CHAPTER – IV
Appropriation and Contestation
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In pre-modern Rajasthan, as in other parts of India—the Brahmanical religion—represented by multitude of Vedic-Puranic gods and goddesses and based on various Sanskrit scriptures—was primarily the religions of upper castes and ruling classes. On the other hand, various “little traditions”, folk and popular cults characterized the religious universe of the subordinate and lower caste communities. We must, however, guard against the acceptance of the binary view of religious life as elite religion verses popular religion, Brahmanical religion verses lower caste religion, or high spiritualism verses primitive religion. Religious systems of the elite and the lower classes have never existed either in isolation from each other or in pure form. After all, what we characterize as Brahmanical religion has evolved as a consequence of the assimilation of many non-Brahmanical elements into the religious beliefs and practices of the Brahmans. Similarly, it may also be argued—without subscribing to the ‘Sanskritization theory’—that many religious and cultural elements and practices of elite religion percolate down to the lowest levels of the society and in course of time become integral part of the religious life of the subjugated groups. There is, therefore, much interaction between the religion of the upper classes and that of the lower classes. But, it should be emphasized that while the elites and the lower classes may share certain beliefs, deities, ceremonies and artifacts, their attitudes towards them will differ owing to the relations of dominance and power in the society. This chapter seeks to analyze how the Rajput ruling elites from 18th century onwards were compelled to acknowledge the deified status of Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and
Teja. The Rajput and Brahmanical perceptions of these deities always remained at variance with the process of popular deification. Once it came into existence, the elite version was always in a state of tension with the popular version and was contested by the latter.

In the pre-eighteenth century period as we have seen socially and politically dominant sections—Rajputs and Brahmins did not extend the patronage to newly emerging deities nor did they join the ranks of their followers in any significant manner. If the Charan literature of the pre-eighteenth century period is taken as indicator of the attitude of the elite towards these deities, it may be argued that at the most they considered them as warrior-heroes rather than as gods. The ruling elite never looked upon the worship of these local deities as a source of general spiritual welfare and material well-being of the society. This situation, however, did not remain static for all times. Evidence pertaining to second half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century indicates a definite change in the attitude of the Rajputs, Brahmins, and other ‘higher’ caste groups towards these deities. The present chapter attempts to understand and explain the change in the attitude of the ‘higher’ caste groups towards these deities and locates the process of this change within changing political and social conditions.

Nineteenth and twentieth centuries also increasingly witnessed the association of Brahmanical rituals with the worship of these deities, who till then were associated exclusively with the ‘lower’ castes and other subordinate sections. Construction of shrines of these deities by Rajput rulers and making public offerings, had become a common feature by the nineteenth century. Brahman priests began to manage shrines of Ramdev and Goga. Higher caste commoners by nineteenth century had started
worshipping these deities for their mundane needs, though gods of Hindu pantheon remained their chief objects of worship. These changes indicate a process where the deities of the ‘lower’ castes that had remained outside the ambit of the dominant religious system were gradually incorporated into it. The sources suggest a definite change in the attitude of the Rajput ruling clan of Marwar towards these deities during the eighteenth century and afterwards.

I. Political Change in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries: The Crisis of the Rajput Polity

The change in the attitude of the Rajput rulers towards these deities can not be explained without understanding the new political scenario, which emerged after the decline of the Mughal Empire. In the 18th century the state of Marwar, which grew and gained strength under the Mughal tutelage, was faced with new challenges once the umbrella of Mughal Empire was withdrawn. After the death of Aurangzeb, disintegration of the Mughal Empire led to decentralization of political authority at various levels. This provided the Rajput rulers ample space to settle scores among themselves and expand the boundaries of their kingdoms at the cost of each other- a development that was not possible under strong Mughal control. Another significant development was the weakening authority of the Rajput king and emergence of powerful factions within the nobility of each state. Maratha incursions and depredations during the course of the late 18th and early 19th centuries also aggravated the political crisis by weakening the Rajput states and their financial basis. Still later, the gradual acceptance of the British paramountcy by the Rajput states after the third Anglo-Maratha war brought them face to face with the colonial power and its ideological and institutional tropes and practices. During the course of 16th and 17th centuries, the effective incorporation of Rajput states
into the Mughal political system had strengthened the position of the Rajput *rajas* vis-à-vis their nobles and subjects. This situation began to change from the middle of the 18th century.

Once the Mughal umbrella was withdrawn, the Rajput kings, so far drawing strength from their connection with the imperial power, became vulnerable to the machinations of increasingly powerful nobles. In the changed situation characterized by the emergence of various destabilizing political developments, mentioned above, the Rajput ruling elites did not only try to devise new politico-tactics and strategies to cope with the rapidly changing political scenario, but also attempted to re-define and modify the ideological and religious sources of their rule.

Abhay Singh, (1724-49) the ruler of Jodhpur invaded Bikaner, a neighbouring state ruled by his own Rathor clan brother. Ram Singh, the successor of Abhay Singh had to fight a number of battles with his real uncle Bakhta Singh. Ram Singh finally lost Jodhpur to Bakhta Singh. The support from outside the clan brotherhood enjoyed by the Rathor chiefs during seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was fast diminishing. Haras of Bundi, Sisodias of Shahpura, Kheechis and even Jat leaders were turning against the Rathors of Marwar. They had organised themselves under the standard of Amber and even attacked Marwar. In one such battle between Jodhpur and Jaipur state, the King of Jodhpur was deserted at the time of battle by Rathor clan members such as *Champawats*, *Jaitawats* and even by Mertea Rathors who believed in the virtue of adhering to the throne, irrespective of its occupant.

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1 James Tod, *Annals And Antiquities Of Rajasthan*; Vol. II; Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. London. 1829; p.90
2 James Tod; Vol. II-p.85
3 James Tod; Vol. II; p.110
Political situation in the states of Jodhpur and Bikaner was worsening as the time passed. Local clan brothers or the Thikanadars, 7 were often outraged against both the Maharajas. When Abhay Singh succeeded his father Ajit Singh, three of his brothers revolted against him with a purpose of carving out independent territories for themselves in Marwar. They along with other Rathor Thikanadars plundered various parts of Marwar. They captured Sojat and Jaitaran and plundered Merta.4 In 1773 A.D., as the struggle for power within the Rathor clan became intense. Bakhat Singh, ruler of Nagaur invaded Bikaner and later Maharaja of Jodhpur himself led the military expedition against Bikaner.

The Maratha depredations accelerated the process of the disintegration of the Rajput political system. In a battle against the Marathas, the Rajas of Bikaner and Kishangarh, withdrew their support from the Jodhpur king Bijay Singh,(1752-1793) leaving him alone to defend his territory. Bijay Singh, not able to withstand the onslaught of Maratha force, retreated. He managed to reach Nagaur without aids in a hired bullock cart of a Jat peasant.5 Popular perception must have found this act of Rathor ruler contrary to the image and Rajput Dharma where Rajput rulers were known to put saffron on their clothes and fight the enemy until the last breath, an indispensable characteristic of Rajput conduct.

Early nineteenth century witnessed the increasing dependence of Rajput rulers upon the British power. To protect their kingdoms from Marathas and to suppress the local Thikanadars, the rulers of Marwar states signed a number of treaties with the British. In the year 1817 the king of Jodhpur entered into a treaty of defence with the British against

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4 Visheshvar Nath Reu; “Maharaja Ajit Singh of Marwar”, in Suresh Kumar Sharma and Usha Sharma eds.; Rajasthan Through the Ages; Vol.-1; Delhi; 1999; pp.124-128 and Visheshvar Nath Reu; Marwar Ka Itihas; Vol.1; 1999; pp.332-333
5 James Tod; Vol. I; pp.591-92
Marathas. In a treaty with Bikaner in the year 1818 the British promised to provide military support to Maharaja Surat Singh to suppress the rebellious Rajput potentates. In another treaty, Man Singh, (1804-1845) the ruler of Jodhpur, requested the British to ignore his Rajput subordinates if they opposed the treaty where Rathor ruler was to act in subordination to the British colonial Govt.⁶

Intra-clan rivalry among the Rajputs and plunder by Marathas left the Marwar kings without resources. Constant warfare cost them dearly and proved ruinous to the financial stability of their states. Enormous wealth accumulated by their predecessors was all used in warfare or looted by Marathas. Ensuring continuation of cultivation and providing safety of the trade routes was a tall order. Marwar gradually sank into anarchy and the king was increasingly reduced to insignificance.

The precarious ecological conditions and frequently occurring famines and draughts added to the prevailing disorder. The state’s authority was further eroded as the ruling elite failed to provide protection and relief to its subjects when they needed it most. Prevailing lawlessness, Maratha incursions, and natural calamities forced peasants to flee from land and wander in wilderness. Eighteenth and nineteenth century sources record large-scale migration of peasants from western Rajasthan.⁷

Discussing a nineteenth century famine, Vaughan Nash depicts the scale of migration- "It is the custom in Marwar, when famine threatens, for the cultivators and herdsmen to leave their home and go off with their families, driving their beasts before

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⁶ K. S. Saxena; The Political Movements and Awakening in Rajasthan; 1857-1947; p.7, 14,15 For more information on Rajput-British relations see: K. N. Panikkar; British Diplomacy in Northern India, Associated Publishing House, New Delhi, 1968
⁷ Archival sources such as Arzdashis record numerous instances of large scale migration of the peasants from western Rajasthan to Sind, Gujarat and other parts of India during the times of distress, see Arzdash, Sawan Vadi 6, V. S. 1762/ 1705 A. D.JR., HS, RASB and Kavi Shyamal Das, Vir Vinod, Vol.III, Part II, 1886, pp.2084
them, to some country where there is grazing to be had. At the end of August, the stream of emigration began. Thousands upon thousands of Rajput and Jats, with their lower castes thronging after them, poured out along the roads of Central India, Gujarat and Northwest. It is believed that two lakh people went to Mhalwar (Malwa) in Central India. Many went to Indore. Sixty thousand people crossed the waterless desert into Scinde (Sind) and another multitude flowed down into Gujarat. All the families who had cattle drove them on before, unless the bunya happened to have seized them for the value of their bones and hides”.

The state in many cases made feeble attempt to dissuade the peasants. Political anarchy, insecurity, scarcity of food grains in famine times combined with diminishing power of the state encouraged people to indulge in open defiance and plundering activities. Grain theft and looting of the traders increased manifold and added to the ‘social disorder’.

Crisis in the Rajput moral order became inseparable from the prevailing political anarchy, which swept this region during the eighteenth century. The environment of uncertainty, court intrigues and political disorder in which kin were put to swords and concept of clan brotherhood was loosing its relevance, created a crisis in the Rajput moral values. Bards’ numerous poetic effusions of the period after Abhey Sing, (1724-1749) in particular, depicts it as an era of moral and political degeneration which rendered the Rajput polity unworkable. The following quatrain coined by bards during Abhey Singh’s reign reflects the popular concern for moral degeneration in the Rajput society.

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8 Vaughan Nash; The great Famines and its causes; London, 1990, p.99
9 Kagadan Ri Bahi; V.S.1851/1794 A. D., pp.25,27,34 RSAB.
10 Siya Huzur; Pos Vadi 5, 11, and Asoj Sudi 7, v.s.1793/1736 A.D., Bundle no.31, JR, HS, RSAB
11 Tod; Vol.; II-92
Rajput Sardars who sided with the Marathas in their conflict with Bijay Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur, spread rumours of the latter’s death, contributing to the defeat of Rathors. Treacherous conduct on the part of the rulers and nobles alike became the order of the day. In 1760 when the Rathor Thikanadars rose in revolt against Bijay Singh, the latter invited them all to pay homage and attend the last rites of his deceased Guru. Five Thakurs were arrested when they entered the fort. Later two of them were released and three died in captivity. Such a conduct on the part of a Rajput ruler shattered his popular image. Political authority and social hegemony of Rajput ruling elite suffered a serious set back.

II. The Changing Rajput Perception of the Folk-Heroes: Rajputization of Popular Cults

(a) The Cult of State Deities in Rajasthan

The collapse of political moral authority of the state was not an unprecedented phenomenon in Rajput history. According to a popular myth, the ancestors of the Rajputs in Rajasthan lost their sovereign political position following ‘social confusion’ caused by mixing of castes and collapse of moral order and social hierarchy. The Rajputs regained

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12 [The prince of] Jodhpur and Amber can dethrone the enthroned. But the Koorma (Kacchawaha) slew his son and the kamd huj(appellation of the Rathore kings) murdered his father.

13 Visheshvar Nath Reu; *Marwar Ka Itahas*; Vol.-1; 1999; pp.398
their lost position and kingdoms through devotion and worship of their deities.\textsuperscript{14} Local deities thus functioned as a source of legitimacy for the Rajput rulers throughout their history. A visit to the temples of their deities to seek their blessings before going on military expedition was considered an important ritual for ensuring victory. The bardic myths and exaggerated accounts of Rajput chivalry, created an aura of invincibility and valor about the Rajput rulers and nobles. This in turn helped the Rajput rulers to maintain their hegemony over their subjects. The ideological hegemony of the state was further strengthened by the bardic or Brahmanical propaganda of the supernatural origin of the Rajput kingship. The kingship, it was believed was gifted to the Rajputs as \textit{Parsad} (favour) by their \textit{Kul Devata} or \textit{Kul Devi} (family god or goddess) for their devotion.\textsuperscript{15} Ekalingaji (also known as Mahadev or Shivji) bestowed the kingdom of Chittor upon Bapa Rawal. Ekalingaji was pleased by the devotion of Rikheshwar, the master of Bapa Rawal. Rikheshwar asked for a kingdom for Bapa, his loyal servant.\textsuperscript{16}

The power to conquer lands and territories was also derived from the blessings of 'Thakur', (The supreme deity). The king was the representative of the \textit{Kul Devata} or \textit{Kul Devi} and ruled on his/her behalf.

The cult of royal, family and local deities thus played an important role as a source of power and legitimacy for the Rajput state system and contributed to its acceptance among the elite and common people alike. The kingdom of Bikaner, according to a popular narrative, was gifted to his devotee Bika by a popular female deity, Karani Devi. When Bikaji, son of the king of Jodhpur marched to find a new kingdom for himself, he was

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\textsuperscript{14} Norman P. Zeigler; \textit{Marvari Historical Chronicles: Sources for the Social and History Review}; XII-2, 1976. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Norman P. Zeigler; \textit{Op. Cit.} \\
\textsuperscript{16} Munhta Nainsi; \textit{Khyat}; Vol. 1, pp.11-12
\end{flushright}
granted the kingdom that came to be known as Bikaner, by the deity as she liked Bikaji
the most among all sons of Jodhpur king. Karniji, who later acquired a position of family
deity for the ruling dynasty of Bikaner, is regarded as the protector of the kingdom from
enemies and is believed to have advised Bikaji on building matrimonial alliances for
favourable political benefits. Following her advice, according to widely held belief,
Bikaji married the daughter of the king of Pugal, which helped him consolidate his
position in newly founded kingdom. When Bikaji was fortifying Kodamdesar, as advised
by the deity, Bhati Rajputs attacked his fortification. Karniji through her miraculous
powers stopped the ruler of Pugal from helping the Bhatis. She is also believed to have
guided Bikaji in his dealings with the Bhatis.\textsuperscript{17}  

The family and state deities of Rajput rulers, thus, were not invisible heavenly figures
with miraculous powers meant for spiritual welfare of the devotees. They were living
human beings who even after their death could continue to play important role in political
affairs by demonstrating their supernatural powers. It was their supernatural powers,
which they continued to exercise posthumously, which differentiated them from normal
human beings and use of these powers many a time was decided by their emotive state of
mind. In one such incident, some Rajputs had attacked the cows of Bikaji and killed one
low-caste Meghwal, to distract him from consolidating his kingdom. Karniji appeared in
the battlefield, punished the invaders with death, and desired that the dead Meghwal
should also be worshiped along with her.\textsuperscript{18} A temple for this purpose was built after her
death. The incorporation of the popular cult of Karni Mata into the legitimation network
of the Rathor state of Bikaner led to widespread popular belief that the female deity not

\textsuperscript{17} Dr. Pushpa Bhati; \textit{Rajasthan Ke Lok Devta Avem Lok Sahitya}; Bikaner;1996; P.66-71
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
only gifted the kingdom to Bika and his successors but continued to act as its defender and protector.

(b) Appropriating the Folk-Deities as their Own: Rajput Patronage of the Popular Cults

Military defeats and collapse of Rajput politico-moral order threatened the hegemonic stronghold of the Rajputs over the society. Clan brotherhood as the basis of kingship was no longer valid and Rajput Dharma evolved during the period of Mughal dominance no longer remained a valid category even in theory. The whole concept of 'Rajput' had to be re-defined in the troubled conditions of eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. At the same time, there was a need to invent alternative modes of legitimacy to sustain the fragile authority of the Rajput kings and chiefs at a time when it was being threatened by their rivals, feuding nobles and the Marathas. To resolve the political crisis and restore the social and moral order and to regain their hold over the lost territories, the Rathor rulers adopted a two-pronged approach. Firstly, while during the late 16th and 17th centuries, the Rajput kings of Rajasthan sought to pattern their polity on the Mughal model and drew upon both indigenous traditions and Mughal patronage for legitimation, during the disturbed political scenario of the 18th century, there was increasing tendency on their part to model the social and moral order on the orthodox Brahmanical pattern. Brahmanical influence began to assert itself on the non-Muslim politics of 18th century northern India.19 The eighteenth century non-Muslim rulers, particularly the Marathas and the Rajputs tried to enforce Brahmanical norms on the social and religious life of

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19 See Susan Bayly, Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 64-96. See also increasing orientation of the Jaipur state towards Brahmanical social order, V. S. Bhatnagar, Life and Times of Sawai Jai Singh, Delhi, 1974, pp. 337-342
their subjects. Sometimes, the rulers did not hesitate to adopt anti Muslim postures in order to be projected as champions of the Vedic-Shastric ideology. Bakht Singh(1729-1753) who ruled Nagaur demolished Muslim shrines there and with their wrecks, restored edifices of ancient days. Islamic prayers were prohibited, which continued for long. Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, the Rajput ruling elites turned to various popular traditions for legitimizing their rule and for creating certain commonly shared values, myths, and symbols in a conflict-ridden and warfare-stricken society. One among many such popular traditions to which the Rajput ruling classes looked for ideological and political sustenance was the cult of folk-deities.

The ruling Rajputs first attempted to establish their ties with the worship of those deities with whom they shared a common Rajput origin. Initially they encouraged the projection of these deities as Rajput heroes and subsequently they began to worship them. The earliest evidence of this process is available in the form of rock cut figure of these deities along with other heroes of Rajasthan. The deities under discussion found a place in the hall of heroes known as the Taintees Karor Devaton ka Sthan (Abode of 330million gods of Hindu mythology) at Mandore, the old capital of the Rathor rulers of Jodhpur. Goga, Pabu, Teja and Ramdev are among the nine heroes whose figures are hewn out of natural rock in the gallery of heroes. The hall and the figures were given shape during the reign of Maharaja Ajit Singh (1707-1724A.D) and completed during the rule of Maharaja Abhay Singh (1724-1749). In the sculpture at Mandor, the statues of

Goga, Pabu, Teja, Ramdev, Mallinath Harbu, Shri Mehaji and Gussainji are treated as Heroes of Marwar. They are presented as the embodiment of courage, valor,
and chivalry and are remembered for their love for motherland and the sacrifices they made in upholding the cultural traditions of the land.\textsuperscript{22} It is significant that in early eighteenth century the Rathor rulers recognized the deities as heroes of Marwar and not gods. Interestingly all figures in the hall of heroes have been represented as warriors. The \textit{vahan} (Vehicle) of all of them is horse and most of them have long staff or flag in their hand, which imparts a chivalrous image to them.

The difference between the projection of the above-mentioned historical figures as Rajput heroes and their identity as deities soon became blurred as Rajput rulers began to make offerings and visit their temples. In bardic account of early eighteenth century written by Ratan Charan Virbhan, there is a detailed description of the pilgrimage undertaken by Maharaja Ajit Singh and Abhay Singh to these temples and the bathing rituals performed by them there. There is mention of Maharaja Ajit Singh going to Runecha to pay visit to the shrine of Ramsa Pir. He also visited the temple of Pabu.\textsuperscript{23} A twentieth century ruler of Bikaner State, Maharaja Ganga Singh (1887-1943) consciously undertook the task of reviving the old traditions associated with Ramdev\textsuperscript{24} and Goga.\textsuperscript{25} In order to understand the process of the ‘Rajputization’ of the folk-deities, it is important to highlight those political developments that necessitated changes in the ideological underpinnings of the Rajput states.

By nineteenth century, royal patronage manifested itself into varying actions of ruling elite and acquired multiple dimensions. Limited veneration could defeat the desired aim

\textsuperscript{22} As written on the big stone slab by the Superintendent Archaeology and Museums: Jodhpur, Personally visited on 9\textsuperscript{th} Oct, 2000
\textsuperscript{23} Ratan Charan Virman, \textit{Raj Rupak}, PP.303-305
\textsuperscript{24} Mira Reym Binford; \textit{Mixing in the Colour of Ram of Ranuja: A folk pilgrimage to the grave of a Rajput hero Saint} in Bardwell L. Smith eds.; \textit{Hinduism: new essays in the history of religions}, Leiden; E.J Brill 1976
\textsuperscript{25} Suryasankar Parikh; \textit{Gogameri- Aik Itihasik Vivachan}, Maru Bharti, year 12 part 4 pp. 16 to23
of striking a bond between the traditional followers of these deities and Rajput rulers, who in any case had lost much of the political authority and social hegemony by now. Attempts were made to reach out to people by constructing new temples and renovating the existing ones. Regular visits to the temples of these deities and public display of making offerings became an important part of the royal routine. The Ramdev temple in the village Runecha, and the temple of Goga at Goga Meri were enlarged and renovated by Maharaja of Bikaner, Maharaja Ganga Singh (1887-1943) without altering the inner place of worship.\(^{26}\) The rulers popularized the local deities by erecting various structures in their names. A *Kund* (reservoir for rainwater) was built at Bikaner around 1894-96 and named as Goga Tank.\(^{27}\) One of the five gates of Fort of Bikaner was named after Goga and called Goga *Darwaza*.\(^{28}\) No ceremony was now considered complete by the royal families unless the worship of these deities was conducted and offerings were made to them. In Twentieth century, on every important occasion like weddings,\(^{29}\) visits to Europe to attend the sessions of League of Nations, and Round Table Conferences, the Royal families visited Pabu and Ramdev temples and made offerings.\(^{30}\) The documents suggest that Maharaja of Jodhpur gave annual donations to the temple of Ramdev at Runecha.\(^{31}\)

Attempts at arresting the trend towards erosion of state authority necessitated building of a relationship, other than that of a ruler and ruled, between numerous social

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\(^{27}\) Report of the Administration of the Bikaner State for 1894-95 and 1895-96

\(^{28}\) Munshi Sohan Lal, *Tawarikh Raj Shree Bikaner*, RSAB

\(^{29}\) During the celebration of the wedding of Sri Maharaj Kumaraj Sahib, the family visited temple of Ramdev at Sujandesar and temple of Pabu

\(^{30}\) Shiv Kishan ji Vyas Sangrah, RSAB

\(^{31}\) Mahakmakhas: *Social general, 1911-1914*, Bikaner, RSAB
groups and the ruling elite. A feature of this new commonly shared religious tradition was that both the rulers and subjects were followers of the same folk-deities. Worship of these deities provided an element of commonality between numerous social groups and ruling elite. This element of commonality helped forge a new bonding between the rulers and their subjects, a bonding that was different from the usual political relationship of dominance and subordination. However, it would be wrong to assume that the commonly held and shared religious belief in the cults of the folk-deities led to the emergence of a religious culture that was neither elitist nor subaltern. Rajput acceptance of the cult of folk-deities can at best be characterized as 'appropriation'. In other words the cult of folk-deities did not have same meaning and significance for the rulers as for the subordinate social groups. The Rajput rulers did begin to worship the folk-deities in a big way from the 18th century, but they at the same time 'Rajputized' their memory by inventing new narratives, myths, and symbols about these deities. More often than not, the 'Rajputized' elements found their way into the already prevalent popular versions. But on the whole, the popular perception of the deities always remained at variance and in critical tension with the elitist appropriation. Thus, while objects of cultic worship were the same for the ruling groups and the subordinate groups, the social hierarchies based on caste, class and power necessitated that the same set of deities was made to perform different—even contradictory—functions for different sections of the society. The elitist worship was marked by presenting the popular heroes and deities as their own. On the other hand, the lower castes and subordinate groups clung to such a perception of the folk-deities that remained essentially contesting, egalitarian and dissenting in its content.
Appropriation of the deities by Rajput ruling elite, however, was not a simple affair where Rajputs quietly joined the ranks of followers and sought legitimacy for their rule by extending royal patronage to popular modes of worship. It significantly altered the character and personalities of the deities. The tailored image of the deities as Rajput warriors was consciously propagated. Along with their divine features of divination, then origins as Rajputs and 'Rajput values' they laid down their lives for, were reinforced in the bardic literature of nineteenth and early twentieth century. Given the familiarity of the people with the cultural milieu of Rajputs, the 'Rajput like' characteristics of the deities were assimilated into the popular perception of the deities. In Rajput value system a Rajput warrior must fight for retaining what belongs to him and to protect the weak and infirm. Given the widely believed Rajput origins of Goga, Pabu and Ramdev, it became easy for the Rajput elites to emphasize their chivalrous characteristics. There was, therefore, a certain degree of 'fit' between the elitist and popular perceptions of the folk-deities, although the basic difference between the two should not be ignored.

In a society of Kshatriyas, battles for territorial possessions and cattle wealth were the order of the day. The historical records are full of evidences where chiefs fought over trivial issues such as hunting or over whatever was perceived as humiliating comments hundreds of human lives were lost in these conflicts. But sometimes battles over minor issues produced major heroes. The gallant warriors earned respect in the society and some of them emerged as legends both among the rulers and masses over a period of time. Valor became an indispensable and central factor in the popular perception of legendary heroic conduct. Individual valor was important in the Rajput notion of manhood in a society in which military values and warfare reigned supreme. Though,
dominantly a peasant society, Rajasthan, like other parts of medieval north India, witnessed the growth of a military culture that was indispensable both to ruling elite and to the peasants. A significant part of the rural society comprised 'armed peasantry'. However, they were in no way connected to the State either permanently or temporarily. A very few men would have been without at least a spear or sword. The arms were used by the peasants both for resisting the revenue collecting agencies of the state as well as for earning their livelihood. Especially during the years of bad harvests the peasants took to arms using them either to plunder the caravans or protect themselves from outsiders. Peter Mundy refers to caravans employing armed guards. His caravan once employed 440 Jats, Blauchis, carters and cameleers, who had firearms and swords. Peter Mundy calls them 'an unruly lot'. Tavernier also emphasized the necessity of hiring armed men to ensure 'travel with honour'.

This culture of living with arms was not specific to the professional bands of young people available for hire. It was deeply entrenched into everyday lives of the mass of the peasants. Simon Diodati, a servant of East India Company, whose caravan was stopped in Malwa in 1717 A.D. by thousands of people armed with muskets, described them as "peasants". Labourers and peasants working with arms lying besides them was not an uncommon site in the medieval north India. Peter Mundy recounts labourers working with their guns, swords, and bucklers lying by them in the present day Kanpur region. A manuscript quoted by Irfan Habib refers to peasants around Agra working in the fields with their guns around their neck. "They are a numerous industrious and brave race.

32 Cited in Dirk H. A. Kolff, Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy; The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, Cambridge University Press; 1990; Page:4
34 Cited in Kolff; Op. Cit. P.6, Mundy; Travels;II, P.90
Every village has a small fort. They never pay revenue to the *hakim* without a fight. The peasants (*riyaya*) who drive the plough keep a musket (*banduq*) slung over the neck and a powder pouch to the waist. The relief loan (*taqavi*) they get from the *hakim* is in the form of lead (and) gunpowder.\(^{35}\) Peasants formed the majority of the fighting armies in north India. These included zamindars led war-bands to regional armies. Only the Imperial Mughal army in the strictest sense, i.e. the camp that accompanied the Mughal emperors, was an exception. In an ‘armed’ peasant society like this, the war like characteristics of gods and goddesses, including of local variety, were a source of inspiration to the desperate and despondent Rajput ruling elite in adverse times to regain their lost prestige.

The dual image of the Rajput warrior and folk-deities, was thus, propagated as a conscious efforts through architecture, sculptural and iconographic representations and through literature composed during nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The words of James Todd make the warrior features of the deities explicit. He records. “Here are displayed, in all ‘the pomp and circumstance of war’, the statues of the knights- errant of the desert, armed, bestriding steeds whose names are deathless as their riders’, all in the costume of the times in which they lived. Each Chieftain is armed with lance, sword, and buckler, with quiver and arrows, and poniard in his girdle”\(^{36}\)

The representation of the folk-deities as battle scarred figures had gradually captured the imagination of people of Rajasthan, and spread through calendar art in modern times. Numerous cards and calendars printed in twentieth century and sold at fairs and other regular shops in various parts of Rajasthan have the warrior image of the deities printed on them. The deities are shown seated on horse with a spear in their hand and a shining

\(^{35}\) Irfan Habib; “Forms of class struggle in Mughal India”, in *Essays in Indian history: Towards a Marxist perception*; Tulika; 1995; PP. 233-258

crown on their head projecting them as kings. Many of the devotees install these images in their houses for regular worship.\textsuperscript{37} During a personally attended ‘Phad’ narration by Pabu’s Bhopa in the month of October, 1999 at Bikaner, it was observed that Pabu’s place of worship at Kolu Mand village was referred to by the Bhopa as Pabu’s \textit{Darbar} (Court) giving a feel of royal ambience. Interestingly, the writings of British officials in 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries have laid special emphasis on the Rajput-like features of the deities. While writing about the rock-cut figures at Mandore, Archibald Adams introduces Pabuji as a Rathor hero.\textsuperscript{38} Ramdev is also regarded as a distinguished Rajput hero in Adam’s account.\textsuperscript{39} Familiarity with old Rajput traditions where combination of ascetic (\textit{yogi}) features- possessing miraculous and supernatural powers and saintly appearance—and characteristics of a warrior co-existed in the same personality seem to have facilitated the acceptance of the new image of the deities by the people. Folklore often describe Rajputs participating in wars as ascetics with bodies besmeared with ashes.\textsuperscript{40} Chand Bardai, while describing in “Prithiraj Rasau” the scene of battle, recounted a Rajput fighter dressed as ascetic ‘with a coil of matted hair on his head and a musical horn, his body smeared with ashes of cow dung’. He is described wearing a leather cloak and carrying an axe that resembled that of Lord Shiva. Afterwards the narrative showed him vanquishing his enemies ‘by the power of his asceticism’.\textsuperscript{41} There are instances where common identity of \textit{Shaivite} warrior ascetic and Rajput is stressed. A Rana of Mewar who lived in 13\textsuperscript{th} century resembled an ascetic as he wore necklace of

\textsuperscript{37} These photos were found in the houses of some devotees in villages of Bikaner region when personally visited during the month of March, 2002


\textsuperscript{40} Kolff, \textit{Op. Cit.} p. 81

\textsuperscript{41} Cited in Kolff, \textit{Op. Cit.} pp. 81-82
lotus seeds with braided hair and was addressed as Jogindra, the chief of ascetics.\textsuperscript{42} Kolff describes these traditions as pre-Mughal pastoral traditions that were fast marginalised after 16\textsuperscript{th} century owing to the emergence of 'new Rajput great traditions'.\textsuperscript{43} Brahmanical traditions such as renunciation, endogamy, and exclusiveness according to him were also responsible in restraining such traditions. Through representation of deities as a combination of warriors and divine figures, old Rajput traditions were reinforced to suit the ideological needs of the new situation.

III. Lower Caste Assertion and Brahmanization-Hinduization of the Folk-deities

(a) Socio-Religious Basis of Brahmanical Hegemony:

This process of appropriation of these deities into Brahmanical fold can not be explained through the concept of Sanskritization. The theory of Sanskritization would be of limited use in understanding the process where Brahmans had taken initiative to incorporate these deities into the pantheon of Hindu Gods.\textsuperscript{(Sanskritization as defined by M. N. Srinivas, is a process by which a 'low caste' Hindu or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and the way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, 'twice born' caste. Sanskritization is concerned with those who attempt to raise themselves in social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{44} Here, on the other hand, the process of incorporation of lower caste religious icons by the Rajputs and Brahmans into their system of worship

\textsuperscript{42} Tod; Vol. I, p.300
\textsuperscript{44} See M.N.Srinivas; Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India; Oxford,1952, p.30 also cited in Kunal Chakrabarti, Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition, OUP, 2001, pp.81-82
reveals their need of selective assimilation of the religious traditions of the lower orders. In this sense, the process is one of appropriation and not Sanskritization.

Upper caste devotees especially Brahmans view the deities of the lower classes through sanskritic traditions whereas lower caste followers are dominantly found holding on to old non-sanskritic traditions associated with these deities. In sanskritic context, the deities like other gods of Brahmanical pantheon are worshiped for general spiritual welfare of the society and rituals are performed accordingly. On the other hand, in non-sanskritic context, the worship has specific protective and acquisitive purpose. The non-sanskritic traditions based on specific and acquisitive purposes originated from within lower caste devotees. Once the lower caste worship of these deities was fully established and became popular, it attracted the attention of the rulers and Brahmans. There is little evidence to suggest that the worship of folk-deities such as Goga, Pabu, Ramdev and Teja drew support and patronage from Brahmans before 18th and 19th centuries.

The popular attitudes towards the deities under study changed significantly over the centuries. Once worshiped only by lower caste groups are now venerated by almost all sections of the society. Their help is no longer invoked only for warding off snakes or curing diseases, as was the case during pre-eighteenth century period. They are now worshipped also for general spiritual welfare and have joined the ranks of Hindu gods.

The material representation of these deities in the form, for instance of a snake engraved on terracotta slab (as in case of Goga and Teja) and in the form of footprints of Ramdev imprinted on a small platform are now matched with large temples with their idols. Brahman priests in several cases also mediate their worship. Modern methods of worship, rituals and many recently invented traditions suggest strong Brahmanical flavour in the
cults of folk-deities as they are practiced now. It is somewhat paradoxical that while in pre-modern times, the cults of the folk-deities under study were either ridiculed or overlooked by the upper castes, especially Brahmans, in modern times it is these very groups which have taken lead in patronizing, mediating and suitably modifying the cultic worship of these deities.

Although Brahmans and Rajputs established their hegemony over rest of the society, the ways in which the Brahmans sought to influence the people were different from the strategies adopted by the Rajput elites. Political power and the concept of Rajput dharma was combined together to enable the Rajputs to establish their ideological ascendancy. Brahmans, on the other hand, did not have the advantage of exercising any military or political power. At the best they could serve as ideologues of the state or as state officials. In the Rajput politico-ideological set up, Charans (bards) were better equipped than Brahmans to perform these functions. However, as rituals specialists, as interpreters of the scriptures, and as upholders of social order based on varna and caste hierarchy, Brahmans could still exercise profound influence. The Rajput ruling groups by and large accepted this position of Brahmans. As has been mentioned above, in the 18th century conditions, the Rajput states increasingly adopted Brahmanical norms to discipline the society. This led to greater role for Brahmans in the 18th century Rajput states. The state provided legitimacy to their position by extending patronage and punishing anyone, who dared to violate the caste based norms. Nainsi in Marwar Ra Pargan Ri Vigat records numerous revenue free land grants given to Brahmans in every Pargana. This land was called sasan or dohli.45 Brahmans were non-peasant right holders

as they collected the revenue from sasan villages, but did not cultivate the lands themselves. It appears that Brahmans even had right to sell or mortgage the land or village.\textsuperscript{46} Even the crimes committed by Brahmans were ignored by the State. Rich peasants belonging to higher castes, many times, encroached upon the lands of others. In one instance, the illegal occupation of land by Brahmans, Kayasths and Mahajans were brought to the notice of the State. The state ordered to convert the lands of all these people except Brahmans, into Khalsa.\textsuperscript{47}

Brahmans and other dominant caste groups, who enjoyed a position of dominance in social and religious domain, were either dismissive or scornful about the religious beliefs and practices of the untouchables and other lower caste groups. The Brahmans treated these beliefs and practices as superstitions and primitive.

Nineteenth century, however, witnessed concerted efforts on their part to appropriate the non-Brahmanical deities, worshiped by the lower rung of the Rajasthan society. Appropriation of popular deities by Brahmans can not be explained without locating the process in the context of new situation, weakening of the Rajput states and entry of the British as a political player. Late nineteenth century saw the unleashing of new social forces leading to the emergence of modern nationalism, an ideology that gave birth to a powerful national movement that, in turn, culminated into the emergence of modern independent nation state. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as ‘congruence between culture and power’.\textsuperscript{48} In pre-modern times, this power culture fusion was reached in a


\textsuperscript{48} Ernest Gellner, \textit{Thought and Change}, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964
manner that it acquired a form which was hierarchical and ascriptive.\textsuperscript{49} Iniquitous social apparatus created by this form of congruence between power and culture deprived mass of the people of social power and equal opportunities in the society. The ascriptive hierarchical society based on specific form of culture-power fusion was now challenged by the deprived ones, who emerged politically with an intention to redistribute the power within social relations. It is in the context of this challenge that we have to address the problem of Brahmanical appropriation of the local deities. The challenge, at the same time strengthened a counter-hegemonic and anti-Brahmanical culture that promoted a lower caste contestory perception of the folk-cults.

Power and dominance found their expression in, and was sustained through, institutions such as caste, which worked as a system of privilege for some and disabilities for many. Brahmanical supremacy was mediated through ordering of different varnas and Hindu theological constructs-sanskara, karma and dharma were integrated into caste system to legitimize Brahmanical supremacy.\textsuperscript{50} Though, the system was patronized and protected by those who operated the levers of political power, it primarily drew its strength through inner dynamics. The sustenance of iniquitous and hierarchical social order, however, was not an easy task. It often faced resistance from those, who found the ascriptive hierarchy disadvantageous. Since, the hierarchical social order sustained and perpetuated itself primarily through religion and social customs sanctified by religion, resistance in the religious sphere was the strongest.

\textsuperscript{49} G. Aloysius, \textit{Nationalism Without a Nation in India}, OUP, 1997, P.15
\textsuperscript{50} M. N. Srinivas, \textit{Social Change in modern India}, Orient Longman,
(b) The Lower Caste Challenges in 19th and 20th Centuries:

In order to understand the Brahmanical appropriation of the cults of folk-deities, it is important to trace the history of lower caste socio-religious movements in Rajasthan in the 19th and 20th centuries. The history of Indian sub-continent is replete with numerous socio-religious and cultural movements, which challenged the hierarchical social order and dominance of Brahmanical ideology. Monotheistic Bhakti movement of Kabir and other low-caste saints, sects such as Vira-Shaivism, and Sikhism were all, with variance in degree, anti hierarchical socio-religious manifestations.\(^{51}\) The traditions, cultures, and values posing a constant resistance to varna based Brahmanical ideology received an impetus owing to political and social changes unleashed during the course of establishment of British rule and preceding it. These changes combined with qualitatively different rule of the British had a definite impact on the traditional form of social distribution of power, which, in turn, created a condition of anxiety for the traditional beneficiaries. Scholars have analyzed the impact of British rule on the traditional social structure at the national level. It has been suggested that transition from warlord aristocracy to diversified bureaucracy proved significant in changing the nature of power and method of wielding it in social arena. The politico-administrative unification and network of communication accelerated the pace of spatial mobility, as a prelude to social mobility.\(^{52}\) Politico-administrative unity of the country, however, did not disturb the social hierarchy and Brahmanical dominance. Colonial rule, in fact, further deepened the cleavage between Brahamans and other higher castes on the one hand and lower caste


and other marginally groups on the other. The process, once begun, brought cohesiveness between near equal castes, both at top and lower levels of caste hierarchy. This polarization undoubtedly led to rise in the political consciousness among subjugated and deprived sections of the old order resulting into numerous political movements in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nineteenth and early twentieth centuries India witnessed numerous movements of political awakening and posed a renewed threat to the Brahmanical dominance and ascriptive hierarchy struggling to acquire a new form under the changed circumstances. These movements were localized within regions and communities and sought redistribution of power within social relations. Numerous such demonstrations of egalitarian aspirations were crystallized in the form of incipient organizations, activities and struggles, varying in degree and content from region to region and community to community.

The struggles of lower caste groups were aimed at redistribution of power by challenging the dominance of Brahmans. They were conducted both in religio-cultural and political sphere. Izhavas, an untouchable agricultural caste in Travancore challenged the monopoly of Brahmans in ritual matters whereas Shanars conducted a struggle against degrading custom of partial nakedness of women in deference to the savarna castes.

The nature of relationships between the colonial state, the colonial-Orientalist forms of knowledge, social distribution of power and challenges to the dominance of Brahmanical ideology that was acquiring a new form through modern and secular idioms is beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, it will not be wrong to conclude that these relationships had their ramifications for the region under study. Weakening of the Rajput

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55 G. Aloysius, P.55
States due to Maratha depredations, infighting among them and beginning of colonization had adversely affected the traditional balance of social forces. Although recent research, particularly those of Nicholas Dirks, have stressed the ‘invented’ nature of caste society under British colonial rule, it is also true that colonial state and administrative practices gave rise to the emergence of many low caste movements that questioned Brahmanical hegemony. Pre-nineteenth century sources indicate strong administrative intervention by state whenever the lower caste groups violated caste hierarchy or designated caste functions. The State had even appointed officers (karkoons) to ensure that these practices were followed by the lower castes. The state issued instructions from time to time prohibiting the lower castes from using sugar in sweet preparation. On some occasions where both savarna and lower castes participated in a function, the sweetmeats were allowed to be prepared with certain conditions. The preparation of sweetmeats had to be carried out in the house of a person belonging to savarna caste only and use of sugar in such preparation was allowed partially. In the year 1726 A.D., in Qasba Amber, a complaint was made to the state authorities that the institution of caste was loosing its meaning as Muslims and lower castes were drawing water from wells of Brahmans and Mahajans. The State passed an order that people belonging to lower castes and Muslim community should draw water from their respective wells. Thus the eighteenth century states made it a part of their state policy to enforce caste norms particularly on the lower orders. Such sources become negligible as we approach nineteenth century.

56 Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of mind: Colonialism and the Making of modern India*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001
58 Ibid.
59 Sihay Hazur; Mingser Sudi 6, V.S. 1783/1726 A. D. Bundle no.23; Jaipur Records, Rajasthan State Archives Bikaner
Weakening of the Rajput states made the position of the Brahmans vulnerable and provided a space for assertion by the lower castes. As a consequence, Rajasthan during nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed numerous struggles by the depressed communities. The two pronged struggle by the lower castes was aimed at rejection of degrading and dehumanizing customs, they were forced to perform over the centuries, and also at challenging the Brahmanical supremacy in the religio-cultural sphere. In both the spheres, assertion of their independent religious identity by giving wide currency to the cults of the local deities was an important mode of contestation and resistance.

In western Rajasthan, the first organised movement was witnessed during the first decade of twentieth century. In 1907, an organization called Sarva Hitkari Sabha was established in Churu. Apart from raising demand of educating the untouchables in the existing schools, a separate school for lower caste groups and untouchables was opened by Sarva Hitkari Sabha. The school was named as Kabir Pathshala. 60 Another school called Ramdev school was established at Bikaner in 1923. 61 The aim of the movement was to throw open schools, temples, dharamshalas, wells, and ponds etc. for the use of untouchables and others at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The struggle resulted into certain gains and the ideal of egalitarian society looked within reach. Birla temple in Pilani was opened in 1932 for untouchables and twelve students from lower caste groups were admitted into a college for higher education in Pilani. 62 A temple of Ramdev was constructed in the year 1935 and a harijan (a term denoting untouchables) was assigned the task of Pujari (priest). Harijan Sewak Sangh, which had its branches in almost all parts of western Rajasthan decided to celebrate Balmiki Divas and other such ceremonies.

60 P. C. Joeya; Rajasthan Ke Dalito Mein Samajik Va Loktantrik Chetna; 1922-1952
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
during which bhajans were sung. Prbhat Pheri, (collective singing of devotional songs while marching in the streets early in the morning) and lectures were organized on the occasion of Balmiki Diwas for the upliftment of the untouchables and other marginal caste groups.\textsuperscript{63} Twentieth century witnessed movements against the ban on the entry of the lower caste groups into temples. A report compiled by Rajputana Harijan Sevak Sangh clearly reflects the successes of the movement in terms of articulation of aspirations of the groups involved and in terms of the social issues that were becoming important to them in the twentieth century. The report says that twelve temples were opened to harijans, 386 bhajans and kirtans took place, 246 times katha was organised among harijans, and at 34 places harijans and other higher castes held prayers together.\textsuperscript{64} These struggles, to a great extent, were successful in bringing various lower caste groups together- groups which had traditionally remained antagonistic to each other. There are numerous instances where lower caste organizations and caste panchayats intervened to resolve the differences between various castes and sub castes. Jata and Bashira, the two sub castes of Meghwals, pledged in the name of their deities Ramdev and Dalibai to mitigate their differences. Later, an association of Meghwals was formed in Udaipur state which launched a movement for eradication of degrading customs such as forced labour, dragging of animal carcass and eating meat of dead animals etc. In District Ganganagar, schools and hotels were opened for lower castes. Caste and community panchayats were involved in decision making and implementation of the decisions. Panchayats even imposed fines upon those who violated the collective decisions. The decisions to give up degrading caste practices were strictly enforced by the organizations and bodies such as

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{64} History of freedom movement papers, 1943, R1V and V94/3 National Archives, New Delhi
panchayats.65 7151 harijans took pledge not to consume meat of dead animals. Another 7247 harijans pledged to give up alcohol.66 One would find that a kind of self-reform was carried out by the lower castes to lift themselves socially. One of the dietary practices prevalent among the lower castes, mainly among the leather workers-Meghvals and the Thories, was the consumption of meat of dead animals. Giving up such practices was an attempt to mitigate the apparent difference between them and the 'clean' castes. The untouchables also tried to do away with several other symbols of discriminations. Rajputana Harijan Karyakarta Sammelan passed a resolution on 23-12-1938 in Mukundgarh against prohibition of wearing special dress, gold and silver jewelry, construction of houses, riding on horses by the untouchables.67

Since these discriminatory practices were sustained through religious sanction for ages, the resistance also could be most effective through religious idioms. Religious beliefs, practices, and symbols became a central feature not only in contesting the social hegemony of Brahmins but also in challenging their social and political dominance. In the year 1944, thousands of lower caste people gathered at Ramdev temple at Pushkar and founded a new religion called Sura Dharma. The principles of this religion advocated the rejection of traditionally assigned humiliating and dehumanizing professions. The temples of Ramdev became centers of socio-political activities where meetings were organized and resolutions were adopted. The cult of Ramdev proved a cementing force and rallying point for all those fighting for ending social discrimination.

65 *Meghwal Darshan*; Bikaner; 2000
66 *History of freedom movement papers*, 1943, R1V and V94/3 National Archives, New Delhi
67 *Mehkmakhas*; Jodhpur, C2/9, 1933-39, RSAB.
Many anti Brahmanical movements in Rajasthan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries projected the cult of the folk-deities under study as symbols of protest and in the process increased their following. But, on the other hand, some of the lower-caste movements contested the Brahmanical domination by founding their own sects and established traditions rejecting essential elements of Brahmanical religion. Many new cults had emerged among lower castes, especially among the Chamars, which later developed into sects. For instance, Lalgir founded the sect Alakhgirs during the decade of 1830. Lalgir was a member of the Chamar caste. He denounced idolatry and taught his followers to invoke the 'Incomprehensible' (Alakh) and their sole worship consisted in the repeating of this word (Alakh).^68^ There were other small sects which emerged during this period among whose main followers were the Chamars, but other lower caste groups also adopted the tenets of these sects.

The rising consciousness among the lower caste groups and untouchables during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a definite bearing on the Indian National Movement. Indian National Congress leaders at national level did recognize and advocate their cause. At local levels, however, it was considered no less than a direct challenge to the hegemony of the Brahmans and the allied caste groups, and was resisted. The native States, however, given their political compulsions responded favourably to the rising consciousness of the lower strata of the society. During the first half of the twentieth century, the temple of the village Garabdesar near Bikaner was thrown open for lower caste groups. The 'clean' castes, however, reacted sharply, lower caste people were forcibly prevented from taking water from the village wells, and they were socially boycotted. Upper caste shopkeepers refused to sell goods to lower caste groups, the lower

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^68^ Imperial Gazetteer of India; Vol. VIII 1908, Oxford, pp.208
caste tenants were evicted from the lands, and their cattle wealth was stolen. The women folk of the lower caste groups also bore the burnt as attempts to molest and rape them were made to teach them a lesson for the audacity of their men.69

In 1952, Bikaner State organized an anti-untouchability day by allowing lower castes to take water from public reservoirs and enter into temples. The savarna castes allowed the lower castes to take water from the reservoir already demarcated for them and were allowed to enter temple of Ramdev, which in any case belonged to them.

The concerns and aspirations of the untouchables and other lower caste groups found expression in the activities of the Indian National Congress as well. Lok Parishads, bodies constituted by the Indian National Congress in various parts of the country, were voicing such concerns. Rajput Jagirdars and Brahmins at the local level, however, were resisting these efforts as the desired change could upset their hegemonic designs. The resultant social conflict sometimes acquired forms of physical confrontation forcing the state authorities to intervene in order to prevent religious congregations from turning violent.70 Opposition to the attempts of the progressive leaders at raising issues pertaining to the plight of lower castes was not confined to individual members of Jagirdars and upper caste elite alone. Despite the decision of the Indian National Congress leadership to raise issues affecting the lower castes, the local area committees of the party dominated by higher caste groups not only suppressed such moves, but also resisted the entry of the depressed castes into the local area offices of the Congress.71 Socially dominant sections,

69 P. C. Joeeya, "Riyasatkaleen Bikaner ke Meghvanshi Samaj mein Samajik va Rajnaitik Chetna"; in Meghwali Darshan, Bikaner, 2000, Page 13
70 Looking at the possibilities of confrontation between the activists of Lok Parishad and the Jagirdars during Ramdev's fair at Birathiya Khurd village, the state ordered the Hakim of the Jaitaran to be present at the headquarters of the fair. The relationship between the activists of Lok Parishad and Jagirdars was described as 'highly strained', File C3/3 Vol.-1, S.No.51, Mahakama Khas, RSAB
71 AICC Papers;G-11 (KWI, G-12 LPT-1), ,1938
led by Brahmans, were willing to accept the lower castes into Hindu hierarchy, but conceding equal social status to them was not acceptable to them. Their leaders at the national level, however, looked at the rising aspirations of the lower caste groups differently. The continuing alienation of the lower caste groups from national mainstream and Hindu religion, in the new emerging political situation would not only weaken the national movement it could also push these groups into the fold of Islam and Christianity. The conservative groups and, particularly, the Brahman leaders did not want to lose their hold over the lower caste groups.

Lower caste radical reformers like Jyotiba Phule and B.R Ambedkar emerged as mass leaders who condemned Hindu Religion for the exploitation of the lower caste. On the other hand, the Orthodox Hindus were increasingly concerned about the conversion of the lowest caste groups to Islam and Christianity and later to Buddhism under the leadership of B.R Ambedkar. Many times the presidents of Hindu Mahasabha (who also happened to be the leaders of Indian National congress) stressed on making Hinduism more liberal in order to improve the condition of the depressed sections. The leaders of Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress leaders were voicing the fear that social discrimination of the untouchables could lead them to embrace Islam and Christianity. In Rajasthan a memorandum to the Maharaja of Jodhpur by All India Hindu (Arya) Dharma Seva Sangha reflected the anxiety of members of Arya Dharma about growing indifference of harijans towards Hindu Dharma. Moreover, they blamed oppression of and inhuman treatment meted out to the harijans by the upper caste Hindus.

72 The fear is reflected in all the presidential addresses of Hindu Mahasabha's as it attacked Islam and Christianity for converting the untouchables, Jayakar papers, Private paper collections, National Archives, Delhi.

73 Jayakar Papers, National Archives, New Delhi
The scare among the protagonists of Hindu Dharma was also caused by the systematic work carried out by the Muslim and Christian missionaries, who could easily exploit the poverty, restlessness and anger of the lower caste groups. These missionaries through their benevolent institutions such as schools, dispensaries, asylums and poor houses could wean away the depressed sections from influence of Hindu religion. As a result, the States of Jhalawar and Bharatpur had declared open some important temples for worship to harijans.\textsuperscript{74} Similar attitude is reflected in a letter that communicated the resolution of Hindu Mahasabha to Maharaja of Jodhpur congratulating those Indian Princes who had ordered the removal of restriction on temple entry of depressed sections and requested the other princes to follow their noble example.\textsuperscript{75}

The fear of the orthodox Hindus leaders is evident from their letters to the Maharaja of Jodhpur appealing him to pass legislation to ensure religious freedom in Marwar on the lines of the acts passed in Bikaner and other states of Rajputana. They criticized Muslim organizations for converting Hindu Women and minor girls and boys treacherously. Marwar Freedom of Religion Act was brought into force on 1\textsuperscript{st} Dec 1929. This Act was to stop conversion. According to it, a person desiring to convert should present himself in person and sign a written statement, an oath affidavit before the Registrar. Registrar should not admit an affidavit from a person who had not resided within his jurisdiction at least for a period of one month immediately before the date on which the affidavit is filed. The clauses of the Act fixed person under 21yrs of age as minor and only an adult was permitted to seek conversion. Wholesale conversions undertaken as an organised

\textsuperscript{74} Mehkma Khas, C2/9, Social, Jodhpur
\textsuperscript{75} MehkmaKhas, govt. of Jodhpur, C2/9, vol-II 18-11-1936
endeavor on the part of an organised body or by any individual in the state was to be declared void.\textsuperscript{76}

The lower caste movements that emerged in various parts of India questioned the very religious basis of Brahmanical hegemony. Rajasthan also did not remain untouched by the forces of lower-caste assertion. During the eighteenth century, the Rajput states espoused Brahmanical ideology and re-imposed Brahmanical caste norms on the society. Eighteenth century in this sense may be regarded as one of Brahmanical re-assertion. However, as the crisis of the Rajput polity intensified and the hold of the state over its subjects became weak in the wake of internal conflicts, Maratha inroads and the advent of the British, the Brahmans could no longer rely extensively on the ability of the state to sustain the social order based on caste. In the new situation of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Brahmans in Rajasthan were forced to come to terms with lower caste religious traditions. The cults of folk-deities, which were ridiculed and despised by them earlier, were now appropriated by the Brahmans as their own. However, in the process of appropriation, the Brahmans imparted new dimensions to these cults by Hinduizing them.

(c) Brahmanical Transformation of the Cults of Folk-deities:

Although the higher caste Hindus did not include the folk-deities into the list of great Hindu gods, they began to worship them for their ‘specialist’ powers. Most of the higher caste pilgrims visit the temples of Ramdev with specific desires inextricably mixed with sense of spiritual well being that comes from engaging in a ‘meritorious act’. This shift first came from among the women folk of the upper castes. Men worshiped deities such as Ramdev only in distress.\textsuperscript{77} However, the change in the case of Pabu’s followers can

\textsuperscript{76} The Marwar Freedom of religion Act, \textit{Mehkma Khas}, Jodhpur, C5/3, Social.
\textsuperscript{77} Mira Reym Binford; \textit{Op. Cit.}
not be considered significant. The method of invoking the deity in case of Pabu is called Phad Banchna, that is, narrating the life story of Pabu as depicted in the Phad in front of gathering of the devotees. Bhagats or bhopas, the priests belonging to lower castes undertake the narration. The gathering attending the phad narration also has people from higher castes, but their number is not significant.

Although, the higher caste groups joined the ranks of the devotees of the folk-deities, they did not accept the mediation of the lower caste priests. The lower caste devotees traditionally built the devras or thaans of Goga and Ramdev and hired the priests belonging to their own communities to conduct worship. The process of appropriation of the worship of these deities by upper castes was also marked by erection of places of worships by the devotees and by recruiting a Brahman or a Rajput priest for the purpose of conducting worship and ceremonies.

With the increased circulation of the print material and expansion of literacy in the twentieth century, the process of appropriation of the deities into mainstream Hindu religious system gathered pace. Photos and calendars increasingly replaced the erstwhile symbols such as snake and pagaliya. Now a specific Rajput warrior image of the deities as depicted on the calendars or cover of the books, began to occupy the popular psyche. The contents of the non-Barahmanical traditions, associated with these deities, were gradually transformed. The emphasis now was placed on heroic values and Kshatriya Dharma, a feature repeatedly emphasized in the print literature widely circulated in the form of booklets and in popular narratives by jogis, bhagats and bhopas of these deities.
Popular religious literature, photographs, and calendars caused a gradual shift in the popular image of these deities and assigned a new role to them. The cult of the folk-deities no longer remained a localized religious phenomenon and began to be worshiped for general spiritual welfare, an expectation that had been so far been confined to gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon alone. The special functions and purposes for which these deities had been worshiped for centuries, were pushed to the margins in the popular religious literature. There emerged religious texts on the pattern of the scriptures of mainstream Hindu religion. Guga Puran a religious narrative composed in the twentieth century attempts to project Guga as a Puranic god. Guga Chalisa written on the pattern of Hanuman Chalisa is widely in circulation in parts of western Rajasthan and southern Haryana. Artis (devotional songs) to invoke deities were composed, printed, and widely circulated. These artis are often composed on the tunes of Hindi film songs. This undoubtedly ensured the easy remembrance and popularity of the devotional songs. Apart from regular bookshops near all major temples of these deities, periodic fairs are the effective medium for dissemination of the new image through print literature. Owing to the simultaneous spread of print literature and literacy, the deities under study, were increasingly absorbed into Hindu religious system. Traditional devotional songs were modified to make way for gods of Hindu pantheon along with Goga and Ramdev. In one such bhajan, Ramdev is shown to have participated in jamma (A religious congregation organised to offer prayers and sing devotional songs) along with Brahma, Shiv, Vishnu and Goddesses Sarswati of Hindu pantheon. Bhajans in most cases begins with

78 The term popular religious literature has been used here for the low cost books, booklets, handbills and collection of devotional songs, which are sold by the regular bookshops or sale organized specifically during the days of fair or distributed free of cost by some devotees.

79 Shri Panalal Tripathi, Avatari Shri Ramdev Katha, Madras, 1973, P.4
recitation of OM, a term denoting God and used while offering prayers to Hindu gods and goddesses. Ramdev Chalisa (Forty couplets composed in reverence of Ramdev) on the pattern of Hanuman Chalisa is in wide circulation. The publisher of the text has offered concessional price to those buyers who are willing to distribute the booklet for propagating the teaching of Ramdev. It depicts Ramdev as incarnation of Krishna and lord Vishnu. The devotional songs (Arti) contained in these booklets have strong materialistic overtones. It suggests material benefits for all those who worship Ramdev. Ramdev Chailsa also contains excerpts from Bhagwat Geeta and couplets written in Sanskrit. Popular religious literature once published in Marwari has been increasingly published in Hindi whereby is multiplying the reach manifold. The method of invoking the deities has also been made complex to the extent that role of the mediator has become essential. Performance of Puja is preceded with devotional songs sung in veneration of Lord Ganesha and Goddesses Sarswati.

The printed literature therefore indicates complete assimilation of popular deities into Brahmanical fold. The method of performing jamma jagran as prescribed in a text Jamma Jagran Vidhi a treatise authored by Swami Gokul Das Ji Maharaj is complex and full of Brahmanical rituals and artifacts. According to this method, a square platform is prepared and a piece of red cloth is spread on it. Thereafter the word OM is written with rice and pulses and a jyot is lighted. In the center of the platform a kalash is placed and near it is established the idol of Ramdev along with idols of Lord Ganesh, Hanuman, Bharion and other male deities. The items required for performing puja include Supari, Dhakh,

80 Ramdev Chalisa, Shri Sarswati Parkashan, Ajmer
81 Swami Mahatma Gokuldasji Maharaj, Shri Ramdev Maharaj Ke Jamma Jagran Vidhi, Ajmer, year of publication not given, PP.23-24
82 Swami Gokul Das ji Maharaj; Shri Ramdevji Maharaj Ke Jamma Jagran Vidhi; Sarswati Prakashan; Ajmer; not dated
Ilaychi, Badam, Chuhary, mishri, Patasey, Meva, Mishtan, Fruits and Flowers depending upon the level of dedication of the organizer. Havan samagri include Gugal, Chandan Chura, Khopra, Chap, Kapur, Jau, Til and incense. Lighting of incense, recitation of Gayatri mantra, arti and harikirtan is recommended while performing jamma jagran. Features such as placing idols of Hindu gods along with the idol of Ramdev, performing puja with large number of items and recitation of gayatri mantra and harikirtan are Brahmanical features which are described as necessary for a successful jamma jagran. Organizing jamma jagran as prescribed in the text could be an expensive affair and only rich could afford it.

Even the iconography has been modified to facilitate the process of incorporation of Ramdev into established Hindu religious system. The photograph of samadhi sthal (Burial place) of Ramdev shows Ramdev in the posture similar to that of Brahma with his right palm projected forwarded with two devotees singing prayers on both sides with musical instruments. The photograph is designed in a manner that it covers the marble stone slab (mazar) which suggests his burial in accordance with Islamic tradition. Similarly, in a twentieth century temple near Goga Meri, idols of Hanuman and Lord Shiva are installed along with the idol of Goga.

IV. Responses and Resistance to Brahmanization: Resilience of Lower Caste Religious Forms

Although, the ‘Rajputization’ of the images of the folk-deities through the efforts of the Rajput ruling elites was making inroads into the popular attitudes towards them, their traditional lower-caste followers continued to emphasize association of these deities with

\[\text{\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.}\]
their cause. At the level of the lower castes and subjugated groups, the cultic worship of
the folk-deities continued to be looked upon as important religious performances having
significant relationship with their mundane life and existential problems. Despite
‘Rajputization’ of their carrier and personalities, the deities remained, in popular
iminations, the allies, and companions of the common people. In one such song “The
song of Goga”, recorded by Mirza Hussain of Delhi from a local bard, shows Bhajju-
Goga’s household scavenger- as his associate. At one of the shrines of Goga in Punjab,
the images of Nar Singh, Bhure Singh and Kale Singh are installed along with that of the
deity himself. The bard identifies Bhure Singh with Bhajju.84 The song was narrated by
the bard Shitabi (a non-Charan bard). He was a Meo, which explains his emphasis on
glorification of association of Goga with low caste people. The song depicts Goga as the
owner of the Village of Dederva, which is different from Goga’s depiction as a great
king, known across the seven rivers, by the traditional bards patronized by the Rajput
rulers. Projection of Goga as a commoner is further established from the manner in which
his cousins ask for division of property including domestic animals and household goods,
a practice popular among the common people rather than Rajput ruling elites. Division of
ancestral property and source of income among the descendents and officials of the
Rajput rulers remained confined to such practices as bhai-bant (division of conquered
territory) or assignment of pattas (land-revenue assignments) or creating thikanas.
Sharing the household goods was never a part of Rajput traditions. Showing Goga
practicing popular customs was to ensure rejuvenation of his bonds with common people.
The appropriation of the deities by Rajput rulers from 18th century onwards brought about

significant alterations in the existing images but the lower caste perceptions still continued to thrive and retain their popular character.

The new image attributed to the deities, introduction of Brahmanical rituals and creation of mythological texts on the pattern of texts of institutionalized Hindu religion had a desired effect. The deities were gradually appropriated into Hindu religious framework. The process of appropriation resulted into greater interaction between the two religious systems—one represented by the cults of popular deities and other by the worship of the gods of Hindu pantheon. Whereas people from higher caste segments of the society joined the ranks of followers of the popular deities, the process of appropriation also opened up Hindu religion to lower caste groups, whose chief deities until then were the figures such as Ramdev, Goga, and Pabu. The lower caste groups, in the changed circumstances, saw a new opportunity to shed the stigma of being ‘unclean’ and move upward on the ladder of social hierarchy. They began to worship gods of Hindu pantheon and some of them were raised to the status of chief deities. It was considered imperative by many among the lower castes to be the part of over arching Brahmanical religious world to gain religious equality. Many lower castes, which for centuries considered Ramdev as their chief deity, began to worship other Hindu gods as well.85 G.W Briggs in his treaties, The Chamars, has made a similar observation. The Chamars, who had lived in larger cities for some time and had come under the influence of the Arya Samaj, or of Christianity, gave up ‘superstitious’ elements in their customs and were professing to

85 Many lower castes listed in the census 1909 and 1911, had stated Ramdev as their chief deity, but later in the twentieth century Ramdev no longer remained their chief deity. The ‘People of India’ does not mention Ramdev as the chief deity of Nai, Jogi or Raiger, who had listed Ramdev as their chief deity in the Census of 1911, People of India; OpCit.
have lost faith in their godlings.\textsuperscript{86} However, this did not seem to be all pervasive phenomenon. Malis worshipped Visnu, Siva and Sakti along with Ramdev.\textsuperscript{87} Nai worshipped Sakti, Mahaji and Hanuman besides Ramdev. The Chamars worshipped Sitla and Ramdev and Bhambis worshiped Vishnu, Ramdev and Khetrapala.\textsuperscript{88} The Balai mainly worshiped Ramdev, and Raigar worshipped Siva, Visnu, Ganga, Mataji and Ramdev.\textsuperscript{89} There are instances where, many devotees continued to worship local deities even after migrating from Marwar. Some Meghwals who had migrated to Delhi, though had began to believe in all gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon viz. Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, Ganesh, Shankar, Hanuman, Shiv Lakshmi Durga, Parvati and Kali etc. but also continued to worship Ramdev. The Julaha Meghwal Panchayat, a representative body of the Meghwals constructed a temple of Ramdev in Karol Bagh, in the year 1920. As a symbol of devotion to Ramdev the Meghwal families used to unfurl a saffron flag in the center of their courtyard.\textsuperscript{90} However, those Meghwals, who migrated to Bombay preferred to worship Lord Ganesh.\textsuperscript{91} The interaction between two religious systems mediated through appropriation of popular deities by Brahmans and other higher caste groups once again created the basis to reinforce Brahmanical supremacy. The lower castes, however, did not surrender to the new situation and continued to worship the popular deities as their chief deities. Although the Brahmanical rituals had entered the religio-cultural milieu of the lower caste groups, they did not give up their traditional cultural and religious customs. The domestic ceremonies of the Chamars show much Brahmanical influence, and while the cardinal

\textsuperscript{87} Census of India; 1901 pp176
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. P.140
\textsuperscript{89} Census, of India, 1911
\textsuperscript{90} Census of India 1961, vol. XIX Part V-B, Scheduled Castes in Delhi
elements of Brahmanism are practiced by them, still there is a very large admixture of
details of ritual that belong to the non Brahmanical religion. The fear of demons and the
principles of spirit-possession are everywhere taken into account and malicious spirits
and demons of disease are universally feared. None of these elements of primitive belief
are borrowed; they come from the strata in which the Chamars themselves are found.92
Although, alternative deities and mediators are created for necessity and transgression,
still the protest against inequality does not stop here. This protest continues and its
ramifications are to be found in different forms in different period of time.

It is also interesting to examine whether the prescribed Brahmanical methods of invoking
the deities were followed in practice and if yes, to what extent. Hundreds of followers of
Goga and Ramdev were interviewed for the purpose of present study. Not even one of
them possessed a copy of either Goga Puran or Ramdev Chalisa. Very few of them have
heard of these texts. When the methods to perform jamma jagran prescribed in printed
texts was compared with an actual performance, the results were found very different.
Jamma jagrans organised by commoners are often marked with absence of Brahmanical
complexities. One such jamm jagran attended in village Munda in western Rajasthan on
8th April, 2003 was remarkably different from one prescribed in the Brahmanical text.
Jamma jagran in this part of Rajasthan is known as Raat Jaga. This particular raat jaga
was organised by a Jat family for seeking a successful and happy married life for their
son. The bhajan mandali called to perform the raat jaga comprised of five persons, all
belonging to lower castes. Three of them sang bhajans whereas other two gave them
company on musical instruments—drum and ravanhatta (a musical instrument with

92 G. W. Briggs, The Chamars, Low price Publications, New Delhi, first published in 1920 pp.234
strings) Before commencement of raat jaga a wooden platform was made and a piece of red clothe was spread on it. On the platform, idol of Ramdev riding a horse was installed. Lighting the jyot followed. The jyot was made of mixture of cow dung and incense and clarified butter was poured over it before lighting. All the members of the bhajan mandali went on their knees with folded hands and touched their foreheads to the platform murmuring mantras that could not be heard. Thereafter, it was the turn of the audience who paid respect to the deity by bowing and throwing coins on the platform. In contrast with the required items prescribed in the Brahmanical text, there was one dry coconut and a plate full of ladoos. Raat jaga was started with a bhajan of Ramdev and subsequently along with it, bhajans of Hanuman, Khetrapal, a local deity, and Goga were sung. Complex and elaborate Brahmanical ritual and puja were completely missing. Raat jaga did not begin with gayatri mantra and there were no idols of Hindu gods on the platform. Therefore, It will not be wrong to conclude that while the introduction of Brahmanical rituals and modes of worship and their propagation through print literature had lend to assign the attributes of Hindu gods to the folk-deities, at the lower level of society, these gods continue to be worshipped in traditional manner and impact of Brahmanical rituals is negligible.

The resistance to the attempted Brahmanical domination through appropriation of the popular deities can also be seen in existence of temples of Ramdev in Rajasthan. There exist numerous temples constructed and managed both by Brahmans and as well as Meghwals separately. The village temples in the Jaisalmer region of the western Rajasthan have been built by the Meghwals the traditional devotees of Ramdev. They
along with Kamads have been the priests of Ramdev's temple as well. Several temples personally visited by the present researcher in Bikaner and Jodhpur region have been built by higher caste devotees and are managed by priests belonging to higher castes. The existence of separate religious shrines of lower and dvija castes suggests that even after consistent efforts by the Brahmanical forces to appropriate the cults of deities, a synthesis between two religious systems is yet to be achieved. The lower castes have been maintaining their independent religious identity in opposition to the dominant religion. In the month of March, 2001 a bhajan mandli, professional group of singers comprising devotees from lower castes, and a group of lower caste commoners in an personal interaction at Ramdev's temple at Runicha, and Bikaner respectively expressed their feelings, which suggest that antagonism between the two religious belief systems is far from over. The group at Bikaner sharply reacted and made no efforts to hide their anger against 'clean' castes and 'their' gods when they were reminded of a saying coined by higher caste groups, which ridicules Ramdev for his association with lower castes and untouchables. They retaliated by ridiculing Lord Shiva for his ‘indecent’ dress and sitting posture. Similar reaction was observed from the lower caste devotees of Goga at the fair of Goga Meri in the month of September, 1999, where these devotees in a personal interaction projected Goga superior to the gods of Hindu pantheon and ridiculed the upper caste devotees by calling them ‘new comers’. The Brahmanical appropriation of the folk-deities, though an ongoing process, is bitterly contested by their original followers-the oppressed and the socially subjugated majority.

94 The temples of the folk-deities such as Goga, Ramdev and Pabu were personally visited by the present researcher in several parts of western Rajasthan including Bikaner, Jodhpur and areas of Jaisalmer in the month of March, 2001.