this chapter. As will be shown, these processes had significant bearings on the emergence and cults of the folk-deities under study.

Chapter Three begins with the explorations of the theme of the folk-deities as actually living historical personalities. Although sources in this regard are unreliable and replete with legends and later interpolations, we have attempted to retrieve certain original 'facts' about the lives and times of Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja. All four of them probably belonged to the period between 12th-13th and 15th centuries. The Chapter then seeks to stress their association with lower and lowest sections of the society. This association along with their determination to fight for protecting the lives, cattle wealth and other resources of the peasants and pastoralists have been discussed in this Chapter. The Chapter examines how the actions of these historical figures made them objects of glorification and ultimate deification. The processes of glorification and deification have been dealt with in the case of each one of them. The factors responsible for deification have been examined in detail.

Chapter Four shifts the focus from the medieval centuries to the period between the 18th and 20th centuries and discusses the changing dimensions of the cults of the four deified personalities during this period. The Chapter opens with an overview of the political changes in Rajasthan during the 18th and 19th centuries. The focus here is on crisis of the Rajput political system in the wake of the collapse of the Mughal Empire, internal conflicts, clan rivalries, advent of the Marathas, their plundering raids and
extortions and ultimately the advent of the British and establishment of the colonial dominance over the Rajput states. How the crisis-ridden Rajput polity searched for new solutions, including new sources of legitimation, has been examined in this Chapter. The ‘Rajputization’ of the cults of the folk-deities has been viewed as a process of religious appropriation by the Rajput ruling elites facing a severe crisis of survival and existence. It has been stressed that the appropriation of the cults of the folk-deities was just one among several ideological strategies adopted by the Rajput ruling classes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Various forms and dimensions of the ‘Rajputization’ process have been discussed in the Chapter. The Chapter then examines the theme of the Hinduization and Brahmanization of the worship of the popular deities during the 19th and 20th centuries—the period which also witnessed a powerful lower-caste challenge to Brahmanical hegemony and religious dominance in Rajasthan and other parts of India. In the face of growing assertiveness by lower-castes, their attempts to break the monopoly of the Brahmans and other upper-castes over religious symbols and sacred centres. The ability of their most enlightened spokespersons and intellectuals to articulate their social and religious aspirations, and the growth of the national movement compelled the Brahmans to have a fresh look at the popular cults which they had ridiculed and despised in the earlier period. The Brahmanical appropriation transformed the cults of Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja to some extent. The Chapter, however, seeks to highlight the differences between the original version of folk-cults (as practiced by the lower caste groups) and the new versions as espoused by the Rajputs and Brahmans. The resistive and contestory character of the lower-caste perceptions and worship of the cults of the folk-deities has been emphasized.
The Fifth Chapter is a study of the social composition of the followers and worshippers of the folk-deities. Beginning with a following among non-Brahmanical peasant-pastoral communities (such as Jats and Gujars) and artisan groups (mostly belonging to lowest castes and untouchable groups), the cults of Goga and Ramdev- in particular, acquired new followers among the Muslims and tribal groups. The factors behind the spread of the Goga cult and Ramdev cult among Muslims have been discussed. During the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, the four folk-deities were transformed into the gods of the entire society in western Rajasthan. The Rajputs began to believe in their divine powers from 18th century onwards and the Brahmans joined the cults, quite frequently even as their leading priests, from late nineteenth century onwards. The expanding social base of the cults of the deities under study did not, however, imply homogeneity among followers. Different groups pursued these cults for different, even contradictory reasons.

The Sixth Chapter deals with the modes of worship as espoused by different classes of followers of the folk-deities. The nature of religious ceremonies, the differences in the iconographic representations of the deities and in the structural representations of their shrines, and public performances (in the form of narration of their deeds, and pictorial representation) have been discussed in this Chapter. Despite the existence of common myths, symbols and objects of worship, the essential differences between Brahanical-Rajput modes of worship and those employed by lower-caste groups have been underlined.
II. 'Popular' religion: Issues and Controversies

The term 'popular religion' has been a hotly contested historiographical domain among the scholars. Lack of commonly agreeable definition has resulted into a situation where a plethora of definition with various riders and qualifications have been put forth by the scholars. So much so that many times it looks arbitrary on the part of scholars to resort to the use of such a category. Dominick La Capra¹ in his book 'History and Criticism' discusses culture as group specific. Culture pertaining to groups such as peasants and workers, to him, can be called popular culture. Culture as interpreted by him encompasses such phenomena as popular religion, witchcraft and folklore. High or elite culture on the other hand generally refers to the artifacts of cultural elite in the art and science-novels, poems, paintings, philosophical treatises, scientific discoveries and so forth. Interaction between the two cultures, according to the author, has been rendered extremely difficult owing to the characterization of both the cultures by pronounced differentiation or even fragmentation in the modern period. Ground reality, however could have been different and it is imperative to identify the areas of interaction between the two cultures and their interaction with new processes in social and political spheres. Study of non-Brahmanical religious process in Rajasthan suggests that interaction between popular and elite religion, though frequent, was never a smooth and linear development. Changes in socio-political spheres of life, to a great extent determined the form of interaction and nature of transformation of two cultures.

¹ Dominick La Capra; History and Criticism; London, 1985, PP. 75-76
The term ‘popular religion’ has been under scrutiny and stereotypical definitions have come under criticism in the recent past. Roger Chartier\(^2\) believes that the notions of theologians and clergy of the medieval ages have influenced definitions of popular religion offered by the modern day scholars. It was the medieval clergy who categorized the whole body of beliefs and practices as popular that was in contradiction with legitimate Christianity. It is held that historians are re-emphasizing the distinction that was fundamentally created by clergy to impose their own idea of religious conformity. Rogier Chartier questions the concept of popular religion as he observes that religion of the masses was determined by censorship that aimed to interiorize a system of perception created by the clergy. The perception of the dominant and elite rung of the society was never accepted as it is by the masses and became part of the popular consciousness. The elite perceptions, cultural or religious, were transformed significantly in the process of appropriation by the masses. The people received these ideas in their own way and accorded their own interpretations. Modification of the elite religio-cultural percepts by the mass of the people was mainly determined by the needs and desires of the people in different societies and varied conditions. Hence, the ideas and perceptions lost their original content and form. The possibility of such a transformation of ideas is more if they are conveyed orally. However, the ideas and perceptions contained in printed material also get altered in the process. The ultimate understanding of the printed pages may also be affected by the already acquired religio-cultural values, based on the personal experience, of the reader and accordingly he may emphasize certain words and

obscure the others. His conclusions are based on his study of both reading and oral cultures. The interaction between these two cultures has also been examined by Carlo Ginzburg in his treaties, ‘The Cheese and Worms’.\(^3\) Ginzburg in his scholarly work, based on the analysis of the recorded trial of a sixteenth century Italian miller by the Roman Catholic clergy, has shown that in spite of strong ideological hegemony and political control of the elite over the society, the masses could think and interpret differently. The miller, ignorant of the then established interpretations of Bible, put forth his own interpretations of certain books that he had come in contact with.

In recent years, many scholars including Natalie Z. Davis\(^4\) have been insistent that the people were not passive ciphers. Even if the people learned from the clergy and their likes, they re-wrote and revised the whole content in the process of consumption. In the eight essays on Society and Culture in Early Modern France, Natalie Z. Davis examines the process of reworking by the people on what they learn from the dominant theology and interpreting it according to their own perception. Any theory of popular culture, Davis argues, must acknowledge the competence of the lower orders, a competence so often denied to them by elite groups in the past. This shift in point of view has led to the important recognition that popular culture embodies social protest. This is equally true in the case of popular religion represented by the four deities in the region under study. A set of religious beliefs and ideas in this case, with a definite structural representation, which are significantly different and some time even oppose to established Brahmanical religious system, is followed by the people at large as a symbol of resistance.


The scholars, in spite of defining differently, have applied the terms 'Popular religion' and 'popular culture' to designate the culture and religion of the masses in the studies. Although Aron Gurivich\(^5\) mentions that the concept of Popular culture has acquired a definition in the fifteen to seventeen centuries, he has concentrated on the lower layer of medieval culture that was barely influenced by the classical tradition but has preserved links with mythopoetic and folkloric-magic consciousness. The works of historians and anthropologists discuss the vagueness of the term 'popular culture' and then develop the understanding of the subject, assign certain social groups to the category of 'popular'. The category 'popular' in most cases includes subordinate classes. Peter Burke\(^6\) Remarks that 'It is perhaps best defined initially in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the Non-elite, the Subordinate classes as Gramsci called them'. Peter Burke further explains the Non-elite in the case of early Modern Europe were a whole host of more or less definite social groups of whom the most prominent were craftsmen and peasants. Peter Burke seems to have provided the most appropriate definition. The examination of studies 'popular' religion shows that most authors squeeze in or out specific classes according to different social structures. Thomas Brennan\(^7\) calls the culture of urban lower classes as the popular culture. His study is on the taverns in eighteenth century Paris. He has tried to study the dialectics between elite and popular culture through the Tavern. Unlike Brennan, many scholars find it difficult to accept the two-culture model. Gunther Lottes\(^8\) opines that there may also exist, particularly in cities,


\(^7\) Thomas Brennan, *Public drinking and popular culture in eighteenth century*, Paris, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1988

\(^8\) Gunther Lottes, "Popular Culture and the early Modern State in the 16th century Germany" in *Understanding popular religion* edt Stevan Lawrence Kaplan, Marton Publishers, Berlin Newyork.
a distinctive middle class culture that is neither elite nor popular culture. David Hall\(^9\) reaﬃrms similar objections, although on different grounds. According to David Hall, the problem is with the preconceived notion of division or diﬀerence in the culture of people and elite. There may not exist any such division in black and white. A similar kind of expression is echoed by Gunther Lottes\(^10\) when he says that the model is seen in terms of socio-cultural confrontation between the elite and the subordinate class. He argues that the Popular culture has to be seen as an integral part of a socio-cultural totality, as one subsystem among others in the early modern formation which is bound to change when other subsystem changes. He proposes that the growth of market economy has to be studied more thoroughly in its relation to popular culture in the case of England and the role of State in the case of Germany. Peter Burke discusses the inﬂuences of rise of the market on the popular culture. Nevertheless, he very clearly talks of the growing split between learned and popular culture. The withdrawal process from popular culture according to him took place at diﬀerent times in diﬀerent parts of Europe. Especially between 1500 to 1800 A. D. gap between Courtly and popular culture widened. Religion like culture, popular or elite, is not static phenomenon but keeps changing and molding itself as the process of interaction between the two begins. Brahminism in India, as discussed by Kunal Chakraborty,\(^11\) adopted many popular symbols to legitimize their inﬂuence over masses when they felt that their popularity was getting eroded. In the process of adopting, they convinced the populace of the need to adopt Brahmanical methods of worship, advocating that it would facilitate their devotion to, and communion

\(^9\) David Hall, Introduction in “Understanding Popular Culture”: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century, eds, Steven L. Kaplan, Marton publishers, New York, 1984


with God. Brahmanical religion in this process, on the other hand, did not remain the same and was substantially modified. Appropriation of local deities by Brahmans in case of Rajasthan during nineteenth and twentieth centuries was also mediated through the adoption of symbols and traditions associated with these deities and modifying them to suit the needs of Brahmanical ideology and to arrest their declining hegemonic position. The aforesaid views of the scholars make it obvious that no definition of popular religion can be called as final. Social classes and their religious beliefs have to be defined in each context to categorize as popular.

Popular religion, in the context of the present study, would include a belief system associated with the religious traditions and rituals followed by peasants, pastoralists and artisanal communities of Rajasthan. Most of these groups not only constituted the subjugated and oppressed classes-on whose surplus production the ruling Rajputs and their ideologues lived, they also mostly belonged to the lower and lowest castes. The deities functioned as their religious icons, central to their belief system. This 'popular religion' represented by local deities originated outside the orthodox Hindu religious system with non-Brahmanical following. Defining a religious system as elite or popular, based on its association with dominant or subordinate classes gives rise to several questions. Such a definition underlines a presumption that religion or culture are class or group specific and does not include the possibility of having both the elements, popular and elite, in one religious system and such a combination can occur only in the process of incorporation and contestation. A religious system with a defined god may have different or even opposing rituals, traditions and symbols and perceptions encompassing all, one followed and practiced by dominant and other by subordinate sections. A study of the
cults of the deities along with other associated traditions, symbols and rituals, different from the artifacts of established and institutionalized Brahmanical religion (which is also referred to as Hindu religion in the present work) and followed and practiced by subordinate sections of Rajasthan society is understood as ‘popular religion’. Although the two religions did not exist independently of each other and shared many common symbols, myths and other cultural forms, the ways in which these common features were perceived and appropriated were different. The believers of the two also belonged to different social classes. This is not to suggest that no dominant or ‘clean’ caste person never worshipped these deities. It is the perception, rather than the deities themselves, which has been termed as ‘popular’. The subordinate sections, which dominantly belonged to the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy, perceived these deities and the associated philosophy, created their own traditions and ritual which were different and in many sense even opposed to institutionalized Brahmanical religion. Understanding a religious system, represented by four deities, through the perception of the subordinate people has become the basis for calling it a popular religion. A religious activity with mass participation may introduce numerous elements which can be categorized as popular. People may interpret the teachings and the role of the gods in question in a manner that is completely different from the explanations offered by the elite.

III. Literature Survey:

Rajasthan remains an unexplored domain with reference to religious processes. There is hardly any work, which deals with the non-Brahmanical religious process in its entirety drawing its connections with changing socio-political realities. Most of the works more or less reproduces the mythical aura around the folk deities and compile religious verses
composed and attributed to them. Though, rich in sources and labour it involves, they lack serious analysis.

Some important works produced on the deities under study include *The Religious Movements in Medieval Rajasthan* by Dr. Pema Ram, which discusses Religious condition as existed in early medieval and medieval Rajasthan. The work is descriptive in nature rather than analytical. It informs the reader of various branches of Hindu religion followed and gods and goddesses being worshiped in various parts of Rajasthan. The local gods and the traditions associated with them have been dealt separately under the title ‘Folk Deities and Rajasthan’, where origin of folk deities has been explained as a result of expansion of Islam and attack on Hindus and killing of cows by Muslims. This formulation, however, has not been substantiated by the author and appears only as an assertion. The association of the deities with the lower castes has been explained in the context where deities as historical personalities attempted to uplift them at a time when lower castes were attracted to Islam and Islam was successful in making inroads into these communities. Pushpa Bhati in her work *Rajasthan Ke Lok Devta Avem Lok Sahitya*, has categorized the local gods based on their origin. The gods and goddesses whose origin can be traced to *Puranas* have been called as *Puranic Lok Devta* and those who lived as human personalities have been categorized as *Karam Devta* or *Itehasik Lok Devta*- those who acquired the status of god on the basis of their worldly actions. The deities under study figure in the category of *Karam Devta* suggesting their origin as human personalities. The deities have been further sub-categorized by the author based on the tasks performed by the deities. Goga, Pabu and Teja have been classified as *Upchar Ke Devta* (Gods of cure). Ramdev owing to his undisputed association with
lower caste groups has been described both as vir and ‘social reformer’. The author has reached this conclusion considering the traditions, associated with these deities, as historical. No questions have been raised pertaining to the historicity of these traditions. The book, though, is deficient on many accounts, provides valuable information crucial to our analysis. Dr. Hirlal Maheshwari in his book titled History of Rajasthani Literature, provides us details of genre of literature originated in Rajasthan from eleventh century onwards. Literature pertaining to the popular deities has been categorized by the author as Lok Geet, which is further sub categorized into ‘Heroic songs’ and Devotional songs’.

Early Chauhan Dynasties by Dashratha Sharma is a serious analytical work which help us in understanding the theoretical and conceptual premise that might have necessitated the hero worship of Goga. The origin of Chauhan Rajputs, a clan to which Goga belonged, and their ascendancy to power in Rajasthan created a space for hero worship of Goga to suit the ideological needs of the new rulers. The book also throws light on the issue of appropriation of deities by Brahmans a subject matter dealt in the present research in the context of changing socio-political conditions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Appropriation as suggested by Dasharatha Sharma was not a new phenomenon in the context of Rajasthan. Brahmans in early medieval India, to strengthen their hegemonic hold over the society, had taken over the worship of goddess Chandika or Chamunda and had identified her with Gauri, Brahmani, Lakshmi and the likes. H. S. Bhati in his book Folk Religion: Change and Continuity, deals with rituals, ceremonies and belief system connected with the worship of Goga at length. His analysis of legends counterpoises Goga with worldly and domestic life but at the same time suggests the features of integration between the two.
Simple life led by the deities as human personalities and absence of Brahmanical rituals and religious texts have been considered by various authors for categorizing these deities as ‘Folk deities’. Dr. Gopinath Sharma in his book titled *Rajasthan Ka Sanskritik Itehas*, while dealing with the folk deities, has suggested that the absence of Religious philosophy and mediation of Brahmans as *pujaris* and no orthodox rituals were the features, which made these deities popular with mass of the people. Dr. Mahipal Singh Rathor also makes a similar point in his book *Rajasthani Sahitya Men Lok Devta Pabuji*. He suggests that local deities such as Pabu, Ramdev and Goga became heroes of people owing to their concerns for them and then gradually these heroes acquired the status of a deity. Like other authors, Dr. Rathor also does not discuss the process of deification or the factors responsible for it. Dinesh Chandra Shukal in his treatise *Rajasthan Ke Pramukh Sant Avem Lok Devta*, discusses external influence (Islamic culture) and internal defects (Orthodoxy and facade) as two features which gave rise to a new consciousness in medieval Rajasthan. This new consciousness rejected the caste hierarchy and attracted people towards devotion rather than idol worship. The deities under study, according to the author were the product of this changed circumstances that played an important role in both meeting the external challenges of Islam and internal orthodox elements of Hindu religion responsible for the plight of low caste groups.

In most of the works referred above, myths and anecdotes associated with the deities have been considered as historical facts and their analysis has not been attempted. For example, Muslim following of Ramdev is explained through a mythical story. The narrative describes that when *pirs* of Mecca heard of popularity of Ramdev, they decided to test his powers and reached Runecha, the place where Ramdev resided. Upon being
invited by Ramdev for food, *pirs* said that they had forgotten their plates at Mecca and they would not eat in any other utensil. Ramdev, using his miraculous powers brought the plates from Mecca and served them food. Impressed with Ramdev’s miraculous powers *pirs* declared that Muslims would also follow him and that he would be called *Ramsa pir*.

A well-researched and analytical work on one popular deity, Ramdev has been produced by Dominique Sila Khan.\(^{12}\) She, in her work on Ramdev, establishes that he belonged to Ismaili branch of Nizarpanthis, a nonconformist Muslim sect. Her basic argument revolves around the understanding that the central Ismaili Dawa in Multan region was instrumental in converting the untouchables and lower castes into Ismailism during the 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) century. From 15\(^{th}\) century, as the central authority at Multan declined, these communities also underwent changes apparently breaking away from the center and coming in contact with local *pirs*, *bhaktas* and *nath jogis*. There has been increasing pressure on these communities to either adopt a more conventional Hindu identity or Sunni or Shia Islam. Recognizing these pressures, D. Sila Khan in her book explores the traces of former Ismaili affiliation, which these communities may still have. Based on logical arguments and sound interpretation of some of the existing traditions, she has worked to establish Ramdev’s connection with Ismailism, which she emphatically terms as ‘secret tradition’ now and then. Her work is an innovative attempt in the face of a common belief that Ramdev was a Vaisnava saint. The most talked about treaties, which suggests Ramdev being a Vaisnava saint is *Baba Ramdev: Sahitya Avem Itehas* by Dr. Sona Ram Vishnoi. Besides showing Ramdev in the light of being the Avatar of Krishna, Sona Ram’s treatise is more of a reproduction of existing literature than an analytical

\(^{12}\) D. Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities. Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan*, Manohar, First published 1997
piece of work. Mira Reym Binford in her article *Mixing in the Color of Ram of Ranuja* studies the cult of Ramdev based on pilgrimage in the Village Ramdevra, district Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. She has analysed the cult of Ramdev in Urban centers of the modern period. Unlike Dominique Sila Khan, Binford observes that Ramdev cult shares certain characteristics with the Bhakti movement- the importance of a direct relation between the devotee and his God with a minimum of rituals. Besides Ramdev, J. D. Smith has produced an important work on another folk deity, Pabu. Smith has examined a Phad of Pabu in detail. He has concentrated on the legends of Pabu in the Phad to examine the process of deification. The works of other authors consulted for the present work are Vinay Kumar Srivastav, Harjot Oberoi and Nonica Datta who deals with the said deities in case of Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana respectively.

Another genre of literature studied and analysed for the present research include publicity material, collection of bhajans, vanis, and life story and religious texts of the deities, proclaimed as authentic by authors. Though, at the face of it such literature does not look academically valuable, it provides valuable insights into the changing religious process in Rajasthan during twentieth century. This genre of literature published in the form of leaflets, booklets, and low priced books using low quality paper is easily accessible. Apart from being sold in small qusba markets, every major temples of the deities has bookshops which sells not only the printed material but also audio cassettes containing bhajans with reasonably good music and sung by local singers. Negligible price of the print material, simple narrative in either vernacular or simple Hindi language were instrumental in disseminating and popularizing the traditions associated with deities. Most of the booklets are authored by the devotees of the deities who had taken up this
venture either to popularize the cult of the deities on their own or, as claimed by them in
the preface of their works, had been asked to do so by the deities themselves. Some of
them are authored by individuals and published by publishing houses who undertake the
job of publishing books and material on religion. Some known publishing agencies are
Sri Saraswati Prakashan, Ajmer, Laxmi Prakashan, Delhi, Sethi Pustak Bhandar, Jaipur
and Meerut Pustak Bhandar, Delhi.

To make it easy for popular consumption the booklets carry translation of every
devotional couplet or even explain them in simple Hindi language. Tune and meter of
popular artis(devotional songs) and songs from Hindi cinema are picked up to sing artis
and bhajans pertaining to the deities under study. The booklets either on their cover and
back page or inside carry colourful pictures depicting life story of deities and important
events they performed. The events depicted help the reader in relating the bhajans or
story with the pictures.

IV. Examination of sources:

Archival as well as non-archival primary sources have been consulted to complete
the thesis. Important among archival material consulted are Bhaiyats and Siyah Huzur,
preserved in Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. Kagadan Ri Bahi of Bikaner is
significant for giving miscellaneous information. Prominent among them are details of
problems faced by the peasants, the amount of land revenue collected and concessions
given by the State, if any. It also, sometimes records, though unintentionally, common
people’s perception about society, religion, and customs. Siyah Hazur is a document,

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13 Sri Prithviraj Ji, author of ‘Goga Puran’ in the preface of the treatise narrates his meeting with Goga in
his dream where deity desired him to undertake the task of writing Goga Puran. See Prithviraj ji;
Sampurn Sri Goga Puran; Meerut Pustak Bhandar, Delhi, year of publication not given, Page12
which contains direction from or on behalf of Diwan of Amber State to its Amils and other officials. As a primary source of information, it contains details, which range from movements of the Raja to structure and functioning of village society. It also contains information regarding the method of arbitration and adjudication to the structure and organization of trade and commercial practices.

Mahakmakhas files of Jodhpur, Bikaner and Jaisalmer which are preserved in Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner provide us with valuable information pertaining to letters, notices, complaints and applications to his highness, the Maharaja, the Chief Minister and other government officials from various sections of the society. Freedom Movement Papers in the National Archives of Delhi contain among other things Bardic songs and extracts from Home Department files. Home Department files contain important information regarding political activities of various organizations such as Jodhpur Praja Mandal, Lok Parishad and Harijan Sevak Sangh. Another valuable source material consulted for the thesis is AICC papers available in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. AICC papers throw light on the resistance and struggle against the state repression in the early twentieth century, attempts to gain entry into temples by the Harijans and communal disturbances. Similarly the Jayakar’s private paper collection is of immense help in understanding the nature of social conflicts and changes that were taking place in the first half of the twentieth century.

English records of Jodhpur and Bikaner state provide information regarding society and polity of nineteenth century. Rajasthan State gazetteers, travelogues of British officials, Punjab notes and Queries, Indian antiquary and works of William Crooke, R.C.Temple, Tessitori and James Tod have helped immensely as source material for the present thesis.
Apart from books and journals various genre of sources pertaining to medieval period as well as modern period have been made use of. The sources such as Rajasthani Literature of pre modern times, Oral and modern pavement literature, Chronicles, genealogies, and various government documents of nineteenth and twentieth century on the concerned topic constitute a major segment of the sources consulted. Interviews, personal visits to the temples and fairs of the specific deities under study have been helpful in understanding the deities as present day phenomenon. Using oral traditions as source of history writing have been a difficult task. It is not possible to attribute them to any period of history as they travel form generation to generation. Songs sung and verses composed in praise of rulers by bards, the professional singers in the service of the rulers, also became part of the oral tradition. Hence, the narrative is fraught with the possibility of exaggeration. The oral traditions have been used in the present work to understand popular consciousness and the process that caused the changes over the period of time.

(a) Bardic Sources

Bardic sources such as Baats, Vanshavalis and Khyats are important primary sources for understanding the deities as historical and legendary personalities. There were certain castes such as Charan, Bhat, Rao, Motisar etc. who had meticulously carry forward the bardic traditions. The Charan received instructions and learned their profession from learned members of particular Charan families with whom they associated themselves. They were taught basics of composition, poetry, and narration. Stress on memorization and oral recitation was given. Subjects studied by these castes included not only history and literature, but also religion, astrology and Omen reading. In Rajasthan the Charan and Bhat castes ranked immediately below that of Brahmans. The Charans had hereditarily
attached themselves to particular Rajput families. The Charan poetry was written in two forms- narrative and stray. The first was known by various names viz., Ras, Rasau, Rupak, Prakas, Chand, Vilas, Prabandh, Sanvad, Ayan, Sanvad These poems were also named after meters such as Kavitt, Kundaliya, Jhulana, Nisani, Jhamal and Veli etc. Certain meters had been used in Charan poetry like Geet, Doha, Chappaya, Nissani etc.

Writings of bards throw light on the way these deities and their heroism was perceived by the common people during the times they composed their writings. Bardic material provide us with important insights into the subject matter of historical memory of the Rajput ruling elite and how this historical memory was interwoven with the immediate political concerns of the Marwar rulers of the period. The Charan poets used to accompany their heroes to the battlefields. Many times, they used to participate in fighting as well. They were witnesses not only to battles but also to many other occasions and episodes forming part of the contemporary Rajput life. The creative imagination of the bards gave a definite shape to the literature but its importance lies in the fact that it represents oral traditions then in circulation in Marwar and probably in other parts of Rajasthan. They not only preserved and transmitted the oral traditions but also sometimes invented them. Most of their works are in Dingle and Pingle Language. The values of these bardic composition of historical events lies not so much in their description of historical events, which are neither accurate nor do they form part of bardic perception of history, as in their portrayal of the values and ideals which inspired the deities as historical personalities to undertake various chivalrous acts for the cause of others. The bardic poetry pertaining to the deities gives a clear indication of the image of an ideal

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14 Norman. P. Ziegler, Marvari historical chronicles, Source for the Social and Cultural History of Rajasthan, in The Indian Economic and social history, Review XII-2, 1976, April- June, pp. 219-250
Rajput in the minds of these heroes themselves and those associated with them. Being true to their words and carrying out the commitments at whatever cost that may have reigned supreme in the minds of these hero turned deities are repeatedly emphasized by the bards. The patronage links of the bards, to a great extent, influenced the contents of their verses. The content could significantly change with the change of patron. The exaggerated accounts and hyperbolic nature of the bardic sources have, over the period, made the scholar cautious in their approach in using them for reconstructing the past. The lack of sound methodological techniques in most cases has prompted scholar to reject them as a source of history writing. The bardic literature popularized and propagated Rajput mythology, their stories and anecdotes of valour, bravery and sacrifice. However, as true loyalists to Rajput ruling elite, who patronized them, they suppressed or distorted the information detrimental to the popular Rajput mythology. (Non conformist Rajput personalities such as Ramdev, Pabu and Mirabai, daughter-in law of Sisodia Rajput family of Mewar have either been ignored by Rajput sources at certain stages of history or painted in bad light. Pabuji Ri Baat in Nainsi’s Khyat record an episode which suggests how Rajput Thikanedars used to despise Pabu for his association with low caste people. Mukta Parita in her work Upholding the Common life: The Community of Mirabai, has painted a contrast picture of Mira in popular consciousness where people preserved her memories and Rajput sources which ignored Mirbai completely. The criticism of oral traditions, which form the basis of bardic literature, such as lack of fix date and precise chronology for decades has made the scholars skeptical in using them for history writing. The critics have considered the oral traditions as sources which can
only facilitate second best histories of communities with poor sources. However, arguments in support of using oral traditions as source of history writing are equally strong.

Though, the possible exaggeration and hyperbolic nature of the bardic narratives must be understood, it should be kept in mind that the bard did not generate the records with a view of history writing. P. Ziegler argues that “the role of the Charan is not that of an ‘objective’ historian, but that of a seer, a guardian of legend and a conserver of tradition. As a seer, he is not a conscious manipulator of ‘truth’ and historical fact, but a preserver of the truth of what he sees”.

The genealogical material for the post-mid fifteenth century period can be considered reasonably reliable because official written records and Mughal documents support it. Biases and distortions in the bardic accounts can themselves be used as source material for history writing. These biases and distortions throw light on the social organisations, values, customs and political culture of the Rajput society.

In pre-modern Rajasthan the language Dingal and Maru Bhasha were similar and spoken language of the land was called Dingle. Braj Bhasa mixed with Rajasthani was called Pingle. The diction and style of Maru Bhasa were adopted in Pingal but the grammatical structure of Braj Bhasa was maintained. Pingal was also used by the saint poets of Rajasthan. In order to propagate their ideas the saints used simple language and picked up popular colloquial words of the regions of their travel. As a consequence, Khadi Boli

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16 Norman P. Ziegler, Marvare Historical Chronicles. P.225
found its way in Rajasthani popular poems. The emergence and spread of Nath Panth and expansion of Muslim domination provided a stimulus to Khadi Boli in Rajasthan.

People belonging to Bhat caste for a long time authored genealogies in Rajasthan. The genealogies are known as *Pidhiyavali* and *Vamsavali*. *Pidhiyavali* denotes line of generations and *Vamsavali* means line of descendants. The *Pidhiyavalis* were not only maintained and preserved by *Bhats*, they were considered to be their property. *Vamsavalis* on the other hand were maintained by *Bhats* but they were property of families themselves. The *Vamsavalis* were generally more elaborate, included clan founder, descriptions of important events, short biographical sketches with information on battles, grants of land, and miscellaneous kind of information usually with dates.

According to Tessitori (Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 15(1919) some Jain families maintained regular records of the Rathor clan. He observes that the *Pidhiyavils* had been compiled under the aegis of the sovereign chief, by men in his employment. Works like these cannot be explained as being merely the outcome of private initiative. These tasks were undertaken by the specialized groups and patronage by the rulers acted as an incentive.

This specialized group of *Bhats* was patronized by the commoners as well. The *Bhats* maintained client-patron relationship with the families of the other castes, and maintained genealogies and kept records of endowments made by the head of the families to their clients. The genealogies were recited on occasions like births, deaths, and marriages since the last entries made. On the occasion of new entries in the *Bahis*, the family along with the village elders and other villagers, assembled to hear the recitation of their genealogy. The phenomena of recitation by the *Bhat* at his *Yajaman* house, helped in identifying him
as the genuine Bhat genealogist of that particular family. Along with the written genealogies in the form of Bahis, parallel oral genealogies were preserved in villages. In most cases, the people who undertook this task were from lower castes like the Raika, commonly known as Rebari-herders of camels, sheep and goats, the Dholi, the drummers, Dharhi, a caste of singers and players of musical instruments. Relevant manuscripts of Charans and Bhats have been helpful in providing valuable insights into the subject.

Another important literary traditions carried and nurtured by Bhats and Charans in Rajasthan was writing Khyats. The term Khyat is derived from a Sanskrit word khyati meaning fame or glory. Khyats were composed to record the important deeds of kings and Thikanedars who happened to be the patrons of authors-the bards. In Rajasthan, the term khyat has come to acquire the meaning ‘that which is told or proclaimed’ and ‘account or description’.

As a form of literature, the Khyat concerns itself primarily with the history of particular Rajput clans (kul) and their branches such as Rathors of Marwar. They are important sources to understand political developments and reaction of the ruling class and as to how popular perceptions were influenced by writings and skillful recitation of Khyats.

The vaat is a form of prose narrative meaning ‘story’. In Rajasthan it also signifies ‘lok-khatha’ (folk tale) But as a genre of literature, the vaat has developed its own form which is different from ‘lok khatha as well as traditional story telling. It is essentially an ‘inspirational biographical narrative’, which deals either with the life history of an important individual, such as the leader of a particular Rajput clan or with particular

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17 Norman P. Ziegler; Marvari Historical Chronicles: A sources for the Social and Cultural History of Rajasthan; IESHR XII-2, April-June 1976, PP. 219-250
episode in his life, which are seen to be significant. Some even takes the form of diary event, often with dates included. Vaat as defined by Ziegler, in Rajasthan, is interchangeable with folklore and ‘kahani’ (story) which dominantly were the creation of common people to be told to the household gathering by elderly people in the family. These vaats were often either pure fictional or mixture of fiction and historical events. The study of these household vaats provides insights into popular perceptions of socio-religious and political realities of those times and is more significant for the present study.

The works of Munhta Nainsi Jaimalot, the first Diwan of Maharaja Jaswant Singh-I, “Marwar Ra Pargana Ri Vigat” and “Muhanta Nainsi Ri Khyat” in Marwari language written during the period 1648-1666 are the two most valuable historical chronicles. Munhta Nainsi has dealt with the life and literature of western Rajasthan in a systematic manner giving details of almost every sphere of life. Marwar Ra Pargana Ri Vigat supplies the minute details of seven Parganas, ruled by Jaswant Singh-I. It provides information regarding roads, crops, major town, administrative boundaries, main castes, villages denoted to Bhats, Charans, Brahmins and other miscellaneous judicial and administrative facts. Nainsi Ri Khyat is again a voluminous work dealing with socio-political life of Rajasthan. Nainsi has discussed dynastic histories of various important ruling lines and their genealogies in detail.

Many more invaluable manuscripts are being made accessible to the scholars through painstaking efforts of some individuals and institutions in Rajasthan. Some of the important manuscripts include “Pabuji Ke Sorthe” written by Ramnathji Kaviya, who lived from 1801 to 1879 A. D. This manuscript was subsequently published in Vardha, a
journal published by Rajasthan Sahitya Samiti, Bisau, Rajasthan. Agarchand Nahata, a scholar from Bikaner unearthed a manuscript of three hundred and one couplets of Pabu. The manuscript was authored by Muhanta Lodhraj, a Minister of Raja Jaswant Singh who ruled Jodhpur in the second half the seventeenth century. Agarchand Nahata published the aforesaid manuscript in a journal-Maru Bharti. Similarly Agarchand Nahata had also published Pabujis’ verses authored in a manuscript by Jinsamudra Suri, a poet who lived from 1613 to 1684 A. D., in Vardha. There are many more such manuscripts which have been discovered by several individual scholars and published. They constitute a rich corpus of source material for students of history.

Other than this, individual scholars and institutions have recorded and published oral traditions of the region under study and are available to the scholars to reconstruct history. Prominent among them are songs composed and sung in the rural society on various social occasions such as marriage, birth and death. Songs, verses, and vaats coined during times of distress and even during the normal course of life are recorded and published in various journals such as Vardha, Shodh Patrika, Prampara and Rajasthan etc.