

### 3. *Lokgeet*, Literary Imagination, and the Idea of Kachchh

Kachchh is located on the western most side of the modern Indian state. The north of Kachchh is bordered with Sindh, Pakistan; on the East are the Gujarat Districts Banaskantha, Patan and Surendranagar; and on the South is the Gulf of Kachchh which separates the fertile land of Kachchh from mainland Gujarat. It has a very long coastline and satellite images show it as an island. Recorded history and archeological sites of Dholavira, Kotada, Kuran, and Andhau, among others, justify this.

Majority of the written histories of Kachchh have pointed out its crucial and sometimes strategic geographical position, which some of them believe gives it not only geopolitical but also sociocultural uniqueness.<sup>9</sup> Being an important but remote frontier, Kachchh has been a focus of interest at least from the medieval era. When the Islamic rulers took over the then pan-Indian region in the thirteenth century it found new importance as a place to settle. It became a part of several larger princely states as well as an independent state in its own right (Shah 18). Pravinchandra Shah has argued that “Kachchh has never been an independent state at least eight to nine hundred years before British arrival in Kachchh, being a part of one or the other political regime” (Shah 8). Kachchh had been ruled from Delhi in the time of Jahangir, Ahmedabad from 1510 to 1583 (Shah 19), by the British government from Bombay since 1819 to 1956 to 1960, and from Gandhinagar since the formation of Gujarat state in 1960. L.F. Rushbrook William notes that:

It would hardly be an exaggeration, indeed, to say that during most of the age of prehistory, throughout the dawn of history, and right into mediaeval times, Kutch had no separate existence: it was regarded as part of the dominions of whatever dynasty or race chanced to rule over the lands now known as Sind and Gujarat, and proved itself powerful enough from one base or the other to control the island state lying between them. (60)

Regardless, Kachchh was always seen as being culturally and linguistically foreign to mainland Gujarat because of the culture and language spoken by the natives of Kachchh, cultural affinities with Sindh and remoteness from mainland Gujarat.<sup>10</sup> Due to

---

<sup>9</sup> See Colonial Accounts, William Rashbrook, Edward Simpson, among others

<sup>10</sup> See Farahana Ibrahim *Settlers, Saints and Sovereigns*; Rita Kothari *Memories and Movements*; Samira Sheikh *Forging the Region*

the constant shifts which occurred in political regimes, natural calamities since the eleventh century, people of different ethnic groups, such as Samma, Meghvals, Jats, and Jadeja among many others migrated in large numbers to Kachchh, mostly from its northern and eastern borders. *Parable of Jakh* is popular narrative among the Kachchhi about the arrival of foreigners (Simpson 1). Samira Sheikh notes about the migration in Kachchh that:

There were two kinds of migrations into Gujarat. One, as Kolff highlights, was the incursion of small bands of warriors, often dispossessed junior relatives of established lineages in Rajasthan who came in search of patrons and employers and offered their military services. The other kind, not always distinct from the first, was the incursion of entire clans with their cattle wealth and families, driven south by famine, local oppression or the hope of better pastures. (101)

Kachchh being an island had maritime relationships with the Gulf and African countries to the West and with Europe as well. It had a connection with port cities, such as Okha, Bombay, Calcutta, Mangalore, Madras, and Karachi (William 17; Goswami 1). The most significant land connection was with Sindh, which can be apprehended even today. Within these geo-political fluxes, seismic movements and other natural calamities have also shattered the life of the people of Kachchh with at least two major earthquakes within the span of the last two centuries.

In 1852, as S.N. Raikes notes in his memoir, the population was 409522 of which 26.5 percent were Muslims (69). The density of population in 1901 was 64 per sq. mile with total population 408802, where it was 46 per sq. km in 2001 (Census 1901 11; Report 1901 35; Census 2011).<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The population of Kachchh according to the 2001 Census was 20,92,371 of which 10,96,737 were males and 9,95,634 females. Whereas it was 1583225 in 2001 census.

The population of the district forms 3.5 percent of the state population and ranks 14th among the districts. There are 877 inhabited villages and 14 towns in the district. There are 10 talukas in the district. The total rural population in Kachchh district is 13,63,836 persons and it is 65.2 percent of the total population of the district. The total urban population in the district is 7,28,535 persons and it constitutes 34.8 percent of the total population of the district (Census 2011, 69). The sex ratio is 908 females for 1000 male. Out of the total population, 12.4 percent is Scheduled Castes population and 1.2 Scheduled Tribes in 2011. 70 percent of the total population is literate among them female education rate is 60.9 percent. 76.9 percent are the follower of Hindu among total population and remaining is minorities of which Muslims are 21.1 percent. Gujarati has been considered as the mother tongues of Kachchh which does not give the number of speaker of Kachchhi as mother tongues (Census 2011).

Rushbrook William in his book published in 1950s notes that 567000 was population of Kachchh and 80 percent was in villages (16).<sup>12</sup>

Similar to the wide practice of ballads in Scotland, *lokgeet*, along with folktales, has always been central to the folk traditions of Kachchh. They have captured the dilemma and passion for the land. Composers of *lokgeet* have imagined Kachchh in multifarious ways, addressing vividly various aspects such as desert, rain, water, remoteness, and separation among others.

This chapter, following the framework of the previous chapter, examines Kachchh as a region through the close analysis of the *lokgeet*. It attempts to understand the social, political and regional construction of identity of Kachchh. In so doing it locates the idea of caste in the imagining the idea of Kachchh. It argues that the notion of caste, a pivotal social stratification structure, plays an important role in the imagination of the region of Kachchh just as the categories of race and class played a pivotal role in Scottish ballads. The region that emerges from this imagination remains exclusive to the upper-caste.

In order to locate the caste-based construction of the identity of Kachchh it analyses selected *lokgeet*. *Lokgeet* as an important and appealing medium is often used to mobilise the nationalist emotions. It has been used as a medium in the Indian freedom struggle (Yagnik 156). Based on this, the chapter also attempts to understand that how *lokgeet* as a genre is used in Kachchh to mobilize mass consciousness for the assertion of its distinct identity. In this regard it also argues that the selective appropriation of the *lokgeet*, which glorify the king or upper castes, by the people who often claim the distinct socio-political and geographical identity are significantly influenced by the notion of caste. It gives the region a homogenized identity disregarding the folks.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Drawing from the different histories of Gujarat and Kachchh, the first section locates Kachchh as a distinct historical, geographical and political region. It explores Gujarat and Kachchh as imagined regions in context of their histories, society and culture. In this backdrop the second section attempts to analyze *lokgeet* as a genre and discusses its historical and literary importance to Kachchh. Contextualized by the first and second sections, the third section examines

---

<sup>12</sup> The censuses carried out in the time of princely state in Kachchh people of who were considered as the untouchables might not be included in the survey. Therefore, it actual figure might vary than the presented in the censuses. Migration was also major factor in the movements of these people. With growth rate of 32.16 percent in 2011 population in Kachchh has increased three times in last 175 years (Census 2011).

selected *lokgeet* in order to locate the symbols and metaphors used in the *lokgeet* which give sense or the construction of the identity of Kachchh. The fourth section locates emerging Kachchh as a region from the readings of *Lokgeet* analyzed in the previous section. It also discusses the politics behind the imagining of Kachchh and the role of caste in it.

### **Imagining Gujarat**

The idea of Kachchh has greatly been influenced by the history and historiography of Kachchh and mainland Gujarat. Kachchh had been a gateway to the Mughals and Sultanate for British religious and political purposes for at least half of a millennium, as recorded by the historian and other scholars (Simpson 1; Ibrahim 1; Sheikh 101; Kothari 1-2). People have passed through Kachchh and spread within and outside of Gujarat.

Histories and writings of the geographically neighboring regions to Kachchh have, also invoked Kachchh and, been significant sources of information.<sup>13</sup> Histories of Gujarat prior to 1950 often excluded Kachchh as a part of Gujarat and considered it as a separate political and geographical region. Nevertheless, the politics of imagining Gujarat as a region is pivotal to the understanding of the idea of Kachchh as a region.

The imaginings of the idea of Gujarat can be studied as four major phases. First is the age of religious scripts (roughly before eleventh century). The second is pre-colonial Gujarat from twelfth to sixteenth century. The third phase is the colonial phase, where Gujarat was ruled by the British and their Indian allies during eighteenth to early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> The fourth phase is that of the post-independence period when India became a sovereign nation state.

Several histories of Gujarat and Kachchh refer to mythical times and the Vedic period. Mythical landmarks, including, rivers, hills and jungle are invoked mostly in the beginnings of the history books' chapters to offer a pre-colonial view of Gujarat from the pre-modern sources. Yadavasthali or Dwarka as a capital of Krishna's state is also a significant place of source of an imagined Gujarati *asmitā* or consciousness. It is believed

---

<sup>13</sup> The Gazetteers of the Palanpur state; the Memoirs and Reports by the British officers mostly written/published in early the early nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Marian Postans, Alexander Forbes, Dalpatram, Narmad, Meghani and Munshi SeeYagnik, Hasu. *Lokshahitya-Vignana*. Divine Publication, 2012.

by many Hindus that the mythical River Sarasvati flowed somewhere in the middle of the present-day Gujarat (Ibrahim 40-45).

The existence of Buddhist caves and stone inscriptions leads us to the presence of other pre-modern states which might have existed and stretched over the region. The Buddhist caves and stone inscriptions of Siyot, Lakhpatt and Junagadh are also significant traces of Buddhism. However, the imagination of Gujarati *asmitā* elides these.

Evidence from the Gupta and Maurya rulers indicate that they might have ruled this region (Karani 34; Rushbrook 65; Ajani 39; Shah 17). This shifting of centres of power brought people of different ethnicities, cultures, and languages.

During the Sultanate and Mughal era territories of the region Gujarat were in constant flux. Munshi believed that the Chalukya Solanki dynasty's rule was the 'golden age' which was disrupted by the Sultanate and British rule (Sheikh 2). This brings one to the second period and sources of imagining of Gujarat. Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Seth note that the Jain monks had first used the term 'Gurjardesh' in *Kuvalayamala* in the eighth century and then onward it had been used in Jain manuscripts by the other monks (Yagnik and Seth 21; Sheikh 26). The term meant to be used to indicate the region that is the northern part of the territory now known as Gujarat or the region surrounding Aravalli hills which included districts of North Gujarat stretching south wards to Ahmedabad and Khambhat (Yagnik and Seth 9).

The term Gujarat is derived from an ethnic community and used as a prefix to the people who are from the present-day northern Gujarat, eastern Rajasthan or Malwa. It's first known use is in the sixth century, Brahmins and other people used it in this way as well. It was also considered as a regional marker, two kingdoms existed with same name as noted by a Chinese traveler (Sheikh 26-27). However, a Muslim Sufi saint from the Deccan region settled in Ahmedabad and was known as Vali Gujarati in the seven century. Gujarati was used as suffix to his name (Ibrahim 20). As Sheikh argues the idea of modern Gujarat has its beginnings in the medieval era; she notes that it was the traders and religious pilgrims that made Gujarat a distinct mercantile and religious place. The politics surrounded by both the activities shaped the idea of Gujarat at deeper level and continues to do so (Sheikh 2).

The idea of Gujarat has been traced back to the era of Jain monk Hemachandracharya and rule of Kumarpal and Siddhraj Jaysinh Solanki of Chalukya dynasty in the eleven and twelfth century in Anahilvad, Patan. This region was known as the region of the Gūrjars upon which Gujarat is supposedly derived.

People such Narmadashankar L. Dave, popularly known as ‘Narmad,’ Alexander K. Forbes and others had started literary activities which, under the aegis of Forbes Gujarati Sabha, collected and archived literature of and in Gujarati and constructed an idea of Gujarat from the mainstream historical narratives with folk and mythical elements. One of the aims of the Forbes Gujarati Sabha, established in the year eighteen sixty five, was to research and publish book on Gujarati language, literature and history<sup>15</sup> (“Forbes Gujarati Sabha”). *Rasamala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat, In Western India* was a one the major book published by Alexander Forbes, the then founding president of the Sabha.

Jain monks had used the term Gujardesh, Gujarat in a scattered way in their travel and religious scriptures even before the advent of the British Empire (Yagnik and Seth 4). Yagnik and Sheth aptly note that “Gujarat is a complex mosaic of interactions between the historical and mythical pasts which continue to shape the present” (5). On the similar note, Sheikh argues that:

Although modern Gujarat was formed by recent events, its medieval history clearly continues to have major implications for contemporary politics. The Gujarat region has been continuously settled for almost 4,000 years by immigrants, attracting continual waves of traders, peasants, pastoralists, and invaders. (1)

Yagnik and Seth locate Kachchh within the social, geographical, and political terrains of Gujarat. Although it was included politically in the state of Gujarat in 1960s, however considering it as a linguistic part of the Gujarat region raised questions for the people who uphold the distinct identity of Kachchh and Kachchhi language. Historians and scholars do believe that Kachchh has a different dynamic which make it significantly unlike the rest of mainland Gujarat, although Kachchh, since the 1960s, has been an integral part of Gujarat state as well as shares socio-cultural affinities with Gujarat since then.

The third phase roughly begins with the arrival of the British empire in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; when they had begun to understand the people, culture and Indian society at large to rule effectively. This period extensively drew from the oral and written sources of the earlier two phases. British officials approached the society and region in terms of the territories of the state and the language people speak within the princely states. Even their works were carried out with two general aims: to

---

<sup>15</sup> See for more details <https://www.forbesgujaratisabha.org/parichay/>

know the land and the people to help in governing the newfound land more effectively and shaping discourse to sustain the rule. The official gazettes of the Bombay Presidency for example, were widespread and contained information about the state, territories, people, trade, economy, agriculture, rituals and customs, treaties and agreements, etc. (Campbell 1880). There were annals on the people, culture, and language, among others. James Tod and Alexander Forbes are the best examples of it.<sup>16</sup>

It was the second half of the nineteenth century when the seeds of the idea of modern Gujarat were sown, with the support of literary and historiographic activities started by the Gujarati urban literati and the help of the British officers. This idea became reality in 1961 when Gujarat was declared a separate state. Sheikh, in her seminal book, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200-1500* notes that:

The movement for a separate state of Gujarat derived much energy from the writings and personal efforts of campaign for statehood a cry for the restoration of the ancient *asmitā* or glory of Gujarat. Munshi was a popular and prolific novelist in Gujarati who wrote on historical and cultural themes. (1-2)

Perhaps, the idea of Gujarat was being constructed prior to Munshi. *The Gazetteers of Cutch, Palanpur and Mahikanth* (1880) consist of variety of information of the regions. It contains description of the geographical position, boundaries, divisions, geological aspects, flora and fauna, population and demography, caste, religion in form of a census, agriculture, capital trade and manufactures of variety of goods, different routes, history, revenue, health and places of interest. The data of Kachchh was prepared and sent by the British agent colonel L.C. Barton (Campbell 1880).

The close affinities of the British officers and native upper-caste literati enabled the British to write books, memoirs, reports on the Gujarati/India subject for the Empire and Europe at large. The other understanding of the region of Gujarat was accumulated by the newly educated literati from the second and third quarters of the twentieth century. They were either from a Brahman or a Baniya (Merchant) community. The folklore collected from the bards, Charan, and Bhattas by Dalpatram Travadi and Narmadashankar L. Dave, a Brahmin from Surat, were used by Alexander K. Forbes in his *Rasmala* (Forbes xvii-xviii).

---

<sup>16</sup> See *Annals and Antiques of Rajasthan* 1829; *Rasa Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat, in Werstern India* 1856 [1878]

The connections of British officials with their newly educated upper-caste and class allies as mediators and facilitators helped them to roam in towns and villages and remote areas to collect materials. Tod for instance gathers the idea of Rajaputana through language and lore in parts of the territory now known as Rajasthan; Forbes acted quite similarly in the context of Gujarat and published the *Rasamala*. Natives like Dalapatram, Narmad and others, were his close allies. They not only helped people like Forbes and Tod to translate and understand the lore but had significantly informed the meaning-making of life and culture of the region being an upper-caste. Dalpatram taught Forbes the Gujarati language (Forbes xvii-xviii).

Narmad himself had himself written and published several works. Among them the poem ‘*Koni Koni Chhe Gujarat?*’ [To Whom Does Gujarat Belong?] is significant as it lays out the idea of Gujaratiness through language, and religion. He believed that those who speak the Gujarati language are Gujarati and where Gujarati is spoken is Gujarat. Narmad in this poem mapped out Gujarat on the basis of linguistic and socio-cultural affinities. Those who speak Gujarati and practice the Gujarati way of life are Gujarati irrespective of their ethnic and religious affinities. He also differentiates between the *Aryadharma*<sup>17</sup> and *Pardharma*<sup>18</sup>. *Aryadharma* is a religion followed by the Aryan which was based on *Vedic* practice and rituals. It has also been considered as *Sanatan* religion. The contemporary Hindu religion practices and rituals draw their origin from it. *Pardharma* can be religion and religious beliefs other than the Hindu.

He also asserts that those who are from foreign places but follow *Aryadharma* or work for the betterment of Gujarat are Gujarati. ‘*Jay Jay Garvi Gujarat*’ is also an important poem. In this poem he charts out the places within the region of Gujarat which are its pride. This is the pride later K.M. Munshi upholds in his novels and articles.

The version of Gujarat which is being constructed in the British writings, official and personal, is foregrounded in the native oral and scripted material provided to British personnel by the learned among the natives. Therefore, the idea of pre/post-colonial and modern Gujarat is an upper-caste, middle-class Hindu imagination, upon which most of the British writings drew the understanding of Gujarat and its neighboring regions.

The fourth phase starts with the early twentieth century—the era of nationalism. Litterateurs such as Zaverchand Meghani and Kanaiyalal M. Munshi contributed in

---

<sup>17</sup> The religion of Arya; the *Sanatan dharma*, contemporary modern Hinduism.

<sup>18</sup> The religion of others. Mostly Islam in this case.

shaping the idea of Gujarat and Gujaratiness recollecting from the literature, in oral and written form, available to them and with their own writings. Meghani was more active in this context in pre-Independence whereas Munshi's post-Independence importance can be seen in the reorganization of the state (Ibrahim 29).

Zaverchand Meghani has been known for his collection of folklore in the form of poetry and folktale from the Saurashtra region. He has also been considered as one of the pioneers and most important figures in the history of folklore collection and studies and even in the history of Gujarati literature. He has mostly dealt with the folklore of Saurashtra, which is the southern-western part of present-day Gujarat which was included in Narmad and Munshi's ideas of Gujarat as the people residing in the region speak variants of Gujarati and the archaeological sites of Somnath and Dwarka covered by Munshi are in this region. However, the region is culturally and geographically diverse in nature. The region that emerges from the collection of Meghani is also divergent from what the mainland Gujarat is. Kachchh has greater socio-political affinities with the Saurashtra<sup>19</sup> region by both the land and sea routes, however socio-culturally and geographically unlike to Saurashtra.

Meghani's collection and idea of Gujarat has been rooted in folk and folklore. Nonetheless, a very small amount of the entire collection of folklore by Meghani is from the community which was, socio-politically, at the margin. As mentioned in the first chapter, in the wake of nationalism and the call by upper-caste nationalist leaders to assimilate the masses, the hitherto neglected folks, people like Meghani indeed brought out literary compositions that were supposed to stimulate consciousness for the Indian independence movement. The collection of Meghani includes literary compositions of the *Bhaktiyug*<sup>20</sup> or Bhakti movement. This poetry or devotional songs were mostly practiced by the people at the margin i.e. Dalits, women, and people from other socio-politically backward castes.

The *Varna* as a system of stratification has been practiced across the Indian subcontinent. Various theories of the origin and appropriation of the *Varna* as system exist; one of them is occupational theory. In this system, four occupations were assigned

---

<sup>19</sup> Saurashtras a socio-cultural and geo-political region consist of atleast seven princely states, from North: Jamnagar, Porbandar, Rajkot, Morbi, Gondal, Bhavanagar and Junagadh. It is also divided in sub-regions like Halar, Gir, Zalavad, Gohilvad etc.

<sup>20</sup> Pre-modern and modern India, spans roughly from the eight century to nineteenth century.

to the four *Varna*. Teaching and learning to the Brahmins, defense and protection of the state to the Kshatriyas, trade and mercantile affairs to the Vaishya, and service and menial job to the Shudras were assigned. However, imaginary the practice of caste was, it has not ceased to be practiced. The Shudras due to their menial job came to be considered as untouchables to human; have been untouchable to the history, literature and the discourse of the making of the nation and region.

The freedom movement paved the way to bring out the valorous and heroic deeds in youth to mobilize them. Meghani was able to gather this from the folklore of Saurashtra. He presented the historical deeds of heroes of Saurashtra in his collections of folksongs and folktales. Majority of his collection remain focused on the Kshatriyas of Saurashtra often shown as sacrificing for cause of the kingdom, cows, women. This corpus significantly homogenized the idea of Saurashtra based on battles, war and bravery, which were supposed be the qualities of the Kshatriya disregarding the majority of the people. This, therefore, cannot give a complete picture of the true Saurashtra. A similar approach can be found in case of Kachchh.

Munshi, deriving from Narmad, carved out '*Gujaratni Asmitā*<sup>21</sup>' through his novels and poems, locating major archaeological and architectural sites of the Hindu faith. This again excludes Kachchh. His trilogy of novels titled *Patanni Prabhuta* (1916), *Gujaratno Nath* (1917), and *Rajadhiraj* (1922) has exemplified the idea of *Gujaratini asmitā*. Farhana Ibrahim's analysis of *Asmitā* in her book *Settler, Saints and Sovereigns* is pivotal in understanding it in the broader arena of politics of Gujarat. For her the meanings of *asmitā* are regional variation of right-wing politics, and the othering of the minorities. She argues that in form of rearticulating medieval past, re-territorialisation of Gujarat firmly takes it in its Hindu mythic-historical space and anti-Muslim policies of present, othering of Pakistan, and imagining Hindu self (Ibrahim 15). She notes that the idea of Gujarat in the form of *asmitā* is concretized better than the previous renditions of Narmad in nineteenth century (29).

In her view, Kachchh has its own idioms of experiences of region away from and often contradictory to the mainland Gujarat. She notes that goddess Ashapura, as the *deshdevi* means goddess of princely state, clothes and poetry and their invocation of trans border connection, histories of Meghvars and Jatt are the space where *asmitā* and state is experienced differently (9).

---

<sup>21</sup> The pride or glory of Gujarat

Roughly since the early twentieth century, the idea of hyper-masculinity has been a common trait of Gujarat as an imagined region which has significantly been drawn from the Charani literature<sup>22</sup> and other folk literature as well as the heroic characters from other parts of India. As the war was an affair of Kshatriyas the folk or the common people always remained out of the imagined region.

Ashis Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* analyses the self in the context of colonization. He discusses the four phases of the self in this era. The colonizer imposed the idea of European masculine self-disregarding the native self as non-adult. This caused a loss of self which was recovered by natives in indigenous way (Nandy 2009). However, this disruption believed to be caused by the invasions took place in Gujarat since the fall of Anahilvad Patan. The self of person and state was somehow intact in the folklore and the oral literature far away from the courts and towns. Meghani intended to rediscover and recover this self from the villages of Saurashtra.

The recovery, as Nandy notes, involved hyper-masculinity. And this was to be found in the folktales and folksongs of Saurashtra in which the Kshatriya were glorified as often self-sacrificing. It can also be thought in terms of caste-based occupations. Kshatriya, As the rulers, imposed those works which they had believed need not bravery and courage both factors defined in their position in the social structure of caste.

During these four broad periods, the character of Gujarat was shaped as a hyper-masculine upper-caste bourgeois community speaking Gujarati as a major language. It mostly limited its boundaries from the northern Aravalli hills to the Tapi River. Geopolitical and linguistic demarcation help indirectly to shape the conceptions of Kachchh. Kachchh is what Gujarat was not, up until the 1960s.

So, what have these imaginations/understandings of Gujarat to do with folklore and imagined region with folklore? Or rather what has folklore to do with the imaginations of Gujarat and Gujaratiness? The imagination of Gujarat as a region, historically backed up by the archives of the British officials and mediated by the upper caste literati, does not lead us to an inclusive idea of Gujarat as a region. As it offers us a selective understanding of the people and the folks. The tribes of the eastern peninsula from Aravalli to the Dang are also not given any space in these imaginations. The masses are significantly defined against the traditions of the classics of the upper-caste society. Zaverchand Meghani,

---

<sup>22</sup> Charani Literature is often defined in terms of language-Dingal, Pingal and Vraj and either composed by a Charan (Bard) or collected by a Charan. Found in abundance in Kachchh, Saurashtra and Rajasthan.

Hasu Yagnik, and Balavant Jani among others reiterate a similar understanding of folk against the civil society.

Thus, Kachchh as a socio-cultural and geo-political region significantly remained out of the imaginations of the idea of the modern Gujarat. Majority of the people of Kachchh, as evident in the British documents and records and censuses as well as contemporary censuses, speak Kachchhi mother tongue or first language. The language and culture both have close affinities with the Sindh region. Munshi could not find any particular source of the *asmitā* in Kachchh. The British Empire responded in its own way of administrating the region.

### **History and Imagining a Region**

Edward Simpson in his seminal essay, “Making Sense of History of Kutch” (2010), brings forth two tendencies prevalent in the post-colonial writing of Kachchh. He asserts that the first way of history-making in Kachchh was traditional and based on the native bardic tradition in which genealogy and cosmology were the chief constituents. He believes this was used by the local Hindu historians later in the post-2001 earthquake era. He also notes that this was, alike and resonating with K.M. Munshi, a restorative and nostalgic approach to the lost past due to the natural calamities such as the 2001 earthquake. The second was shaping the idea of Kachchh from the non-Hindu perspective. This makes the connection between Kachchh, Indian Ocean and Islam. He argues that “both these forms of history and making sense of history are a form of resistance to the idea of Gujarat and Gujaratiness advanced on them” (Simpson 12). He asserts that:

The amateur historians of Bhuj reminded those who would listen that the history of Kutch is not the history of Gujarat, or even the history of a part of Gujarat... Sub-regional identities in Gujarat remain strong, despite attempts made by the colonial and post-colonial state and other cultural and literary organisations at the colonial at creating homogeneity. (Simpson 12)

Farhana Ibrahim’s analysis brings forth an idea of a region that is informed by memories of movements of the past, ethnicity and modern state politics. She primarily argues that the region, Kachchh and Gujarat, experienced by the Jats and Meghvars, being Muslim and Hindu, are not the same vis-a-vis mainland Gujarat.

Ibrahim in her book *Settler, Saints and Sovereigns* discusses the lived experience of Jats and Meghvars and the ethnography of border making. She captures the moving or shifting borders for the people of northern Kachchh with changing political regimes. She

also takes on Munshi's idea of *Asmitā* and builds a counter-narrative to it to have a sense of state-making and the sense of belonging. In her study, as has been discussed in Chapter one, she asserts that the region is an experiential category. It is the people who live in the region that give it shape through their lived experiences with a sense of belonging. This imagination of a region cannot be the same as that of the modern political state. She analyses two different communities, Jat (Muslim) and the Meghvar (Hindu), and how they transgress borders. She shows how Jats are perceived as a threat to the modern state in opposition to the Meghvals who migrated from Nagarparkar who were assimilated into the Hindu fold (Ibrahim xv). This complexity is shown to be further complicated in Veena Das's argument: she notes "Thus people of in Kachchh might express their desire for Sindh in their longing for cloths origination from Sindh, or its embroidery or even linguistic expression that bear testimony to a past that was share even when fraught with various conflicts" (Ibrahim xv).

The study of the histories of Kachchh by Simpson in a way leads us to the two different senses of Kachchh as a region. The first is the one which emerges from the historical writing of the court-commissioned bards in the form of eulogy and praise in verse as well as the genealogies of the rulers and the territories within which they had ruled. The second is that told otherwise and apart from the eulogized history of Kachchh. This history he believes comes from the minority. He argues that both are inflected by the colonial interventions. Although, the second tendency of making sense of history is counter to the first, both of them have, with limited scope of religion, as a point of departure significantly keeping the socially marginalized of mass out of the scope of it. Therefore, I argue that the idea of region, here Kachchh, that emerges from these historical narratives is limited in a sense that discounts the majority of communities and people. The folk can be one of them. It homogenises Kachchh erasing the differences that itself has created: of castes, class, religion etc.

Within the overarching thesis of Simpson and Ibrahim, we can gather that the idea of the Kachchh as a region has different versions and whatever we have in contemporary understanding is the upper-caste understanding of it, highly informed by the colonial interventions in a similar fashion of imagination of idea of Gujarat. The contemporary claims for Kachchh as a separate state are based on these imaginations of Kachchh. These claims have been backed up by the folklore as an important constituent of the idea of Kachchh in a historical sense; in this imaginary, folklore is a tool to understand the past.

But, as we shall see, the folklore of Kachchh like other parts of Gujarat has been significantly informed by the colonial, native upper-caste and nationalist interventions.

### **Kachchh: As It Is Told**

According to Shah the history writings of Kachchh can be divided into two major parts: the first type is commissioned history—a genre in play at least since one thousand years by feudal forces and five hundred years of monarchy, and the second is history and historical notes and reports by the British officers. He argues that their validity and accuracy to the subject is a matter of investigation (Shah 8-9).

Histories of Kachchh divide their timelines into at least five broad phases. First, the pre-historic age, which includes the Harappa-Dholavira civilization and Vedic literature; second, the first to fourth century, the Kshatrap, and Gupta era; third, the middle age ranging from seventh to twelfth century with Vaghela and Solanki rulers followed by Mughal empire in the sixteenth century; fourth, the early modern era, including Islamic, Jadeja, and British rule from the sixteenth to mid-twentieth century; and fifth, the post-independence period. However, the histories of Kachchh have tended to remain remain state/crown centric. Shah notes that: “*Chhela 1000thi vadhu varshona samaveshvalo Kachchhni apavad sivay mahattam likhit mnudrti, prashit itihash aekpakshi, pakshapati chhe*” (11). [“since 1000 years’ history of Kachchh, except some exception, mostly written, manuscripts, and published histories remain biased and partial.]

Several historians trace back the history of Kachchh to the Vedic age and cite examples from the *Shastras* and the *Puranas* having the word Kachchh or similar to it from the various scriptures. As the exact dating of the Vedas is quite unclear, the existence of Kachchh in them, no matter what form, is not feasible. Nevertheless, there are a few mythological narratives that have been anthologized in history books, for example, Ravan’s halt at Narayan Sarovar during his journey from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka, Sage Kashyap’s stay near Koteswar and Narayan Sarovar have been carried in *Kachchhki Itihasik Prushthbhumi*, and *Kachchh Darshan* (Gadhavi 13; Ajani 28).

There are several theories as to the naming of Kachchh (Karani *Kachchh Kaladhar* 30). Duleray Karani notes that Kachchh means a region covered by water, island. Karani

argues that when we match this and other mythical accounts with the written chronicles of Bhattas and Khyats the timeline of this history does not match (33).<sup>23</sup>

There is a common consensus among historians and people that Kachchh has derived its current name from its geographical shape, which looks like an upside down tortoise. According to Karani during the era of Yadavasthali Kachchh was known as Bhojkat. From Yadavasthali era to rise of Sikandar (Alexander) is considered as a dark age in which no historical evidence or sources have been found (34). From the first to the third century BC, Mauryas, Sungas and Greeks had ruled Kachchh. Later Shakas ruled the area (Karani 34).

Kachchh has been ruled by the people, from within and remotely, being a part of several changing dynastic rules and independence, too. Historians make a connection of Kachchh as a part of the broader states of Maurya, Shakas, Kshatrapas, Guptas, Maitrak, Gurjars, Chalukyas, Vaghelas, Chavdas, Solankis, and Kathis, Sultanate and Mughal and the Raj (Karani 34-35; Ajani 23-52; Shah 15-39). Jadeja dynasty, known as successors of the Sama dynasty of Sindh, ruled for several centuries sometimes as a king or subordinated head to the other kings. Historians and scholars are of the view that the history of Kachchh can be traced back to at least the Gupta dynasty, as written materials, scriptures, and stone inscriptions found in the region reveal (Ajani 23-58). The arrivals of different rulers from different parts of the subcontinent had always added new layers to

---

<sup>23</sup> It has also been said that lord Ram stayed in Kachchh during his exile for fourteen years (Karani 30). It is believed that the King Virat had ruled part of Kachchh starting from Dhrutipuri (current Ghedi) to Dholaka. Lord Krishna is also ruled Kachchh as part of his Dwaraka kingdom. Coins of Demetrius and Menander are also found in Kachchh (32-33). *Bhagvadgomandala*, a Gujarati encyclopedia, gives thirty-one different meanings of the term Kachchh. Some them are the lid of the sky, tortoiseshell, coastal region, shore; banks; coast, bay, many wetlands; a unique country, land of the sea, a forest covered by river water, flat land surrounding the mountains, a country of that name lying between Sindh and Kathiawar, a puddle of water, second avatar of Vishnu (“Kachchh”). Kakasaheb Kalelkar in a note in *Kumari* monthly notes that in Sanskrit *Kaksha* and *Kachchh* two different words are found whereas in Prakrit only *Kachchh*. There are seventeen different meaning of them in Sanskrit of which armpit, place to hide, arid jungle, wet land with grass. Mostly it means a region nearby water or a frontier may or may not be near water. *Amarkosh* considers *Anupdash* and *Kachchh* as synonyms. However, he believes that the accepted meaning of Kachchh has been ‘the wet land’. It is a region in the north-west of Gujarat which is in delta region of the Sindhu-Sarasvati River and dried up (qtd. in Shah 4).

the idea of Kachchh (Karani 34-35; Ajani 23-52; Shah 15-39). Within the courses of these rules, territories of Kachchh were redrawn frequently.

Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, in the seventh century BCE, is said to have visited Lakhsapth. Osman Notiyar, a tourist guide and writer from Lakhsapat mentions Hiuen Tsang's visit to the Lakhsapat port to tourists (Notiyar). He seems to refer the popular historical narratives by the British officers and the other Gujarati published histories (Rushbrook 1958; Anjani 2020).

From the ninth century BC century onwards, predecessors of the Jadeja dynasty, Mod and Manai, took over the rule of some parts of Kachchh. Lakhsiyarvira near present day Nakhsatrana was established as capital by Lakho and Lakhsiyar twins from Unanad's family (Karani 35). It was later in 1548 that Khengar I established Bhuj as the capital, shifting from Lakhsiyarvira near Nakhsatrana to Bhuj, a town nearby Bhujjiya hills. Until the first decades of the nineteenth century, Kachchh was ruled by the Jadeja kings. The regency council and the *Bar Bhaya* headed by Jamadar Fateh Mohamad 1786 to 1801 and 1801 to 1813 interim rule can be considered as the starting of the official intervention of the British Empire in the administration of Kachchh, which lasted till the Indian Independence in 1947. It was a council of twelve different feudals and a British agent to advise and help the young king to reign.

From 1539 to 1947 the princely state of Kachchh was ruled by different people from different places with the shifting of the regimes, boundaries, and borders. These political dynamics shaped Kachchh as a socio-political region differently in different eras.

### **The Imagined Kachchh**

The conceptions of Gujarat as a region have a role to play in the understanding of the idea of Kachchh as a region in terms of the politics of exclusion and inclusion.

Kachchh, then being a separate princely state, was represented separately in the gazettes compiled by James Campbell and published in 1880 from Bombay. The colonial imagination of Gujarat has significantly excluded Kachchh. The status as a princely state, remote location, and differing geography, language and culture can be the reasons behind this exclusion. However, Kachchh state was administered by Gujarati(s) for a significant period of time; they held offices at the court of Kachchh before and during the British regime.

Kachchh was also a strategic gateway for the British Empire enabling it to take over Sindh and march towards Afghanistan. British officers travelled through the desert of

Kachchh to the Sindh region. Cartography and mapping were also a tool for the demarcation of territories used by the British officers. These officers had made notes in their writings on the various frontiers of Kachchh in the northern and eastern sides while journeying to different parts of the region. This also gave a modern sense of geo-political boundaries demarcating a particular princely state or kingdom. This way of apprehending a region has a deep impact on the current understating of the region. *The Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary Case Tribunal* derived from these sources.<sup>24</sup>

The imagined region in the poems by Narmad remains different than what Kachchh had been or was at that point of time. Kachchh, is still imagined as remote due to its geographical location, consisting of arid desert, and scarce of water by the people from mainland Gujarat. In ‘*Koni Koni Chhe Gujarat?*’ [To Whom Does Gujarat Belong?] (1862) he charts out the geography of Gujarat with the linguistic ethnicity. He writes that those who know Gujarati are Gujrati. Those who live in the region called Gujarat are Gujarati. In his other poem ‘*Jay Jay Garvi Gujarat*’ (1873) he centered on the religious places as source of pride and identity of Gujarat.

Kachchh as a region has been imagined by the reiteration of folk and folklore at least since the second decade of the nineteenth century. Several British officers started archiving Kachchh through official documents. A very significant attempt to archive Kachchhi life can be found in Marian Postans’ *Cutch or Random Sketches: Taken During a Residence in One of the Northern Provinces of Western India Interspersed with Legends and Traditions* as a memoir of her visit to Kachchh, and has been a pivotal source of state ritual, customs and life centered on the court and state of Kachchh. She was a wife of a

---

<sup>24</sup> *The Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary Case Tribunal*: The tribunal was constituted pursuant to the Agreement of 30 June 1965 which awarded on 19 February 1968. The Indian Independence Act of 18 July 1947, enacted by the British Parliament, set up, with effect from 15 August 1947, two independent Dominions, known as India and Pakistan. The suzerainty of the British Crown over the Indian or Native States (or Estates) of Kutch, Santalpur, Tharad, Suigam, Wav, and Jodhpur lapsed and they eventually acceded to and merged with India. The territory allotted to Pakistan included the Province of Sind. It had formed part of British India which was under the sovereignty of the British Government. In the course of time, the two Dominions became the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The mainlands of Sind and of the above-mentioned Indian States all about upon the Great Rann of Kutch; Sind in the north and west and the States to the south and east. From July 1948 and onwards, Diplomatic Notes were exchanged between the Governments of India and Pakistan concerning the boundary between the two countries in the Gujarat—West Pakistan region. The dispute led in early 1965 to a tension which ultimately resulted in the outbreak of hostilities in April 1965. (7)

British army officer and a scholar herself who came to Kachchh via sea route. As Simpsons notes, she was curious towards lively experiences of “political history, ethnography, *sati*, eunuchs, Negros” during her stay in Kachchh in the early nineteenth century (69). Postans covers almost all the aspect of life in Kachchh. Whereas Karani focuses on different forms of folklore and history.

*The Black Hills: Kutch in History and Legend* is also an equally important book by a colonial officer L.F. Rushbrook William and his native ally Duleray Karani. The book was commissioned by the King Madansinh, the last ruler of Kachchh and last king from the Jadeja dynasty. Rushbrook William recounts his experiences over two visits to Kachchh: first prior independence during reign of Khengar III and later in the time of Madansinh I (William 13). He chronicles the pre- and post-independence Kachchh in terms of shift from monarchy to democracy. He touches upon almost all the aspects of life in Kachchh. He often drew from the earlier English sources by British officers. This book he mentions is divided into two broad themes— Today and Tomorrow. Kachchh is represented as an integral part of the Indian union in the present and as an isolated sovereign in the past.

Mamaidev (1190 to 1399), a saint poet from the lower-caste in his prophetic couplets mentioned several places, such as Chanduo, Trenajar, Banni, Sindh, Delhi and Kashmir, in his poetry more than twenty times (original in Gujarati, qtd in Gohil 121-133). He enthroned and presided over the coronation of the kings of Kachchh. He was a descendant of Dhani Matangdev. These couplets are important in history of Kachchh in two ways: they are written in Kachchhi and invoke certain places mentioned earlier which have a direct connection with Kachchh in terms of politics. It also gives a sense of borders and the enemies in the north, Sindh.

The imagining of the region of Kachchh, as Simpson writes in context of Bhuj, was restricted to “the ruling class, their work and their spectacular” (75). Kachchh has been imagined in a similar fashion as Gujarat based on linguistic-ethnicity and popular Hindu religious places of worship and battlefields. This has happened due to two colonial paradigms of history writings and influence of Gujarati upper-caste literati. The imagination of Kachchh therefore remained restricted to the royal court, kings and their deeds and works.

## **The Case of Kachchh**

All the histories of Kachchh, except *Raiyatnama* by Shah, are in contradiction with claims that Kachchh was never an independent state. It has always been a part of larger princely states. Some historians connect it with the pre-historic era of the Dholavira and Sindhu civilizations. Archaeologists with several pieces of evidence, like stone inscriptions, connect it with the Gupta and Maurya dynasties as well. But it is evident that when the predecessors of the Jadeja dynasty landed and invaded certain parts of what is now known as Kachchh in eleventh century, it was indeed ruled by various fiefs.

Pre-independence era rulers of Kachchh fought several wars; the War at Bhujiyoh Hill (1730) against an army of Mahammad Shah and the Battle of Zara at Zara Hills (1762) against Mohamad Kalhoda are some of the major wars. These wars were waged on the basis of internal court feuds. Kachchh won both the battles. But these wars were not similar to the Wars of Independence fought by the Scots as Scotland was fought them to get sovereignty whereas Kachchh fought to keep the sovereignty intact.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Kachchh had encountered the British. Kachchhi rulers signed several treaties with the British and as a result the British took administration into their own hands. However, there was not a single war against the Raj army from Kachchh. It was the national freedom struggle movement that led the leaders and people across India, and the Kachchhi people to oppose the British. As Indian political independence from British rule was getting consolidated, attempts to recognize Kachchh as a special state began. Kachchh joined the Union of New Independent India in 1948. Shambhudan Gadhvi, the last court poet of the last king of Kachchh, Madansinh (1948 reigned 3months only), in *Kachchhnu Sankruti Darshan* sang that Vallabhbhai Patel had promised to give Kachchh a special status. Had it been given, it would have been a state of its own, but he further adds that due to Sardar's illness, he could not come to meet Madansinh, to negotiate the merger. Nonetheless, Madansinh signed the treaty and accepted the merger of the princely state into the Union of India.

It has been widely accepted that this was the moment when the desire of Kachchh to be an independent state emerged. In the earlier phase, it was a union territory from 1948 to 1956 when it was merged into Maharashtra. In 1960, with the linguistic re-organization of Indian states, Gujarat was carved out of Maharashtra. As Kachchh was situated on the northern frontiers and geographically connected to mainland Gujarat, despite the language variation, it was assimilated into the Gujarat state in 1960.

Demand for autonomy has kept rising in Kachchh from time to time. Pragamal III, the then king-would be of princely state Kachchh and the last titular head of the state, was very keen and attempted to work out autonomy for Kachchh. He established an organization called Kutch Rajya Sankalp Sameeti in 2009. The Committee demanded the status of an autonomous Kachchhi state. People and even contenders from the Congress party asserted that if he was given a chance to speak in the Loksabha, he would surely put this on the table. Meghajibhai Shah also has proclaimed a similar wish for an autonomous Kachchh state.

These attempts were political and dominated by the people who were in power, either from the royal family or politicians. Parallel to this, a literary movement was also gaining momentum. This movement was concretized when the Gujarat government established Kachchhi Sahitya Akademy in 1999. For several years, a movement of writing and publishing literature in the Kachchhi language has gained momentum as well. Several poetry collections and translations have come up. It, in a way, feeds into the assertion of Kachchh's distinct linguistic identity. Some literary personalities maintained the idea of an autonomous Kachchh state even though the official recognition of Kachchh as a language has not taken place<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, it is unintelligible to the majority of non-Kachchhis that there is such a fierce desire for autonomy.

The case of Kachchh is unlike the Scottish one. Scotland claims the status of a separate nation-state or parliamentary independence, which can make decisions on its own. However, in the case of Kachchh, the aims of the claims have changed. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kachchh as a part of India, a colony of the British Empire, was closely following with the national movement. One of the prominent folklore collectors, Duleray Karani, wrote a poem titled *Gandhi Bavani*. However, it seems clear that the state was in alliance with the colonizers on the political front at least. Nonetheless, independence from British rule was the chief objective of the Kachchh intelligentsia.

---

<sup>25</sup> Pragamal III, Narayan Joshi, Kirti Khatri, Maheta Ashok etc. Maheta, Ashok editor. "Kachchh Aek Alag Rajya: Tena Fayda Tatha Gerfayda" [Kachchh A Separate State: Prose and Cons]. *Mangal Mandir*, vol. 1, no. 434, July 2014, pp. 9–44; Maa News Live. "Alag Kachchh Rajya: Kirit Khatri Sathe Mulakat." [Separate Kachchh State: An Interview with Kirti Khatri]. *YouTube*, 21 Sept. 2017, Neal [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMJrZ4bdA-w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMJrZ4bdA-w); "Interview With Maharao of Kachchh." *Facebook*, interview by Dalapat Danidhariya and Maharao Pragamal III, 30 Aug. 2020, fb.watch/tyo2tl1SR8.

A sentiment to achieve autonomous status by the different princely states began with the rise of the movement for Indian Independence. On the one hand, India as a nation-state was taking shape in the midst of the partition and the emergence of the separate nation-state Pakistan. On the other hand, several small-scale princely states were anxious about whether to join the dominion of India or Pakistan. Representatives of Kachchh state were sure to join the dominion of India. Madansinh signed the Instrument of Accession on 11th August 1947, which was accepted by the then Governor General of India, Lord Mountbatten. This was how Kachchh, being a princely state, became part of the federation of the Indian government.

This signing of the Instrument of Accession came with several promises from the central government, which promised a unique status for Kachchh within the nation of India. However, Kachchh was only given the status of a Union Territory, a C-category state. It remained the same till 1956 when Kachchh was included in the larger state of Maharashtra.

The 1960s again brought re-formation states on the linguistic bases; Kachchh, although being linguistically unique from the mainstream Gujarat, was clubbed with the newly formed state of Gujarat in 1960. However, there was a considerable number of Gujarati-speaking communities in Kachchh; Kachchhi was the mother tongue for the majority and particularly of the marginalized, be it caste or religion. Gujarati was a language of administration and a medium of instruction.

Several land and border disputes with Pakistan went to the International Court and the UN. These tribunals helped develop the strength of mutual relations of Kachchh and the state of Gujarat and India as the Government of India had defended the case on the international level. Being a district of the state of Gujarat, there was a common consensus that Kachchh had been neglected by mainland Gujarat being at the extreme frontier having extreme weather and geographical conditions. The last titular head of the family of the last king, Pragmalsinh III, reiterated several times that the mainland neglected Kachchh. Kachchh bordering Pakistan on its north side has always been significant in military defence and security. It is also commonly considered that because of its geopolitical location, it has been pivotal in the international relationships of the Indian nation-state.

## *Lokgeet*

Across the Indian subcontinent, several forms of folk literature are common to a certain extent, *Lokgeet* is one of them. As it involves narration as well as music and rhythm, it has been a significant medium for the expression of feelings and emotions in folks. Like written literature, folklore has narrative in prose and poetry as major types, of which *lokgeet* is one.

As *lokgeet* is a major constituent of the folklore of the different regions, scholars across India have tried to understand and define it in their cultural context. This exercise has been significantly influenced by the Western scholarship on folklore and folk poetry.

“Initially a *lokgeet* always composed by a person but it becomes a part of repertoire of folklore if it has folk consciousness, relation with folk life, in a poetic form which is fluid that eventually becomes part of folk literature” (Yagnik 3). He also thinks that “fundamental experience of the life told as it, is the obvious essence of *lokgeet*” (Yagnik 4). The influence of Western paradigms on the Gujarati native folklorist is visible in such frameworks and approaches. Reiteration of what is said in the West can be found at a massive level. Ballads and *lokgeet* due to their performativity and simple language make them more available to the folk. Another import point in the definitions of ballads and *lokgeet* is the context and framework in which they are defined. Both the forms were in the United Kingdom and India defined in the context of nationalistic framework deriving from the German romantic thinkers. They are nationalist in vigor and court and popular-personality-centric which are either aristocrats or upper caste in both the contexts.

In the folklore studies on Kachchh, Duleray Karani, oft cited as Meghani of Kachchh, and others<sup>26</sup> have consensus with the understanding posed by the mainstream Gujarati scholars following the conceptualisation of folk and folklore in Gujarati literature.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, Kachchh has an altogether different caste to offer on the idea of who is folk. In Kachchh, the idea of folk and *lok* do not go hand in hand with the each other. As majority of the scholarship on folk and folklore in Gujarat and Kachchh is derivative, except Kanu Jani (*Lokvandgmay* 1992), the concept of *lokgeet* in Kachchh and Gujarat have similarities but it is the folk who differ significantly in the characteristics

---

<sup>26</sup> Dinesh Joshi for instance; Zohra Dholia; Umarshi Parmar in *Kachchhibhasha: Sahitya avm Vikas* (2017) among others.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Zaverchand Meghani in *Dhartinu Dhavan, Loksahityanu Samalochan* Harivalabh Bhayani, Kanu Jani in *Lokvandgmay* (1992), Hasu Yagnik in *Loksahitya-Vignan* (2012)

attributed by the scholars. Similarly, it is also persistent as the meaning-making of the folk has been significantly driven by the same discourse of the socio-political world of Gujarat and Kachchh.

However, *lokgeet*, like ballads in Scotland, is one of the major forms of folklore and if at all second to folktales in Kachchh. Apart from the major genre of *lokgeet* charted out by Dinesh Joshi, Moulud, Wai, of the Jat community, various types of bhajans as well as couplets of Barmati of Meghvar community are yet to be included in the corpus of *lokgeet* Kachchh.

The performative aspect of *lokgeet*, similar to ballad, helped them to reach the wider audience. The *lokgeet* are usually short in size. They also accompany music of certain kind which makes the performance of the *lokgeet* both entertaining and delightful. It even helps in memorizing the lyrics. In opposition to the folktale or narrative which runs longer than a *lokgeet* and often depends on the narrator, *lokgeet* can be participated in.

*Lokgeet* in Kachchh are comparatively recent as the themes and stories they tell are quite of the recent past; it can be the case that the old traditional *lokgeet* disappeared over time as it could not get recorded. The lack of printing press in Kachchh might also be one of the reasons for the lack of records or printed versions of traditional *lokgeet*. First folklore book on *Kachchhi Piroli*<sup>28</sup> was published in 1886 by Usman Bhachal from Ahmedabad.

*Lokgeet* in Kachchh has not been rigorously defined as it has complexities of caste, class, gender, state, language, and religion as in other parts of India. The fluidity of the folklore and *lokgeet* are perhaps difficult to precisely structure in a fixed format but a general understanding of it is that Kachchhi *lokgeet* can be conceived as those lyrical compositions which may exist in the oral, written, audio-visual or virtual medium, and have been composed in Kachchhi or other languages and later transliterated into Kachchhi. These can be lyrical expressions of grief, pain, celebration and other emotions and feelings of the people of Kachchh in their socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts, narrations about the living beings found in different parts and places of Kachchh written by a known or unknown authors.

The collection of folklore in Kachchh, as earlier discussed, began with the arrival of the Empire and its agents in Kachchh. Folktales and legends are the common forms collected in the early archival ventures of the British in Kachchh. Official gazettes

---

<sup>28</sup> Riddle

incorporated folk and mythical stories and legends of the people directly connected to the court or the people who haunted British officials as being outlaws.

Postans as a traveler was a guest of the court in 1834. She notes her journey from Bomay to Mandvi. From there, her encounters started with people. She collected here the legends, narrative of traditions and customs by traveling and as an observer as well as she closely witnessed the tradition and customs performed in and around the court life. Similarly, Karani, as a schoolteacher and later education inspector, got chance to visit the villages. He roamed around with bullock carts and often walked to the people who possessed folklore. However, he does not mention his source very often as Postans did but here and there footnotes do mention the authors and their works. Both of their close ties with the royal court of Kachchh opened up great opportunities for them.

The ideologies behind their exercises are the driving forces to their orientation to the materials. The gap between them was of almost a century within which Kachchh had developed on different fronts. Postans approaches folklore and life in Kachchh with the Orientalist perspective whereas Karani seems romantic and native nationalist who made attempts to save the fast-decaying lore of the region of Kachchh which was reiterated by Rushbrook William in mid-twentieth century.

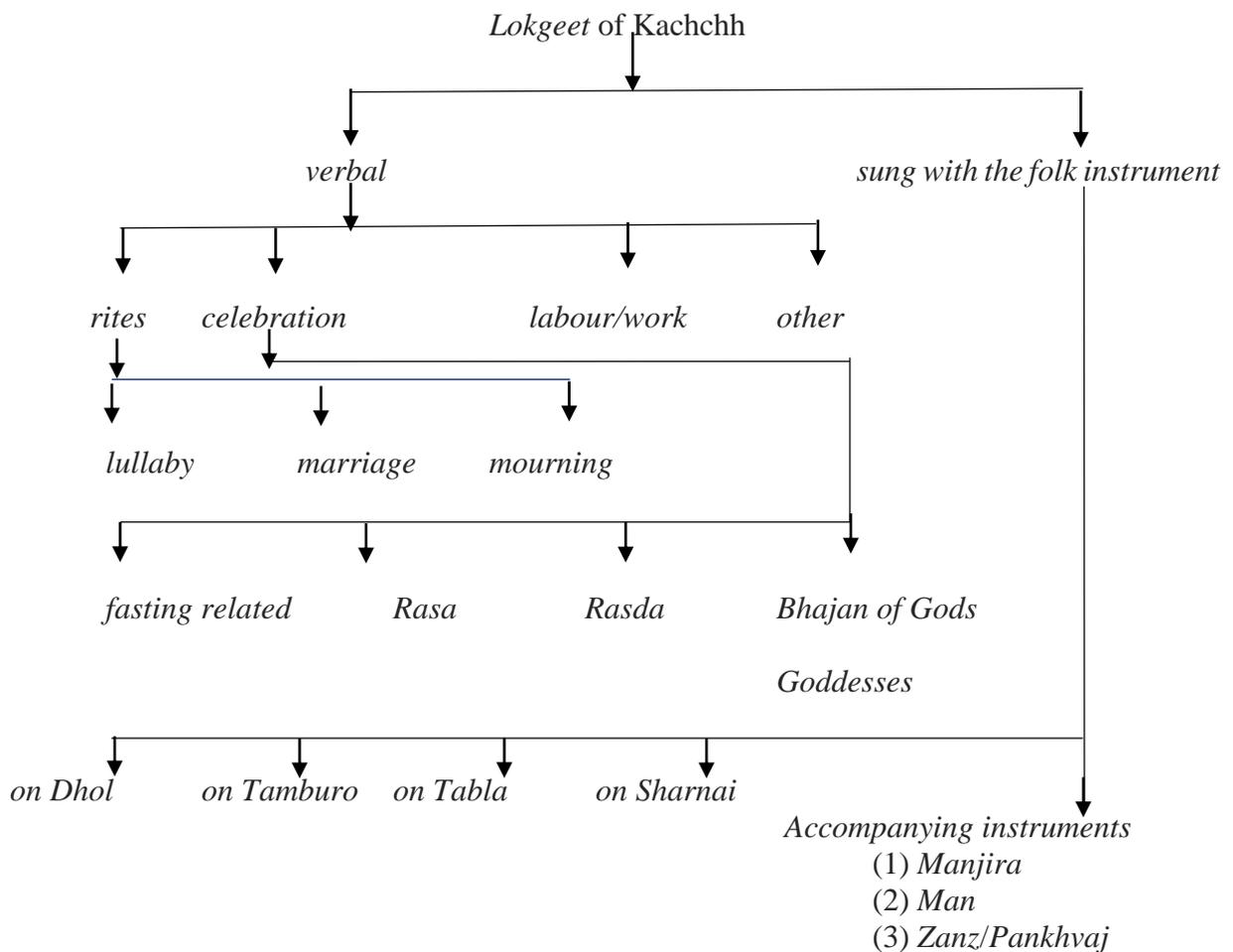
Karani had published several volumes of saint poets. He has collected *lokgeet* in his books. However, he did not collect any book length folksong apart from the devotional poem in *Kachchhna Bhaktima Kavio*. In his *Kachhnu Lok -sahitya Prayojak* (1954) he collected several *lokgeet* (316-337). This can be the oldest collection of numerous *lokgeet* together. The later Dholiya and Zohara seem to be deriving from him. As mentioned earlier Duleray Karani, a schoolteacher, prominent writer and poet, collected folklore of Kachchh. He has published more than sixty books on a range of subjects, but the most important were his archival works that gave new life to the folklore of Kachchh, published between the 1920s to the 1980s. Kanti Gor and Ravi Pethani have edited some of his popular works into a book form titled *Duleray Karani Sahitya Vaibhav* (2018). The next few examples are from this book.

Today, there are several significant collections of Kachchh *lokgeet*; the first is Zohraben Dholiya's work in 1990 that was a part of her doctoral research later published in a book form titled *Karayal*; the other is by Jetho Lalavani's of *Banni Lokgeet*. The third is by Duleray Karani which constitutes a part of his collection of works of folklore in an edited volume by Kanti Gor and Ravi Pethani (2020).

Other than these there are several collections of Gujarati *lokgeet* in which Kachchhi *lokgeet* is given space but in small numbers. *Gujaratnan Lokgeeto* by Khodidas Parmar is one such example. *Gujaratnan Lokgeeto*, published in 1981, collects three Kachchhi *lokgeet* which are *Kuve Pani kin Vinza? Kathadji Liraja Lada? Mod Rakhyo Tar, Hamisarni Pale Dholida Dhraskya* (Parmar K. 141).

Dinesh M. Joshi has classified *lokgeet* in four different ways: Subject/theme, singer, use or style, and compositions (Joshi 22-23). *Lokgeet* as a broader form includes variety of genres of songs which can only be sung, recited, and danced to. Some of them as Joshi classified are songs which can be sung while working. Joshi has also divided songs based on the gender of the singer. The themes and subjects he identified are limited and in the context of Kachchh can be expanded being inclusive of the various folk practices of singing of the minorities and the lower castes.

### Classification 1: By Subject and Theme



(from Classification of *lokgeet* Joshi 21-22)

Joshi classifies *lokgeet* into three major categories: subject and themes, gender, context and structure. The subject and themes are further categorized into two categories in which the first type is just sung while doing activities and daily chores or performing rites which do not need any instrument. Of these, four sub-categories are rites, celebration, labour/work, other. However, the three sub-categories of rites include lullaby, songs of nurturing or education, and performing rites. The rites such as performing rituals of sacred thread, that he mentioned in the book are often limited to upper-castes. *Hallarda* or lullaby are not much in number in the Kachchhi language. The lullabies that Joshi quotes are in Gujarati and are often collected in the anthologies of Gujarati *lokgeet* (25-26). The songs addressed to Rannade, of naming are found in the locales of urban. The other songs of these categories cited by him are gendered and can be attributed to the adult women rather than children as they lean towards material things such as ornaments, household, marriage and separation aspect of a woman. They are small in size and repetitive in nature with alliteration. Marriage songs include songs on different themes like bride-groom, engagement, on marriage rituals, *fatana* means joking and poking on both sides of bride and groom, whereas lament and elegy are rare but on the twelfth day after death, religious songs are sung commemorating the deceased. The songs that he quoted are not *marshiya* but songs of separation. One of them is usually sung in the northern part of Kachchh and in Sindh. *Marashiya* on the battle of Karbala are popular with Muslims across the globe, but these are not given space in the collections by Joshi.

Another type of the verbal *lokgeet* are based on the different of occasions celebrations, be it fasting, ras, rasda, and songs of gods and goddesses. Hindu girls in Indian society often fast for their future husbands and a prosperous life; again a practice that is observed among the upper-caste and middle-class urban and town dwellers. Fasting of this kind is not found in lower-caste villagers. These songs are often addressed to gods as prayer to get a good future. The *ras* is a genre that includes singing and dancing in a circle. Males and females dance while a lead sings and the others follow him or her as chorus. The Ahir communities of Kachchh are known for it. *Rasda* however is defined by including various sub genres. Meghani has included ballads and narrative-songs in it, they are basically long and narrate an event. Variety of songs attributed to gods can be found across Kachchh, often popular Hindu gods/goddesses and those who are in Kachchh.

There are songs which are considered as labour song or the song which are sung while working. “Gajiyo” the most famous of all and much debated song is considered under this type but scholar contest to it as the word ‘Gajiyo’ has two known meanings: a

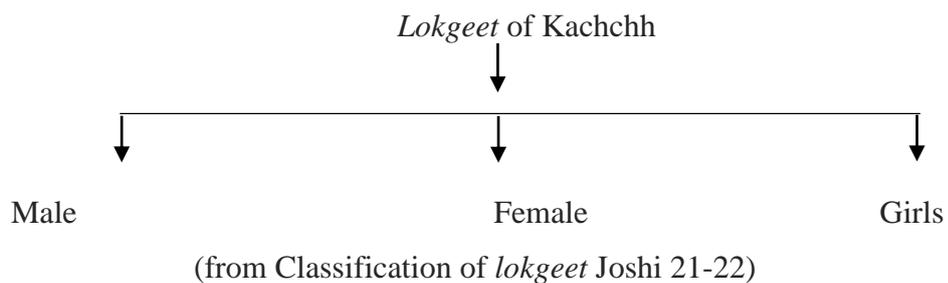
cement block and or blouse (top wear). It is often thought and as accepted the first meaning but the second seems more relevant to the ornaments invoked in the song.

Kachchh is known for its folk music which is also found in Sindh and Rajasthan. Instruments that are found in Kachchh are rare to the Thar region of which the northern part shares border with other two regions. In this category Joshi divides *lokgeet* based on the accompanying instrument. He names them based on terms of instruments like drums (*dhol and tabla*), string instrument called *Tambura*, and variety of flutes. However, several other instruments like *Surandho* (a string instrument), *Jodiyapava* (double flute), *gado-gamelo* (earthen pot and still vessel), can be added into the list. These instruments are found in the Banni and Pachchham, west Kachchh as well as in the southern Sindh.

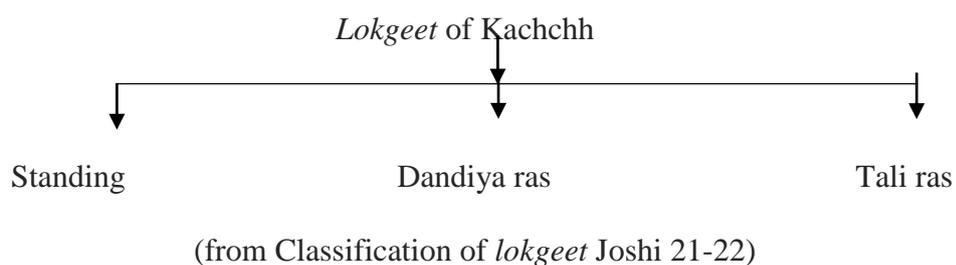
The next classification is based on the gender of the singer. Women across the globe have preserved folklore in a greater capacity. But prohibition of women from certain public activities has a great role to play in the *lokgeet* in Kachchh. The next classification is based on the movement of the singer or dancer which overlap with the genre of *ras*. There is actually a variety of *ras*, different movements of hands and feet as well number of *tali* or clapping—one or three based on the rhythm of the song and music.

The fourth is structure: lyrics and ballads. Majority of the *lokgeet* belong to this category which includes love, familial, season, as well as person, occasions and caste. This type also includes songs on historical events such as battle, flood, drought etc. These *lokgeet* are analyzed in the following section.

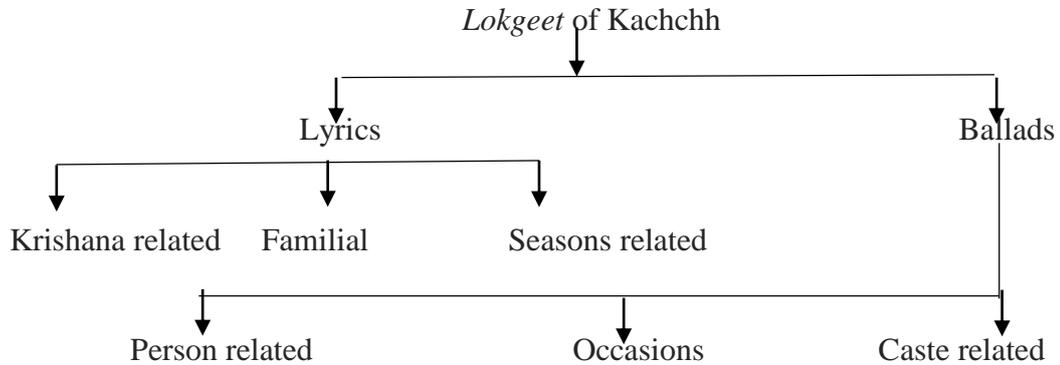
**Classification 2: By the Gender of the Singers**



**Classification 3: By Context**



#### Classification 4: By Structure



(from Classification of *lokgeet* Joshi 21-22)

These kinds of classifications mostly are examples of upper-caste Hindu approach to folklore as this schema dodges the several lower-caste and minorities' *lokgeet* genres. Kachchh has a population of Muslim communities which are migrated from Sindh and beyond and have their style and types of songs. Wai, Moulud, Osani, and Kafi are some of the forms which are particular to the Muslim communities. On the other hand, Meghvars have their folk forms of songs amalgamated from Kachchh, Sindh, Marvad cultures. Types, of folksongs, for instance bhakti and religious bhajan that fall under the broader umbrella genre of Aaradhivani for example are particular to Meghvar and Rabari community. Although some of these types overlap with broader sub-types drawn out by Dinesh Joshi.

In the following analysis, I have selected *lokgeet* from the popular *lokgeet* anthologies, web, and fieldwork. Rather than following the above-graphed types, the *lokgeet* are analysed in terms of their significance in the construction or shaping of the idea of Kachchh. The idea of Kachchh has been envisioned through different symbols which are particular to its nature, geography, communities and politics. Several symbols and elements are frequently reoccurring in the *lokgeet*. These symbols have the potential to draw a map that would strongly indicate the affinities with the physical region. Memory is instrumental in this process. Thus, it is a conscious effort to render lived material reality into words. Here, I will approach the *lokgeet* with how they historically imagine Kachchh as a region and their role in shaping the minds of people outside of Kachchh.

In folklore and literature, cultural, caste, ethnic, social, gendered, national, and geographical identities can be found. A combination of more than one identity leads us to a sense of region or place, which they construct through the invocation of various

imageries and symbols. In this chapter, identities such as socio-cultural, caste, ethnic, gendered, geographical and state-political are dealt with as portrayed in the *lokgeet* of Kachchh.

### **Socio-cultural Identity of Kachchh**

To grasp the idea of Kachchh that is being generated in collected *lokgeet* of Karani and some of his own compositions later popularized as *lokgeet*, is to unpack the positionality he had been situated in. When he was a teacher, he was curious about the lore with which he was surrounded that had been disappearing. This was a common notion across India and abroad. He therefore attempted to collect folk narratives about the kings and courtiers. Later he was appointed as deputy education inspector of Kachchh state. During this position he received patronage from state and others who were interested in the folklore of Kachchh. He roamed from the East to the Western frontiers of Kachchh and noted down whatever he found new to him and that had connection with the past.

His close affinities with colonial officers and writers and mainland Gujarati literary personalities encouraged him to a great extent, and his works contain compositions in Gujarati as well. He later translated Rushbrook's *The Black Hills of Kutch*. His position in the folklore studies of Kachchh became even more substantial as he was a contemporary of Gandhi and witnessed the Indian freedom struggle. He, in fact, lived in both colonial and post-colonial Kachchh. The nationalist approach and attitude can be seen in his works and compilations.

The first and most popular song that is compiled in his *Kachchhna Bhaktiman Santo* is “*Munji Matrubhumike Naman*” [Salute to my motherland] by Kavi Niranjan. Kavi Niranjan was his contemporary and he left Kachchh at a young age and went to the then Bihar. There, he became a popular saint, Niranjan. However, he is better known in Kachchh for this composition. It has been applauded as a *Rajyageet* (state song) of Kachchh or *Vatan geet* [Song of Homeland] (*Kachchhno Sarvangi Itihas*, on cover page) and spread among all Kachchhi. Here *rajya* means princely state—the status Kachchh held till 1948. Traditional folklorists may contest considering this as *lokgeet*, but it has certainly become the song of folk in due course of time and the author became unknown to the majority of Kachchh. This song can be a good example of process of community re-creation of an individual composition.

*Muunji maatrubhumi ke naman!*  
*Kachchhi asanja kod minja kulbhaan kari tan man,*

*Muunji maatrubhumi ke naman!*  
*Ratan khani jit videsh ja ne meraman uchharan,*  
*Mal jada maalum machhven sen, saagar paar pujan-muunji.*  
*Vadiyu vilatu vinji maduda, kachhade ke ukandhan,*  
*Pair dinhdade pachham dhara ten, akhadyu neer vasan-muunji.*  
*Baljogani Sarasvati pan, jamay jit aasan, Jagdusha,*  
*Khengar Pitamber, madi ja majan-muunji.*  
*Tejvatyu jal jyu lakhmyu, jagmalan jiny jhulan,*  
*Jit kapuri hothal jadyu, padhmaniyu, pragatan-muunji.*  
*Sindhudo sonaayi suni, rat mudsen ja uchharan,*  
*Jang jamen jit jorata, tit Jadeja jhunghan-muunji.*  
*Dholak ten nit thap lage ne, tambur vaayez padan,*  
*Surta jen ji lagi saainse, kaafiyu mithyu kuchan-muunji.*  
*Hemare vat pongo 'Niranjan', Dhinohdhar sambharan,*  
*Asin baluda bul bul inja, madi asanjo chaman-muunji.*

We (Kachchhi) sacrifice with affection, our and desire,  
 Salute to my motherland.

The sea is roaring, having foreign pearls,  
 Sailors, like fighters, reach beyond the sea  
 People go on long voyages and long for Kachchh,  
 While returning to the West land<sup>29</sup>(Kachchh), overflow their eyes with joy  
 Where Sarasvati sits,  
 Jagdusha<sup>30</sup> and King Khengar are the guildsmen of the motherland.  
 Bright *Lakhmiyu*<sup>31</sup> swings here like the mother goddess,  
 Where women like Kapuri<sup>32</sup> and Hothal appeared.  
 Telling and listening to the war poems, the blood of brave boil,  
 Like the mightiest, Jadeja<sup>33</sup> strives at the battleground.

---

<sup>29</sup> Kachchh is located on the western most side of India, the word *Pachchham* derived from *Pakshchim* mean the west.

<sup>30</sup> A philanthropist of medieval era

<sup>31</sup> Women

<sup>32</sup> Lover from Kachchh

<sup>33</sup> The rulers who ruled over Kachchh for more than 400 years

Drums are beaten daily, and prayers are sung with Tambur<sup>34</sup>,  
Those who are connected with the lord sing sweet songs.  
When Niranjan reached the Himalayas, Dhinodhar<sup>35</sup> reminded him,  
We are the birds of Kachchh, the Mother is our oasis.

- Kavi Niranjan

(Karani; Gor and Pethani 251)

The song, which has several versions available now in various books and on the web, maps out the major figures, people, places and the movements of its people within and outside the land on the battlefield in the history of Kachchh. The song describes the cultural map of Kachchh. Kachchh has had overseas relationships for centuries, and the port towns of Mandvi and Lakhpat are evidence of that. In the beginning, it depicts the maritime relationship of Kachchh with lands across seas as the Kachchhi sailors sailed across the globe. It also suggests the journey of Kachchh as well. Ramsinh Malam was a prominent sailor who voyaged to Europe. When they make such voyages to the land far away from Kachchh, they do remember and long for the motherland. Further, it refers to popular historical figures before he invokes the goddess of knowledge. Kachchh is the land where goddess Sarasvati and guildsmen like King Khengar and Jagdusha were born. Khengar I had laid the foundation of Bhuj as the capital of the state and ushered a new era. Jagdusha was a famous philanthropist who donated huge sums of money and food to the crown of Kachchh during the drought that hit the Kachchh. He also invokes beautiful ladies like Kapuri and Hothal, who came to Kachchh with their Kachchhi spouses. The song also narrates the bravery of the Jadedas, who fought like the mightiest in the field for their land, as they were a community that ruled the state of Kachchh longer than any other community from the sixteenth to mid-twentieth century. It says that Kachchh is the land where daily drums (*dholak*) are played, and those who have a bond with the lord sing the sweet songs (*kafis*) on Tabur<sup>36</sup>. The poet remembers the Dhinodhar hills when he reaches the Himalayas. He says, “We are the birds, and you the oasis” referencing Kachchh’s long history of migration of which he, too, is a part. Here it is voluntarily though. It ends with longing as the narrator is far away from Kachchh.

---

<sup>34</sup> A string instrument. Usually has one to seven strings.

<sup>35</sup> Hills in the north west of Bhuj now in Nakhatrana Taluka

<sup>36</sup> A string instrument which can have one to seven strings and used by the singer as an accompany

Apart from being applauded as a song of the (princely) state, it is important in terms of the way it maps the community of Kachchh almost a century back. On the one hand, it invokes sovereign Kachchh, and on the other, it points towards the cross-ocean and land affinities of Kachchh. The second last couplet contains symbols that are related to the Sufi tradition that is significant. Kafi, particularly in Kachchhi, are associated with Islam in Kachchh, which is commonly sung accompanied by *tabur* and *dholak*. It can be understood as its secular approach, as the author has denounced worldly affairs. In another way, although it sounds secular but it cannot go beyond the caste as the historical figures it invokes are from the upper strata of the caste hierarchy. So, this invokes what was popular be it person, place and activity, which were exclusive. Why did this song become a state song? Who declared it? In what condition does it become a state song being limited in approach?

Niranjan, with suffixes Kavi, Baba, Bhagat often added to his name, as has been said, was from Kachchh. He had become an ascetic and stayed in Bihar his entire life. He lived during the time of high nationalisms observed in his poem published in a magazine which was dedicated to independence struggle. However, the song had been published before even Gandhi emerged as a national leader. It is a song that commemorates Kachchh. Thus, it must have been written when the author was outside of Kachchh. It uses popular imageries of *asmitā* of Kachchh. The nationalist rigor, appeal through popular imageries and language could have made it possible to appeal to the people and was therefore disseminated widely. Its wide popularity makes it suitable and qualified to become a song of the state.

Kachchh being located on the western frontier of India has a long coastal area upon which five major ports were located, four of which are still in working mode. Mandvi was major port in terms of ferries of people and cargo. It had also been made into a station of departure for pilgrimage of Hajj in the seventeenth century by Bharmal I in the times of Mughal emperor Jahangir (Goswami 2). Currently, the Kandla and Mundra ports are operational for national and international trade and cargo transportation.

As mentioned earlier Lakhpat was on a port which was known as *Bastabandar* nearly five kilometres north west to the current fort of Lakhpat where the Indus used to meet the Arabian sea. As the name suggests it used to engage in trade to the tune of one lakh *Koris*. From this port town, Guru Nanak started his visit to Mecca, a *gurudwara* built in memory of his visit.

As Mandvi as a port prospered, the problem of piracy and loot became common in the sea and at the shore. The sailors from both the side of Gulf of Kachchh used to rob the vessels. British vessels were often attacked causing major loss. To control piracy Jamadar Fateh Mohamad then ruling Bhuj, Hansraj Seth in Mandvi and the British Empire signed treaties in 1809 to combat piracy in the entire country (Raikes 16;18). However, piracy did come under control which made British more furious and led them to break it.

Mandvi grew as a port which held importance for the state of Kachchh. It had connections to ports such as Karachi, Mumbai and other Indian ports as well as to the east African countries such as Zanzibar, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Sudan, Oman, Dubai in the gulf countries. The maritime relations of Kachchh are evident in the socio-cultural elements. Indigenous Africans were bodyguards of King Desal. Whereas people from the Bhatia, Memon, Vohra, Khoza merchant communities have settled in the African and gulf countries. Arab merchant used to trade at Mandvi port. Post the independence of India, Kandla developed as nation's major port. Mundra has been growing as private port alongside. The Muslims from Karachi to Mandvi and Mumbai were invested in the maritime and mercantile business. They had settled in different continents and they were influential in the East African and the Arab countries allying with the local rulers. Apart from fishing, several communities from both the Hindu and Islamic faith are engaged in activities of ferrying people and goods. They are settled in coastal villages on both the sides of the Gulf of Kachchh: Zakhau, Mandvi and Tuna, Dwaraka, Jamanagar, and Salaya.

S.N. Raikes in his memoir mentioned that there is no direct land route from mainland Gujarat to Kachchh (85). One had to take Navanagar (Jamnagar) sea route to reach Kachchh. The sea route was of major significance in connecting Kachchh with other parts of Saurashtra, Gujarat and India, and vice versa. The unique islandic geography made it an isolated region made of several islands. Till nineteen-fifties, sea route was the only way to connect with Kachchh.

The next song is on the shipwreck that occurred in the Gulf of Kachchh. "*Vijali*<sup>37</sup>" was a ship that succumbed to a storm in the middle of the Gulf of Kachchh in the late nineteenth century. Its original name was *Vaitarna*, but people named it "*Vijali*," which means lightning, as it was moving in the sea like thunder. Several folksongs are available

---

<sup>37</sup> Name of a ship that got wreck around the Okha- Porbandar sea due to heavy storm in 1888, see Gor and Pethani *Duleray Karani Sahitya Vaibhav*. Vivekgram Prakashan. 2020, pp 450.

on this incident with alterations. The songs are again an example of Kachchh's relations across the sea and parts of the Indian subcontinent. *Lokgeet* such as this had currency in parts of Gujarat. Kachchh has been perceived through the *lokgeet* as a different region from Gujarat and Saurashtra. The song helps generate this idea of Kachchh as a region within and out of Kachchh itself. The song "Green Parote" also does the same. It suggests the different ecology and atmosphere in Kachchh and Gujarat. However, both composed in Gujarati, aptly represent Kachchh as a region in their respective style. It can also be said that songs are the portrayal of what and how people in Gujarat may be think and perceive Kachchh as region.

The narrative is significant in other ways as well, that is, it provides nuance of social-cultural and political affinities and the influence of the other land and ocean on the culture and people of Kachchh. The songs are popular and go by the title "Haji Kasam Tari Vijali," (Haji Kasam, Your Vijali) composed post-event 1888. The incident of the sinking of the ship was devastating to the families across Kachchh and Mumbai as it had bridegrooms with their wedding parties on board who were traveling to get married in Bombay on their arrival. There were young students who were going for further studies to Bombay. It has been preserved in the popular consciousness in Kachchh and outside as well. Even Lavanis, a folk form of Maharashtra, was written to commemorate this tragic event in Marathi (Gor and Pethani 451).

*Bhardariye Veran Thai*

*Kaasam! Taarī vījī re, bhardariye veran thai!*

*Hāji Kaasam! Taarī vījī re, madh dariye veran thai!*

*Bhuj-Anjarthī bhūntiyu jānu, jāye chhe Mumbaī shaher-Kaasam*

*Dash vāge to ṭīkṭum līdhī, agiyāre ve'tī thai-Kaasam*

*Ter jānu to sāmāṭī jāṭī, chadya kesariyā goṭ-Kaasam*

*Sāt vīsum māmy sheṭhiyā beṭhā, jāniyono nahi pār-Kaasam*

*Madhdariye to māmalo machiyo, dariye ḍolyām vāṇ-Kaasam*

*Utar-Dakhan nā vāyrā vāyā, vījī jhoḷām khāy-Kaasam*

*Leṭī sāheb nī chīṭhiyūm maḷiyūm, vījī pāchhī vāḷ-Kaasam*

*Pāchhī vāḷum to māvaḍī lāje, alā māthe itabār-Kaasam*

*Kāch ne kūpe kāgaḷo lakhiyā, te y tanaṭā jāy-Kaasam*

*Bhuj nā hākam hāth pachhāḍe, Pīr ūṭhāre pār-Kaasam*

*Hindū-Musalmān māntā māne, koī'e na karī vār-Kaasam*

*Mumbaī te sher māṃ māṇḍavā ropyā, khobale veṅchī khāṇḍ-Kaasam*

*Dhol saraṇāyuni dhammake vāge, jue jānu nī vāṭ-Kaasam*  
*Desh-pardesh tār vachutyā, vījī veran thāy-Kaasam*  
*Vāṇiyā vāmche Bhāṭiyā vāmche, gharoghar rūngā thāy-Kaasam*  
*Māmo-bhāṇejo dhruke rove, rove chhe ghar nī nār-Kaasam*  
*Sagām rove ne sāgvām rove, benī rove bār mās-Kaasam*  
*Pīṭhī choḷelī lāddī rove, māṇḍave ūṭhī āg-Kaasam*  
*Phūṭ! re bhūṁdī vījī tū ne, teraso māṇas jāy-Kaasam*  
*Vījī ke māro vānk nahi bāvā, lakhyā chhaṭhīnā lekh-Kaasam*

Haji Kasam, your Vijali wrecked in the middle of the ocean,  
people have joined on board from Bhuj and Anjar.

At ten o'clock the tickets were booked and it started at eleven.

Thirteen bridegrooms were on the way with merchants and other relatives.

In the middle of the ocean sea started roaring and *Vijali* twirled.

Wind of North-South started blowing and the captain received  
a warning from Lely sir, but he did not stop in the fear of losing pride.

Hindus and Muslims prayed for it but none worked.

Celebrations were started in Mumbai waiting for the grooms,  
but alas! they received telegraphs that *Vijali* has sunk,

Everyone was crying blaming *Vijali*.

Haji Kasam your *Vijali* is wrecked in the middle of the ocean

(Karani; Gor and Pethani 450)

“*Vijali*” *lokgeet* is written in multiple languages, Kachchhi, Gujarati as well as Marathi. The effect of the event was trans-regional and therefore different versions in different western Indian languages were composed. The author of the poems is unknown as well it has spread in the oral as well as written form across Gujarat and Kachchh. The tragic event upon which it is composed has not been forgotten and with these compositions it has been kept alive.

The next *lokgeet* that I will be examining that has been very popular is “Hi Kachchhdejo Pani” (The Water of Kachchh, The Spirit of Kachchh). It narrates the stories of events in the history of Kachchh that are considered pivotal and the major figures involved in these events. Gor and Pethani attribute this song to Duleray Karani; however, the song has been on the lips of the folk of Kachchh or probably Karani had collected it and composed the metre. It has the name of Karani in the last couplet which also hints

towards his authorship over this song. It has been popularly recorded and published in audio-visual form as well thus, it has wide circulation and has become a song of folk.

***Kachchade Jo Paani***

*Kachchhado vanko Kachchhi vanka, jag mein jenje jash jadanka,*

*Vanki Kachchh vatnji vaani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Aj pan foreto phulani, Marwad kirti vanchani.*

*Aat kot khambhi khodani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Panroter duka peo, jit Jagdusha dataar thie;*

*An jo dinhdal ajod daani, ee panje kachchhadejo paani!*

*Soomariye jo sharan sahayak, Alauddin sen lade ldayak,*

*Vadsar jo abado abadani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Ayraniyu ratt viyu, hit dholi bheryu bhasam thiyu*

*, Aj pan vanchaje vrajvani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Savaj mare Shah jiyare, ra'jo pad Khengar j dhare,*

*Aan Sindh sudhi vartani, ee panje kachchade jo paani!*

*Kachch rajkunvaren jo rakhandhal, chh baluda kulbhan karindhal,*

*Kaklaji pan amar kahani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Ghulam Shah ji chadai chadai, zharen mathye lagi ladai*

*, Ten jo ute utare paani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Buland ayo Ahmedabadhi, kachchhade ji ke la barbadi,*

*Bhago bhagal mein bharay bhani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Fatiye jayu foju firyunte, Kachchh-Kathiyawad vaiyu te,*

*Danka jenja vaga diyani, ee panje kachchade jo paani!*

*Sheth Meghji bhari shuro, ra'je charpan jo ken churo,*

*Veer Luvane ji aakhani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Kachchhade jo nar krantikari, Shyam Krishnavarma bhansari,*

*Azadi jo awal sukhani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Julam-Raj ji jad tode la, Portugal pan thek pugi,*

*Jethibai khatriyani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Khani viman udine ayo, veer Kabali madi jayo,*

*Bharat jo pe'lo j vimani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Matha gine ne matha diyenta, kache ta kulbhan thiyeta,*

*Dhushman jenja dhakk vakhani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

*Sant saayi satiyu ne soora, tapasi pir fakir j poora,*

*Kamal halea kare kamani, ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*  
*Jaifen ke pan de juwani, nirvo paani nimro paani,*  
*Chondhal kitro chay karani? ee panje kachchhade jo paani!*

Kachchh is brave, Kachchhis are brave, whose glory is known to the world  
Bold is the Kachchhi language, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Fulani<sup>38</sup> flourishes even today, whose glory reached Marvad,  
His Cenotaph erected in Atkot, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Drought hit in thirteen-fifteen, when philanthropist Jagdusha<sup>39</sup> was born,  
The greatest ever donor of food and grain, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

He became Sumaris<sup>40</sup> shield, fought with Allah-Ud-Din,  
From Vadasar Abado Abanani, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

There were one-forty Ahirani, who sacrificed themselves with the drummer,  
Even as it is known today, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Fighting with the lion, he saves, achieving the status of Ra<sup>41</sup>,  
His glory reached Sindh, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Taking care of Princes, sacrificing his six sons,  
Kakal<sup>42</sup>'s story is unforgettable, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Gulamshah marched to Kachchh, The Battle started at Zara<sup>43</sup>,  
Defeated to him there, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

---

<sup>38</sup> Lakho Fulani, once upon a time ruler of Kachchh. Who fought battle with king of Patan in eleventh century. However, at least three Lakha have been in Kachchh so it is often difficult to understand which one is being referred to. Karani Duleray. *Kachchh Kaladhar. Vol. 1.*, Rajkot, Pravin Prakashan, 2014 [1987], 2 vols. Rajkot, Gurjar Granthratna Karyalay, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> A thirteenth century philanthropist of Kachchh who donated in the time of drought in Kachchh

<sup>40</sup> The Sumra women. The Sumaras were once upon ruler of Sindh and later settled in northern part of Kachchh.

<sup>41</sup> Ra' or Rao is the titled addressed to the kings of Kachchh.

<sup>42</sup> Bhiya Kakal was sacrificed his six sons to save the life of the prince and heir to throne of Kachchh. See for more details, *Kachchh Kaladhar. Vol. 2.*

<sup>43</sup> Zara is hills located in the north-west part of Kachchh were famous Battle of Zara took place in 1765.

Buland came from Ahmedabad, to wreak destruction on Kachchh,  
Ran away with his mistress, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Fateh Mohamand's<sup>44</sup> army was marshalling, Kachchh Kathiyavad around,  
Whose glory spread day and night, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Seth Meghaji<sup>45</sup> was great and daring, breaking the madness of the king,  
Story of brave Luvana<sup>46</sup>, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

The revolutionary man of Kachchh, Shyamjkrushna Varma Bhanshali<sup>47</sup>,  
Great freedom fighter, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

To shake the empire of violence, reached Portugal,  
Jethibai Khatriyani, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Flying the plane, reached Kachchh Vir Kabali<sup>48</sup>,  
He is the first pilot of India, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

Who takes the head and sacrifices the head, who martyrs for Kachchh?  
Enemy praises their bout, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

*Sant, Sai, Satiyu* and *Sura*, ascetics, Pir and Fakir all,<sup>49</sup>  
Earned miraculous earnings, that's the spirit of Kachchh!

It gives new birth to the elders, and it is pure, pure water,  
How much can Karani say? That's the spirit of Kachchh!

(Karani; Gor and Pethani 450)

The song is an example of popular imagery and memory. It significantly glorifies the people and incidents connected to them. It covers the course of history since the initial era of the Jadeja dynasty, i.e. twelfth century onwards. It carves out the characteristics of

---

<sup>44</sup> Once a soldier in the king 's army, later he led the same army. He ruled on behalf of king Pruthaviraj and Rayadhan III of Kachchh in 1786 to 1813.

<sup>45</sup> Another philanthropist who was ruling over Anjar in 1770s.

<sup>46</sup> He belonged to the Lohana community.

<sup>47</sup> A well-known freedom fighter who was born (1857-1930) in Mandavi and later moved to Bombay and London where he built India house.

<sup>48</sup> Who, it is believed, had made first ever aeroplane

<sup>49</sup> Saint, God, Women, Brave

Kachchh, which are bravery, philanthropy, passion, sacrifice, and spirituality. The word ‘*pani*’ in the phrase “Hi Panje Kachchde jo Pani” means that one who drank the water of Kachchh has achieved success in any form or he/she is of powerful spirit. It also suggests the sharp difference in cultural values and spirit that different cultures and societies cultivate in their people. The song, therefore, suggests that all those who fought for Kachchh, donated, or spread peace and love are born and brought up in Kachchh. The metaphor of water suggests the community and society that cultivated such human beings. However, the reference to the people and events are directly connected with the crown of Kachchh. It presents popular culture as abiding by the court of Kachchh.

Another popular incident that took place in the history of Kachchh was the battle between Allah-ud-din and Abado Abanani which is mentioned in the third couplet. To save the one hundred and forty Sumaris<sup>50</sup> of Sindh fled in fear of Allah-ud-din marching toward Kachchh. Abada had intercepted the army of Allah-ud-din and fought to save the life of Sumaris at Vadasar. People with Abada and himself, martyrs for the cause to save the women, came to seek his help. The tragic death of Abada and the army made Abado popular. Even a block of Kachchh district is named after Abada known as Abadasa in the south-western part of Kachchh region. The battle not only posed a challenge to the army of Allah-ud-din but it was also an attempt to stop him from entering the state of Kachchh. Abado, Orasio and their troop challenged him and became historical figures who died, as was common in Kachchh and Kathiyavad, for pride of women who came to him for shelter. Their self-sacrifice made them important figures in the history of Kachchh.

Kachchh state has its currency in the form of coins. Kori, Panchiya, Dokdo, and Dhingalo, among others, are some of the names of currency prevalent in different eras of the history of Kachchh until Kachchh unified the Indian nation-state. “Dhingalo Keda vyo” means “Where did the Dhingalo Go?” It points to the changing economic culture and changing regime. A child asks his mother:

*Dhingalo kidaan vyo re maadi! Dhingalo kidaan vyo?*

*Haathi je pair jhedo, Dhingalo kidaan vyo?*

*Dhingale ja dher muke, ber gini dae!*

*Pawar ja paka peelu, her gini de... Dhingalo*

*Dokde jyu kharaku, khajur gini de!*

---

<sup>50</sup> Sumara woman; the Sumaras were the rulers of Sindh and later settled in the northern part of Kachchh and Bhuj as well. Abado Jam fought a battle at Vadasar village to save the Sumaris.

*Trambhiye jo bhootada, jarur gini de... Dhingalo*  
*Dokde ja ser muke, jaam gini dae,*  
*Trambhiye je tein mathe, bhadham gini de... Dhingalo*  
*Dokde ja daaria, kutel gini dae,*  
*Trambhiye jaa fula tu, fulel gini de... Dhingalo*  
*Dhingale ja laal tu, liyaar gini dae,*  
*Dhingalo na ve ta taan, udhaar gini de... Dhingalo*  
*Mata-*  
*Dhingalo halyo vyo re, putar! Dhingalo halyo vyo!*  
*Dhingale je jaan mathe aanu achi vyo... Dhingalo*

Where did Dhingalo<sup>51</sup> go? Mother!  
It looks like foot of an elephant, where did it go?  
With this Dhingalo buy me *Ber*<sup>52</sup>!  
Buy the Pilu of Pavar<sup>53</sup>, where did it go?  
Buy me dates with Dokda<sup>54</sup>!  
And with Trambhiya buy groundnuts<sup>55</sup>, where did it go?  
Buy me a drink of Dokda!  
And with Trambhiya almond, where did it go?  
Buy me gram of Dokda!  
And with Trambhiya pop-corn, where did it go?  
Buy me manjack<sup>56</sup> fruit with Dhingalo!  
If you don't have one, buy it for me on loan,  
Mother:  
Dhingalo has gone, Dhingalo has gone!  
Instead of Dhingalo of Aana has come!

(Karani; Gor and Pethani 13)

---

<sup>51</sup> One of the coin which was in currency post-independence

<sup>52</sup> Ziziphus, Jujube

<sup>53</sup> Pavar is a sub-region within the Kachchh consisting parts of present day Bhuj and Nakhatrana tehsil.

<sup>54</sup> A currency of pre-Independence Kachchh was in market with *Dhingla*.

<sup>55</sup> *Bhootada* or groundnuts is a common crops in the plains of present day Nakhatra.

<sup>56</sup> Liyar

The song not only narrates the change or replacement of currency but it mentions the different food items and social world of delicious things to can be bought and eat. However, except almonds, other things can be found in the jungle are free. The boy asks his mother to buy him things to eat, which suggest that he is based in the town or urban space where the replacement of currency can be felt every day. The social and geographical position is also well portrayed as narrator asks his mother to buy things which hints towards the affordability and the economy of pleasure as well as place. Apart from this, the gender voice of narrator is also evident that a boy is asking his mother to buy. The boy demands to buy several things, and even does not have *Dokdo* or *Dhingalo* that he urges to be bought on loan. The song also presents the caste and class implicitly which can be inferred from the social world of things and the economy of pleasure. Here the mother of the narrator is capable of buying such things.

### ***Ethnic and Caste Identity***

Are folks casteless, or do they have caste? Do they belong to any of the *Varnas*? Who is the producer of the folklore, do they have a caste? Do the subjects or the protagonists of the narratives of the *lokgeet* have caste? The question of caste in Folklore Studies has hardly been explored, at least in the context of Kachchh and Gujarat. Definitions of folk and folklore point towards the lowness of the folk. In Gujarat and north India, folklore and literature are popularly defined in binary opposition to classic and mainstream literature. Un-civic is a characteristic attributed to it against the literature of civic society. A region that is imagined or shaped through the ethnic and caste identity represented in its folklore and folk literature is confined to a narrow definition of the popular narratives and is limited in a sense.

In the context of Kachchh majority of subjects in folklore and literature are from the upper-caste popular personalities. Although upper-castes and particularly, Kshatriya, have been the strongest marker of bravery and virtues. Castes in folklore are either glorified or silenced altogether. Several social and political forces are liable for that. The majority of forces are due to the mediation of the upper castes and their colonial masters. But before that, a social system of castes played a role, as only Brahmin and Kshatriya were depicted doing glorious deeds. Successful of them remained in the memory of folks, which spread as folklore and literature. Few heroic deeds were popularized due to selective appropriation. However, the term heroic would also be ideologically loaded. The songs on war of the battle of Zara are among the other examples in which the Jadejas

are portrayed showing courage and bravery. Songs on the attack of Khilaji on the Sumaris and challenge by Abada is another such example. He is often mentioned in the songs of the *asmitā* of Kachchh: for example, “*Munji Matrubhumi ke Naman*”, “*Jodhejo jung athva Abado Adabhang (War of Warriors or Abado the Great)*” however his friend and fellow who fought and sacrificed himself before Abada in the same battle is unknown to the majority of the people of Kachchh. Being lower caste Orasiyo Meghvar is overshadowed by Abada who was a Kshatriya.

These deep-seated prejudices come from the subtle dynamics which have been at work since the inception of the caste system. In the second section of the *Kathageet* ballads in *Duleray Karani Sahitya Vaibhav*, out of fourteen *kathageet*, nine are themed on the king, court and battles. In the construction of masculine identity of Kachchh, Duleray Karani played a huge role similar to what Zaverchand Meghani had in the region of Saurashtra.

Collections of Kachchhi *Lokgeet* by Karani, Dholiya and Joshi are the best examples of it. Even Duleray Karani, in his collection of the folklore of Kachchh, has been very selective and, therefore, remained confined to his patronizing king and his fellow caste man. His other books justify the caste metrics in their full length.<sup>57</sup> He has missed out, perhaps intentionally, the priest who used to coronate the kings of Kachchh in his major works. Even Zohara Dholiya was influenced by Karani. Her collection of *lokgeet Karayal* has a variety of themes and narratives. However, caste is also visible. When and where her collected *lokgeet* do not narrate upper-caste, they are painful stories of either female in Kachchh or out of Kachchh or the lower caste labourers.

“Hi Kachchhdejo Pani” has subjects that are either kings or personalities directly related to the king and his court. Lakho Phulani, a former ruler; Jagdusha, a major merchant; Abado Abdanani, a Jadeja clansman; Fatehmohamand Jamadar, a Muslim soldier who later ruled Kachchh for a while, etc. are the examples of historical figures that are portrayed in the song that belong to the upper strata of the society of Kachchh. Others are socially, culturally, and politically handicapped by the hegemonic structure or erased. It is as if the *lokgeet* portrays only the Jadeja caste as brave and courageous. The ethnicity of the rulers, Jadeja kings, become the ethnicity of entire Kachchh, which is

---

<sup>57</sup> *Kachchh Kaladhar Vol. I*, (pg. 146-156) *II*, only mentioned Mamadev, however he was the guru of the Jadeja dynasty; *Kachchhna Bhaktiman Santo* by Karani.

characterised as upper-caste, brave, valiant, virtuous and valorous. Thus, it ignores the people of other ethnicities and communities.

“*Jharejo Geet*,” or “A Song of Jhara,” collected in *Karayal*, narrates the story of a Jadeja soldier called Bhimaji. As it said, the Jadeja with people of all the other castes had fought at Zara, but Bhimaji fought with utmost courage at the battle of Zara where blood floated away in streams, it was a situation in which one cannot think of retreating and do or die. All the Jadeja fought at the Zara.

*Bhimji Zaro malaayo, mudasen maagna de,*

*Jadeje Zaro malaapo, mudasen maagna de,*

*Chaaro-chaaro Kachhado, Shoora Jadeja,*

*Bhimji Zaro malaayo mudasen maagna de,*

*Tararu hanja takadiyu, kaja bhaalenja gha,*

*Bhimji[ya] Zaro malaayo mudasen maagna de,*

*Bhawani sher ja payanu, rudeo rat minja,*

*Jadeje Zaro malaapo mudasen maagna de.*

Bhimaji fought at Zara, he didn't run away,  
The Jadeja fought at Zara, He didn't run away.

Let us go, Brave are the Jadeja,

Bhimaji fought at Zara, He didn't run away,

Use the swords as fast as you can and stab with the spears

Bhimaji fought at Zara, He didn't run away

The Son of Bhavani sacrificed by shedding his blood,

The Jadeja fought at Zara, He didn't run away.

(Dholiya 86)

### ***Gendered identity***

It has been a common characteristic in Kachchhi *lokgeet* that, at least historically, *lokgeets* have always rested upon popular heroic figures, and the majority of them are

upper-caste men. The *lokgeet* that voice the issues of women and household glorify someone who is not folk in the traditional sense. Folklore and literature were equally contributed by women as part of the daily routine assigned to them by the traditional society. In the traditional setting, women were not allowed to partake in public gatherings which were populated by men and such rules still exist in certain castes and sub-regions of Kachchh. Therefore, the gendered performance of folk songs begins in the private sphere. As Benedict Grima notes:

Just as the gun and turban are typically used as images to exemplify Paxtun manhood, I suggest that tears and the endurance of hardship exemplify Paxtun womanhood. This is true both in the image of women as created by men in popular culture (films, romances, songs, poetry) and in women's images of themselves. (78)

*Lokgeets* in Kachchh are, in most cases, narrated by a woman, or they have a feminine voice that always longs for her beloved brother, husband, or son. Therefore, gendered analysis of *lokgeet* is something which can offer new readings of the subtle patriarchy prevalent in the society and its imagined region.

Rano is a historical character from Thar who is deployed in a real and metaphorical sense in *lokgeets*. As the popular folk narrative, Mumal-Rano narrates the story of Mumal's longing for Rana. Women of Kachchh are always shown as waiting for a son, husband or mostly brother. It depends on the male figure in the family.

Household chores are also vividly portrayed in Kachchhi *lokgeet*—fetching water, working on a farm, or as a labourer are some of the activities which are found. One of the most famous *lokgeet* is 'Gajiyo'. 'Gajiyo' literally means cement block. Women working on the construction site sing this song. Dholiya classified it into a labour song. The narrator of the song, counts her jewelry. Although deciphering the word *gajiyo* has been a challenge for the scholars of *lokgeet*. The narrator says "I sing Gajiyo, Dear sister I sing gajiyo/it is difficult to hold, dear I sing Gajiyo. She then counts her jewels like Kandla, Kambhiyu wore in feet, Muthiya on wrist, Harlo in neck, Thodiya in ear all of them are bought of one hundred and twenty-five rupees. She says it is difficult to work wearing all these ornaments.

*"Gajiyo" (Shramgeet)*

*Gajiyo panjo zor jalano, gajiyo panjo zor jalano,*

*Jalanenti jaliya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya.*

*Savasoja kadla munja, savasoja kadla munja,*

*Pag menti paiya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya,*

*Gajiyo panjo zor jalano, jalanenti jaliya*  
*Bhen gajiyoti gaiya.*  
*Savaso ji kambhiyu mujuun, savaso ji kambhiyun mujuun*  
*Pagmenti paiya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya.*  
*Savaso jo muthiya munjo, savaso jo muthiyo munjo*  
*Hathmenti paiya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya*  
*Savaso jo haralo munjo, savaso jo haralo munjo*  
*Dogmenti paiya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya*  
*Savaso ja thodiya munja, savasoja thodiya munja*  
*Kanmenti paiya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya.*  
*Gajiyo panjo zor jalano, gajiyo panjo zor jalano*  
*Jalanenti jaliya bhen, gajiyoti gaiya.*

(Dholiya 83)

Another *lokgeet* is 'Ki Bhariya'. 'Ki Bhariya' means 'how could I fetch [water]'. In this song, the dilemma of women going to fetch water from the well is narrated. When she passes through a street her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband meet her so she does not know how she can go to fetch water. In order to express deference to the elder male relations- in-law, a bride has drawn a veil (ghoonghat) over her face. It also indicates the well and the act of fetching of water which a difficult task specially in Kachchh where the water level is low. The gender roles are also defined in this *lokgeet*.

Another type of Kachchhi *lokgeet* that is very popular is marriage songs. This type of song can also be divided into sub-types according to their relation to different ceremonies. 'Fatana' or the joke or mockery is one of the sub-types of marriage songs, in which females of both the bride and groom's families sing songs mocking and joking about the opposite side. Males and females are portrayed in unconventional and unusual ways. Men are portrayed as doing feminine activities and females as masculine or both as childish. In this way, these songs are the best example of traditional gendered identity attributed to males and females. These may be mocking or light-hearted jokes, but this gendered consciousness in the folk and people is pivotal in the larger identity of the region. It feeds into it in subtle ways that ultimately make a particular notion of masculinity and femininity, and patriarchal structures, firm and rooted.

Masculinity similar to other princely states in the Indian subcontinent was defined in terms of the heroism and chivalry of the king, his court and the soldiers who were from the Kshatriya *Varna*. Historical characters like Rao Lakho, Rao Khengar, Abado Jam and

Jamadar Fateh Mohammad are the epitome of the masculinity of Kachchh. Bravery and masculinity as often seen in the *lokgeet* and folk narratives are attributed to Jadeja clansman only. This element of the identity of Kachchh Brahmanical social order works secretly underneath the projection and appropriation of certain males from certain *Varna* and castes.

‘*Shourya* songs’ or Songs of Valour—a section in *Karayal* interestingly includes songs in which upper-caste males are protagonists; although women were not allowed to do so, even to Kshatriya women. Even lullaby and children’s songs sections in this collection prioritize male children. Sadly, the sad or tragic song section contains the sadness of women, i.e. daughter, sister, mother and wife longing for their male loved one.

### ***Geographical identity***

Kachchh is the region where a new landscape appears every ten kilometers. A landscape that has sea and coasts, rivers and hills, plains and deserts, national and international borders and archaeological sites ranging from two to three thousand years old. Kachchh has been popularly conceived by outsiders as a land-locked desert. The newly found White deserts of Kachchh added a new layer to the popular imagination of Kachchh. Although Kachchh is a majorly arid land, it has the highest numbers of rivers that become active only during monsoon. The coastal belt stretches from the western tip of Narayan Sarovar to the Gulf of Kachchh near Maliya, Morbi; whereas the northern border is landlocked with Sindh, Pakistan and Banaskantha. The east is bordered by the Great Desert near Surendranagar.

#### ***Nagar Bhajar (Premgeet)***

*Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar,*

*Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar,*

*Nagar Bhajar ja madu dhootra Munke moye chadi menla marin hajar*

*Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar.*

*Nak kedi nathadi ginevyo vithlone*

*Nake adavi thair sumaar Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar.*

*Dog kero, harlo ginevyo vithlone*

*Doge adavi thair sumaar Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar.*

*Hathkero muthiye ginevyo vithlone*

*Harthe adavi thair sumaar Aun re halais bhen Nagar Bhajar.*

O sister, I'm going to Nagar Bajar,  
 I'm going to Nagar Bajar.  
 Merchants of Nagar Bajar are swindlers  
 They taunt and tease me  
 I'm going to Nagar Bajar.  
 Vithalo has stolen my nose ring, I'm without a ring,  
 I'm going to Nagar Bajar.  
 Vithalo has stolen my neckless, I'm without neckless,  
 Sumar! I'm going to Nagar Bajar.  
 Vithalo has stolen my bracelet, I'm without a bracelet,  
 I'm going to Nagar Bajar.

(Dholiya 26)

Geography across the world has shaped life and people residing in it, as has the literature produced from the region. The desert and the ocean are the major geographical elements that have shaped the identity of Kachchh to a great extent. Both these border the northern and southern frontiers as they have been pivotal in migration and both inward and outward mobility. The northern border has been the frontier mainly for entry. The majority of Hindu and Muslim communities believe in their direct or indirect connections with Sindh or trajectories of migration from North-Western and Middle Asia.

Kachchh has been perceived as a desert and arid land, which is partially true. Longing for water and rain in *lokgeet* is vividly narrated. *Lokgeet* collected in *Songs of the Rann: archive of Kutchi folk songs* address the ecology of Kachchh. Songs like “Kunjali”, “Kari Vadaldi”, “Kachchhdo Bare Mass” and “Mitho, Mitho Panje Kachchhdejo Pani” are among the songs which are themed on the desert, water, rain and love and longing. Although rain and water have been explicitly and metaphorically used in the literary imagination, they capture the life and the geographical image of Kachchh. Hills are the most used symbols in the *lokgeet*. Kala Dungar (the Black Hills), the Zara Hills, Dhinodhar, and Bhujiyo Hills are the landmarks that are often symbolised by Kachchh. “Munji Matrubhumike Naman”, and “Hi Kachchhade jo Pani” cite them as places of worship as well as natural beauty of Kachchh. Niranjan Bhagat said in his “Munji Matrubhumike Naman” that when he reached the Himalayas, it reminded him of the Dhinodhar hills. These hills are considerably used as they are associated with significant historical events in the history of Kachchh. Battles were fought at Zara Hills. Dhinodhar has been known for the Nathpanthi ascetics. It has a temple on it; similarly,

Black Hill has a temple on the peak of mountain. Bhujiyo hills are also battlefields and have a temple of the Serpent god. They are places of state and religious affinities and, therefore, remained in the popular imagination as important places for shaping Kachchh as a state's identity. The Black hills are also the northern frontier close to the Sindh border. Karani has collected and written songs on the battles of Zara and Bhujiyo. Even Rushbrook wrote a history titled *Black Hills of Kutch* which was later translated by Karani as “*Kara Dungar Kachchhja*”.

Another landscape that is frequently described in the *lokgeet* is the desert. The northern and eastern Kachchh is bordered by deserts. The northern desert is connected with the Sindh region of Pakistan making an international border whereas the eastern desert is connected with mainland Gujarat. The deserts on both these sides make natural borders they cut Kachchh from the land from the north and east sides.

The landscape of the desert has also influenced the life of the people of Kachchh in various ways. Because of a shortage of livelihood, the people of Kachchh migrate seasonally. When there was no demarcation of borders, people freely moved across regions. This easy travel across regions was key in socio-cultural interactions. Geography, in this way, influences social life and patterns. The remoteness of Kachchh as a western frontier made women of the region vulnerable. Males used to still go away to towns and cities within the region, or sometimes across states for earning a livelihood. A famous line from the folktales of Mumal-Rano aptly captures this dilemma of women as Mumal says, “dear Rana, you have deserted me” (Karani *Kachchhnu Loksahitya* 137).

In an arid land like Kachchh, droughts are frequent, although the climate has changed since the decades due to changing atmospheric patterns across the globe. Several droughts hit hard on Kachchh, but the drought of *Samvant* 1956 (1899-1900 ACE) remained in Kachchh's memory. It was a major drought Kachchh had experienced before depicted in songs titled “The Year of 1956” and “Song of 1956” (Dholiya 75-76). The first song narrates a philanthropic King of Bhuj who bought grains from foreign countries donated to the people of Kachchh and opened his treasures for the welfare of the people. This song is more praise of the king than the tragedy. The second song is a prayer to the almighty to bless the land with rain as nothing is left. The drought has swept away everything.

Rain is always awaited in Kachchh as it is an arid land that receives less than average rain. Drought, migration, rain and return to Kachchh are closely linked to the geography of Kachchh and the mobility of the people of Kachchh. Several *lokgeet* voice

the longing for rain. It has also been used as a metaphor for the near and dear ones. “Kachchh te Vathamī” is a song sung possibly with a female narrative voice longing for her beloved. This song portrays longing for the beloved whom she asks “where are you, it has already rained. I’m not able to pass the day and night and god knows you where are” (*Kutchi lokgeet*, Shreenath Studio) The song is another testimony of two factors of life of a person from Kachchh: longing for a beloved and the rain as beloved.

*Kachhate vatha min, kachhate vatha min;  
Munja pardeshi pankhi kachhate vatha min.*

*Alla jaane toke kola laga din,  
Munja pardeshi pankhi kachhate vatha min.*

*Raatun munjiyun natiyun nekare, nata nekare din,  
Munja pardeshi pankhi kachhate vatha min.*

*Reyaan kayun walida jo ache b-char din,  
Munja pardeshi pankhi kachhate vatha min.*

*(Kutchi lokgeet, Shreenath Studio, Gaana)*

It rained in Kachchh, dear, it rained in Kachchh,  
My beloved, it’s raining in Kachchh.  
God knows why you took so many days.  
My dear, it’s been raining in Kachchh  
Days and nights are not passing with you,  
My dear, it rained in Kachchh.

We would meet o dear if you could come for a day or two.

My dear, it rained in Kachchh. Where are you?

*(Kutchi lokgeet, Shreenath Studio, Gaana)*

The geography and amalgamated cultures of Kachchh certainly make it unique in its way, but Kachchh as a princely state, a province of Bombay Presidency under British rule, a union territory, political and state identity has been in flux until it was fixed into a part of Gujarat state. Modern-day Kachchh, if considered from the date of establishment of the Jadeja dynasty or Bhuj as a capital, accrued a statehood. However, divisions within the state had existed. The crown of Kachchh had control over Narayan Sarovar to Kandla and Tuna Bandar port on the coast, and from Lakhpat to Dholavira on land borders. The

consolidated modern socio-cultural, ethnic, and gendered identities are influenced by the neighbouring cultures. The state and political identity of Kachchh has been majorly influenced by the mainstream and neighbouring states, although consolidation of Kachchh as a state began with the Jadeja dynasty. Internal family feuds within the Jadeja court led to divisions within Kachchh. During Islamic rule, it was influenced greatly from Ahmedabad and often Delhi. British rule made it consolidated into a region that is almost equivalent to contemporary Kachchh, although some of its parts were re-distributed between Kachchh and Sindh post-partition.

To conclude, few points can be made in the context of the above discussion on Gujarat, Kachchh, their histories, imaginations, folklore and construction of identity. Kachchh as a group of islands (mainland (Bhuj) Pachchham and Khadir) on the western most tip of the Indian peninsula has been a strategic base for invaders and rulers. This position has tempted people of neighboring countries for expansion of trade, territory, wealth. It also kept Mughal emperor Jahagir at ease making it a station for the Hajj pilgrim in medieval era. However, the seasonally dry desert on northern side became a passage to many settlers.

The mainland Gujarat has been central in governing Kachchh since Ahmed Shah took rule of Ahmedabad in hand. It has also been defining Kachchh indirectly making sense of itself. As the written sources of the histories of Kachchh are few in number, Gujarat becomes as important as Sindh. Sindh helps, not only politically but also culturally, in developing a sense of Kachchh. This aspect is examined by people such as Ibrahim, Kothari, Simpson. What and how Gujarat has imagined the region is can better be understood in juxtaposition with Sindh. Countries across the ocean have had effect on making and shaping of Kachchh. As the regions, Gujarat and Sindh have been dominated by the caste privileged in all the aspect of human life upon that Kachchh has derived social-political and religious identity often in opposition to them; thus their influence cannot be discarded.

The lore and literature composed in such a political economy imagined the region in a way that was limited by caste and religion. The poetry written in eighteenth and nineteenth century in Gujarat and Kachchh represent the view which was problematic and exclusivist. As literary and historical compositions were affair limited to upper caste, ideologies of their dominance cannot be unexpected and innocent.

Therefore, the first point of the role of folklore is to understand that the historical dominance of caste privilege cannot be avoided to make sense of a region. But alas,

folklore that emerged in certain caste systems could not dodge the dogma and hierarchy. It came to underpin *lokgeet* in subtle ways. The entire inquiry of folklore based on western paradigms in Gujarat and Kachchh added a layer to the understanding of the people, the *lok* and the region. These understandings of region based on the hierarchy and center as point of departure to define it would always remain different from the region discursively experienced by the people who are making and shaping it, as Ibrahim explains.

The second point is in the case of collections of folklore as (re)presenting Kachchh as a region which attempted to do it from the center—Postan, Rushbrook, Karani, Dholiya—with the ideological paradigms of the political and caste hierarchy. They present a limited view of Kachchh as a region, as the history of Kachchh offered centres on the royal court. Any assertion of identity based on such discourse influenced by the undercurrents of system of caste and patriarchy cannot lead us the inclusive imagination of a region. The next chapter examines assertions of the identity and cultural autonomy by Scotland and Kachchh and the role that the discourse formed through the privileged social positions of class, race, caste, and patriarchy played through the folklore in the imagined regions.