

Chapter 3

Devipujak: Social History and Mythology

The meaning of a word Devipujak is ‘worshiper of Goddess.’ They have strong belief in goddess. Devipujak community was earlier known as ‘Vaghri’ and the word was used as slang towards them by other people and it was very humiliating for the people of community. The government of Gujarat decided to use word ‘Devipujak’ instead of ‘Vaghri’ in its official record through resolution SSP- 112001- Mn.148-A passed in year 2001. The community was earlier known as Vaghri so different writers have given various theories about meaning of the word Vaghri and origin of the community. Enthoven (1975) had explained the word Vaghri means tiger-like. They were known by this name because they were brave like tiger and were protecting people from wild animals. The another thought behind name of Vaghri was that they were so skilful to play pellet drum to please goddess in such a way so the goddess will appear to bless them. The string on pellet drum is known as ‘*Vagh*’ so they are known as Vaghri because they play the ‘*Vagh*’ (Verma, 1964). It is more likely that the word Vaghri is derived from ‘*vagads*’ meaning sandhills of the Rajasthan which indicates that there were inhabitants of ‘*vagad*’ region. (Enthoven, 1975).

There is one wide spread folk tale regarding origin of Vaghri name. During *Navratri*¹⁰ festival, a boy belonging to Pardhi community caught lion cub and people gathered over there. They kept idol of *Vagheshwari Ma*¹¹ on lion cub and did *Parikrama*¹² of *Madh*¹³. The Rajput people were impressed with the bravery of Pardhi boy so they first time called him Vaghari. Afterward, the community was started known as Vaghari (Verma, 1964).

¹⁰ *Navratri* is a Hindu festival celebrated in honor of defeat of Mahishasura by goddess Durga to symbolize victory of good on evil for nine days.

¹¹ Goddess whose vehicle is tiger.

¹² Moving clockwise round the temple or devotional object.

¹³ Local word for temple of Goddess.

3.1 Origin of Vaghri

According to Malkan, the existence of Vaghri caste is since ages. They are originally derived from Aryans. They migrated from Caucasus Mountains which is situated at border between South Russia and Central Asia to Central and Western part of India in search of food and water for their livestock (as cited in Talpada, 2020). In ancient time, Vaghri were living as tribe and were known as *Pardhi*. They were hunter and gathers and used to keep weapons like knife, spear, bow and arrow with them. They used to wear clothes around waist made from animal skins and binding red cloth around their head. It was proud for them to hunt animals. Their original habitat was Gujarat and they had strong belief in their goddess (Verma, 1964). In opinion of Col. M J. Bhide, the origin of Babari community in Rajasthan is from Rajput clan. Their names are also similar to traditional names of Rajput community. There is know tale behind name of Babari community. Once there was marriage of princess. Four Rajput men were going to drop princess in palanquin at her in-law's house along with groomsmen. When they were passing though dark jungle, robbers started attacking them. Groom was killed in the attack and some of the groomsmen ran away to save their life. The four Rajput men fought against robbers and killed many of them. They reached very far from the palanquin while fighting with robbers. After victory over robbers, they came to the place where princess was left in palanquin but found that princess was not there. They started searching for princess and ultimately saw the floating dead body of princess in Vav (well). They felt very sad knowing death of princess and thought that King would kill all of them if we go and tell him the incidence. So, they decided to depart and moves to difference directions. They started living with tribal people after departure. They were also hunting along with them and learn collecting honey from jungle. They used to put *Dantun* in houses of villagers when they were not having any other work to do. The villager gradually started asking them which caste they are belonging and they used to reply *Vavari* which is derived from the word 'Vav' in which princess sacrificed her life. They were gradually being known as 'Babariya' instead of Vavari over the period of time. Even today, the Vaghri community is known by surname Babariya in Rajasthan (as cited in Talpada, 2020).

Enthoven mentioned that the Vaghri tribe of Gujarat probably belonged to Bagri tribe who were inhabitants of Bagar region of old United Province. There was no exact number of their population in Maharashtra but have migrated there from Gujarat and settled down at places

such as Bombay, Pune, Kalyan, Thane and Dhulia (as cited in Singh, 1994). Vaghri believes that they are descents of Rajput. When Solanki reign achieved victory on Gujarat so Vaghri tribe also came under attack. And they escaped to jungle to protect themselves from attack by soldiers. During this time, they came into close contact with Rajput community. Slowly and gradually their strong bonding established with Rajput communities such as Solanki, Parmar. This resulted into marriage relationship between Rajput men with Vaghri women and their offsprings started living like Rajput. The Rajput community consider themselves above in caste hierarchy to Vaghri so they outcasted the people who got married with Vaghri women. Their populations increased over the period and started living in a group at different places (Verma, 1964).

3.2 Sub-caste among Devipujak

The Devipujaks are divided into various sub-groups such as Dataniya, Talapada, Gamachia and Chibhadia. Enthoven has divided Vaghri communities based on their occupations. These groups are Chunariya (Lime burners), Datania (selling Babool sticks), Vedu (engaged in growing and selling areca) and Patanejis (involved in trade of wood and bamboo). It is interesting to know that Solanki has made extensive efforts to identify various sub-castes among Devipujak in his book “Shri Devipujak (Vaghri) Samajni Vividh Shakhona Devi-Devtao ane Purvajoni Amar Gathao” which is in Gujarat language (2006, pp.42-55). He has compiled the details from various sources.

Devipujak Sub-groups				
Aaghrojia	Delvadia	Kartania	Moladiya	Shekhalia
Adalia	Dehunia	Kathvadiya	Monparia	Shikari
Adharia	Detrujia	Katida	Moplipara	Shilajia
Ambadia	Deviwada-Pirwada	Katosadiya	Mosmia	Simadiya
Ambalia	Dhangaria	Kavithiya	Nagvadia	Sisangiya
Amdavadia	Dhanreja	Khakhrodiya	Najia	Sodvadariya

Amrania	Dharodia	Khambhatia	Narodia	Solanki
Bakrolia	Dhodakia	Khangarvala	Nasamdia	Songathia
Baralia	Dhodkia	Kharapati	Navadia	Sorathiya
Bawrukia	Dhotre	Khavdiya	Navapuria	Sovasia
Bhadbhidia	Fultaria	Kheruchia	Nindrojia	Surela
Bhadsania	Gafia	Khilosia	Ogania	Surtia
Bhankodia	Gamecha	Khimani	Padodia	Tabudia
Bharwadia	Gangadia	Khodani	Panchada	Tajparia
Bhatiya	Godhaviya	Kodariya	Panchasara	Talatia
Bhayavadria	Goraswa	Koli-Chuvalia	Pashula	Talpada
Bhayatiya	Goyal	Koli-Makwana	Patadia	Talsania
Bhesania	Gudhekia	Kothari	Patan-Vadia	Thadekia
Bhojawia	Hadadiya	Kuchiyala	Patani	Thakoria
Bhonia	Hadiyaniya	Kukraniya	Patelia	Thaliya
Bhoikia	Halvadia	Kumarkhaniya	Pichhadiya	Thania
Brahman-Sarasta	Indragania	Kundhiya	Pomla	Tharkia
Bukraniya	Indria	Kunwaria	Premasaria	Thepadia
Butia	Jadsaniya	Kunwardia	Punjani	Trambisia
Chamadia	Jagaria	Limbasia	Radadiya	Vadhiara
Chamdia	Jalaparia	Loladiya	Rafukia	Vadhiyara
Chaparia	Jalera	Loria	Rajkotia	Vadhvania
Charolia	Jakhvadia	Luvana	Ramniya	Vadodaria
Chapaneria	Jahania	Majethia	Raniyapara	Vadvedia

Chekhalia	Jambusaria	Malaniyat	Ranodaya	Vaghela
Chhanaria	Janjvadia	Mali- Marwada	Rathodia	Vagheliya
Chhaparia	Jaypuria	Mandaliya	Ravalvala	Vaghrodiya
Chibhadia	Jilia	Mandaria	Rethadiya	Vanakia
Chorasia	Jolapara	Mangurolia	Sabadiya	Vanodia
Chovsia	Jotmaliya	Manjokathia	Sabhad	Vansavadia
Chudasama	Julasania	Manodiya	Sakesara	Varadiya
Chunara	Kadival	Manpuria	Sanchania	Vasanekia
Chuvalia	Kaladia	Masiyava	Sanadia	Vijpara
Dabhi	Kalaniya	Mesia	Sandhila	Vikani
Dabhiya	Kalkatia	Metharia	Santhejia	Ugrejia
Dalwadia	Kamaliya	Mewada	Sanura	Yaki
Dahadia	Kangiya	Mirolia	Sarkhejia	Zapadia
Dahkia	Kankodia	Mithapara	Sarvaiya	
Dantani	Kansagara	Modasariya	Sathaliya	
Dantewadia	Kasodaria	Modha	Sathiya	
Darodia	Karadia	Modhvadia	Shaheria	
Vedava Devipujak Sub-groups				
Chadamia	Jakhania	Mathasuria	Vaghelia	
Charolia	Jilia	Mindholia		

Chuvadial Devipujak (Topaliya) Sub-groups				
Barsania	Indaria	Koriya	Tanetia	
Charolia	Kansagaria	Suvaria	Vahankia	
Vadhiara Devipujak Sub-groups				
Aadniyara	Jamanparia	Loladia	Shankeria	Vaghelia
Dadhania	Janjvadia	Mospara	Surela	Varaiya
Dudasia	Kori	Rafukia	Thakaria	Varania
Gamechia	Kunwaria	Samicha	Vadhiara	
Patani Devipujak Sub-groups				
Bachavala	Daduvala	Gumadiyavala	Labudivala	Sangariyavala
Badayavala	Dantalvala	Gungavala	Labuvala	Sengada Gangudivala
Baforiavala	Dantimar	Hadusiavala	Lapelangwala	Siplavala
Bagaiwala	Dhaghadiyavala	Hagenivala	Mesaria	Soitavala
Balodiavala	Dharuklivala	Jaglavala	Mesenivala	Somalavala
Bapulavala	Dhatigavala	Jehalavala	Mugdawala	Surtivala
Bhadiyawala	Dodiyavala	Kabravada	Nadivala	Tatavala
Bhagatvala	Fafuvala	Kadakiyavada	Naniyavala	Thekalavala
Bhajiwala	Garbivala	Kahariyavada	Pichutivala	Titoriavala
Bhaktavala	Gativala	Kaptiyavada	Poptavala	Togalavala

Bhamariawala	Gelavala	Karmetivada	Postivala	Totivala
Bhobiwala	Geliavala	Kasidiyava	Rakhodiyawala	Tukdivala
Bholawala	Godivala	Katidavada	Ramadiavala	Tumbadiyavala
Bhoriawala	Gorakhavala	Keharvada	Raniyavala	Versivala
Bhuriwala	Gotakavala	Kocharavala	Rohadavala	Zaduvala
Dadiyavala	Gotivala	Koklavada	Rohalivala	
Marwadi Devipujak Sub-groups				
Aholivala	Dhoravala	Limbalavala	Palivala	Siparvala
Bhakharani	Gangani	Maldhadiya	Pandrawala	Sujani
Borani	Garavala	Malgadhiya	Parmar	Thobiya
Charan	Gharavada	Mandaparvala	Patodi	Vadhiyara
Chhatrani	Harjivala	Mandavala	Saranavala	Vetvavala
Dhamdhara	Kalani	Motirivala	Savarsavala	Vithuravala
Dhandhal	Kori	Nagara	Saveravala	
Dharmani	Koyalavala	Nathani	Shehval	

3.3 Myth about Origin of Devipujak

There is a myth prevailing among Devipujaks regarding origin of Vaghri. It is widely believed by them. During field work, I was trying to know about authentic story behind origin of the Devipujak community. I asked some of the informants regarding origin of the Vaghri community and came to know about this folklore from them. The story begins with the wandering of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati in jungle. They have seen one small child who was alone and crying while walking. A child was not ordinary but he was demon

‘Amariyo Dutt’¹⁴. The goddess Parvati felt pity to see small child crying in dark jungle so she expressed her wish to take him with them. Lord Shiva was having doubt that he is not an ordinary child so he denied to take him with them. The goddess Parvati was determined to take the child and convinced Lord Shiva. The child was growing up so Lord Shiva gave him task to take care of *Pothiyo*¹⁵. He asked him to take *Nandi* for grazing. He was doing this task for some days but once he intentionally wounded himself and came to Lord Shiva and Parvati. He complained them that he is weak so other children are hurting him. He asked Lord Shiva to give him his *Bhashmakanika* (ashes) and *Amarful* (immortal flower) so he can be powerful and fight against others. Lord Shiva initially denied to give but goddess Parvati insisted Lord Shiva to give *Bhashmakanika* and *Amarful* to him. After getting these two things, a child shows his real appearance of demon. He became so powerful and very giant now and challenged Lord Shiva to either wage war against him or give him goddess Parvati. Lord Shiva knows that it is very difficult to fight against him as he is having *Bhsmakanika* and *Amarful* with him so he asked for some times to think. Now all Devi-Devta (deities) were worried and thinking how to fight against giant Amriyo Dutt. All gods and goddesses assembled to discuss way of defeating the demon. They were aware that Amriyo Dutt is very powerful now so only goddess Adya Shakti¹⁶ can defeat him. But there was a problem because goddess was in deep sleep for six months. The goddess Adya Shakti remains awake for six months and sleep for rest six months. It was not easy to make her awake. The deities thought in deep and created one man through enchantment. They give him a task to wake Adya Shakti from deep sleep. He went to place Adhya Shakti who was in deep sleep and tried to wake goddess. He made all efforts to wake up but failed. He came back to deities and told them that it was not possible for him to wake up Adhya Shakti. This man was created by deities so he came to be known as ‘Raval Dev.’

The goddesses create another man with their supernatural power and a man is known as Vaghri. He is instructed by deities to wake goddess Adhya Shakti anyhow otherwise they all will kill him if he does not complete task. He reached to goddess and try to wake her but he is not able to make her awake. He did all efforts but not succeed. He is worried now as all

¹⁴ Devil in Hindu mythology.

¹⁵ Bull vehicle of Lord Shiva

¹⁶ Supreme goddess in Hinduism known as Durga, Mahadevi, Jagat Janani.

deities will kill him if he returns back without waking goddess. He thought to do a last effort so he cut his abdomen and make two heads of *Damaru* (pellet drum) from its skin. He then made string of *Damaru* from its intestine muscle. He then plead goddess for awakening with playing *Damaru* and singing song in his local dialect. He standing near head of the goddess while waking her so he can protect himself from becoming ashes through hot air blown by goddess if she is awakened before completion of six months. Vaghri then informed goddess Adya Shakti that Lord Shiva is in trouble and he needs your help so you come to meet him. The goddess Adhya Shakti meet Lord Shiva and she is explained whole incident of Amariyo Dutt. Now the goddess asks Lord Shiva to give clothes of Parvati to her and she takes appearance of Parvati Maa and sit beside Lord Shiva. The demon Amariyo Dutt again comes there and asked Lord Shiva whether he will do war against him or will surrender goddess Parvati Maa to him. Lord Shiva told him to take goddess Parvati Maa along with him. Amriyo Dutt ask goddess to come along with me but she denied to come on feet so Amariyo Dutt becomes Nandi and make goddess ride on him. When they were going, the demon fees very heavy weight and felt unable to move so he understood that goddess is not Parvati Maa. Now the goddess takes her real appearance of Adhya Shakti and hit demon very hard. She took away *Bhamakanika* and *Amarful* from him. The demon run away ahead to save himself and a goddess runs behind him. The demon sees dead cow while running so he took tiny shape and hid inside dead cow. Now the goddess stops and think how to take demon out from dead cow as entering inside dead cow was considered as impurity. The goddess made idol from dirt and dead skin of her body and make it alive. She went inside dead body of cow, take demon out and ending the life of Amriyo Dutt. The goddess came to be known as *Meldi Maa* because she entered inside body of dead cow.

This story is also known behind origin of other caste like Raval Dev. This kind of folklore is wide spread among the community regarding origin of the Vaghri on earth. I have not come across any authentic documentary evidences about this folklore but it is believed by Devipujak community towards their origin.

3.4 History of Kumarkhaniya: Myth and Documented

There is a temple of Rajadada at Vadivadi village which is around ten kilometres away from Viramgam block. The place is having its own 400 years old historical importance. Their story begins with Viramdada who was having three children Dhanraj, Khimraj and Bijal. The middle child Khimraj was transgender so their group came to take him away with them but family members were not willing to give Khimraj to them. They prayed to goddess *Bahuchar Maa* and pleaded to give masculinity to Khimraj. Khimraj got manliness with grace of goddess and had son later through marriage with Lakhima whose son was known as Rajadada.

After sometimes, Lakhima and his little child Rajadada were abandoned by family. Their family member organised *Nived*¹⁷ to goddess but goddess was not coming to bless them. As Lakhima got news about Nived occasion was being held by her family members so she decided to go to attend it along with her seven-year-old boy Rajadada and baby goat. When they were heading to place of Nived, they were laughed and joked by sisters-in-law Anjudi and Manjudi during their way. It is believed that both Anjudi and Manjudi were made insane by goddess and their lineage did not progress due to curse of goddess. Now Lakhima along with her son reached to Vadivadi village and it became dark night while reaching there. Suddenly, a dholi¹⁸ came from the from tree and took Rajadada along with him and fled to sky.

Next day, there was gathering of people for Nived of goddess in Vadivadi and suddenly Rajadada was dropped at the place by Dholi. The goddess finally agreed to possess inside body of Rajadada and took Prashadi of Nived. The shepherd of Ratadiya family came there and pleaded goddess to convert salty and dirty water of well into clear and drinkable water in village. The goddess blessed him and make water of well drinkable for villagers. The shepherd was childless and believed that goddess will fulfil his wish so he prayed to goddess

¹⁷ Offering to goddess.

¹⁸ A one who plays dhol.

to give him child and goddess blessed him that he will have his own child in near future. The bali was performed and offering was served to Goddess.

Later, their surnames were decided based on the place they settled down. Gopaldada settled down at Mithapara village and came to be known as Mithapara. Khetsidada was having two sons while one settled down at Zap and came to be known as Zapadiya and another son stayed at Kumarkhan village so came to be known as Kumarkhaniya. The so on Bijaldada Devkarandada went to Khakharodgad so came to be known as Khakhrodiya. This story is documented in the book “Shri Devipujak (Vaghri) Samajni Vividh Shakhona Devi-Devtao ane Purvajoni Amar Gathao” written by Umesh Solanki.

During my field work when I was asking participants regarding their historical routes, I had gained information about the same story from them. But their story does not end here and I came to know how they finally settled down in Pritampur village around three hundred years ago. From Kumarkhan village, their forefather migrated to Baska village first. After sometimes, they migrated to Medi village from Baska. Karajibhai and Jahmatbhai were brothers who told me that their forefathers were harassed by their relatives and by higher caste communities due to their rituals. Their Bhuvo was once beaten by Mahajan¹⁹ so their forefathers Khoyabhabha and Khemjibhabha decided to leave place and move to Sojid village along with their family members and livestock. They were heading to another village and Mahajan got information about performing goat sacrifice at another village so he chased and stopped them in middle of the way. He asked them whether you are going to perform goat sacrifice to another village. Divipujaks usually offer billy goat not nanny goat to goddess for Bali. Mahajan was not having trust to them and was confirming whether goats are billy or nanny and suddenly miracle happened that all billy goats converted into nanny goats by Goddess. They believe that it was Goddess who saved them. They all had tea made from nanny goats’ milk and drank it including Mahajan. They are having belief that Mahajan got white scars on body after drinking tea as punishment by goddess for harassing Devipujaks and descendants of Mahajan are still having white scars on body in village. Then, they were moving ahead and decided to take some rest at Pritampur village. Here, the goddess

¹⁹ A word used for higher caste particularly one who lends money or who is rich and powerful person.

possessed body of their Bhuvu and asked all of them to settled down at Pritampur village instead of Sojid. They accepted the words of goddess and finally decided to stay at Pritampur village.

Apart from it, there are two kinds of Devipujak *Asal* (original) and *Nakali* (fake) residing in village as considered by community. The *Asal* Devipujak are those who are decedents of Khoyabhabha and Khemjibhabha while *Nakali* are decedents of Mobhadada. There is a story behind Mobhadada and his descendent in village. There was once *Mela* organised at Rathnath village where one small child was lost. He was dropped by someone to Mahant²⁰ of Rathnath Temple. There was famous temple of Lord Shiva there. Mahant kept the child for some days but no one came to take him back. There was aged Devipujak couple rendering services to Lord Shiva temple and they were childless. As many days passed but no relative of child came to take him back so Mahant gave child to Devipujak couple for nurturing. The other community members raised objection for keeping this child believing that he might be from lower caste. The old couple had to send this child to their relatives residing at another village due to objection in community. He was raised by them till adulthood. After some years, they were performing Bali but goddess was not possessing body of Bhuvu. They were pleading goddess for some days but they were not being blessed and goddess was not giving permission to perform Bali. It was happening because they had excluded Mobhadada from the community. Finally, they all brought Mobhadada back in village and goddess possessed the body of Mobhadada. The goddess blessed everybody and now Mobhadada became integral part of the community who was twenty-five-year-old at that time. Mobhadada has two sons Raghadada and Maghadada. Both the brother has some issues later so Maghadada went to reside in nearby village and Raghadada stayed at Pritampur. The existing Devipujak are descendants of Raghadada in village. Mobhadada was not born in Devipujak community so his descendants are known as Nakali by descendants of Rajadada who believe that they are real Devipujaks in village. There are only three houses of descendants of Rajadada in Pritampur village and rest of them migrated to different villages. The majority of population of Devipujaks are descendants of Mobhadada. They all stay like one community in village now and not having obvious differences in context of ancestral background.

²⁰ A priest of temple.

3.5 Summary

The Devipujak community which was earlier known as Vaghri has different stories about origin of the community. They were known as Vaghri because they were brave like tiger and so skillful to hunt tiger also. They were adroit in playing pellet drum and its string was known as *Vagh* so the word Vaghri has derived from it. The word Vaghri was replaced with Devipujak in its official record of Gujarat government through resolution SSP- 112001-Mn.148-A passed in year 2001 because it was used in very derogatory way to address community in society at large. The word Vaghri is considered to derive from '*vagads*' meaning sandhills of the Rajasthan which reflects that they were inhabitants of *vagad* region. Their origin also traced from Babari community in Rajasthan who was belonging to Rajput clan. The Vaghri tribe of Gujarat possibly belonged to Bagri tribe of Bagar regions of old United Province who then migrated to Gujarat and settled down at different places. There are many sub-castes among Devipujak community which known by the occupations they were engaged such as Chunariya derived from lime burners, Dantania were engaged in selling Babool stick and so on. There is also story of 'Amariyo Dutt widely known among them about the origin of Vaghri or Devipujak community. The kumarkhaniya community which one of the sub-castes among Devipujak derives its name from village Kumarkhan. They were four brothers kumarkhaniya, zapadiya, mithapara and khakhrodiya who settled down at different villages or places and came to be known from the places they settled down. There is both documented and myths about their historical aspects.