

Research Process
2(1) January –June 2014, pp. 50-61
 © Social Research Foundation

Rabaris of Kutch-History Through Legends

Bina Sengar

Assistant Professor, Department of History and AIC
 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University,
 Aurangabad-431004
 Email: binasengar21@gmail.com

The research paper is an ethnographic study of the Rabari community of Kutch. The available studies on Rabaris are based on narratives' of life and history of Rabaris through the anthropological surveys conducted during the British colonial times. The following study is based on the field works conducted in the region of Kutch and thereafter through the primary and secondary versions of the folk memories of the Rabari community which remains the significant identity of the Rann and its regions in Kutch.

[Key Words: Jath, Kutch, Legend, Rabari, Rann]

*Kutch presents an epitome of the larger story of
 India constant invasions; a fusion of cultures;
 a dawning sense of nationalism, Kutchi annals are
 full of dramatic episodes; there is a remarkable wealth of
 'remembered history' little of which has been written down"*

-William Rushbrook (1984:1)

Kutch: The Land of Legends

If one would go beyond history in the realm of a legend, several facets of cultural and their practices come to our knowledge. The value of these legends becomes more and more of importance when there is a paucity of any other written form of knowledge and sources to substantiate. The history of the common people very often lacks *bardic* literature or chronicles to represent their presence in past. Therefore, to traces their past value of their folk traditions becomes an invaluable source to study their past. The folk traditions could be in form of; tales fables, songs, dances, legends and so on even many a times diurnal practices become valuable sources to trace past. In the present article reference is made to study legends of a community to understand the historical past of the same (N: 2).

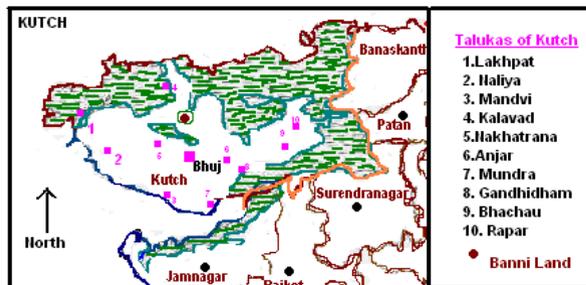
Kutch a natural ambience with *Rann* has one of the prominent community well known as The **Rabaris**, they are there in this region since ages and it is only through their rich culture and legend that we can weave their past. Their legends constitute folklores, fables, parables and many more of similar

kind of oral traditions. For a layman, history of Kutch is a blend of different communities and their past. For thousand years, the people of Kutch migrated in and out of Kutch to countries like Sindh, Afghanistan, Britain and Africa. Many foreigners who came here have depictions of Kutch in their journals. One of the army personnel of Alexander the Great called it 'Abhir', which means the shape of tortoise. Kutch has always fascinated historians and people who have flair for art. Its rich culture and heritage has many unknown secrets weaved in it. Kutch remains integral part of the different currents of South Asian history.

Kutch a Unique Geographical Entity

Geographically Gujarat can be divided into three areas: The Eastern Region includes the major cities of Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara (Baroda). The Gulf of Cambay divides the mainland strip from the flat, often barren plain of the Kathiawar peninsula, also known as Saurashtra (N: 3). Saurashtra is divided from the Kutch by the Gulf of Kutch, which is virtually an island cut off from the rest of Gujarat to the East and Pakistan to the North by the low lying Rann of Kutch. Kutch is mainly known for its Rann region a salt desert spread over an area of about 32881 Kms (Bhatt 1992:198). Which holds water turning it to be a marshy land, because of which it is also known as *dwikalpiya Gujarat*, (i.e. a region with two distinct phases) (Jani 1992:6). Kutch is also the largest district of Indian union, due to a large population of Abhiras or Ahirs (shepherd community) in the Kutch it is also known as Abhiria (Rajgore Y-NM:16-24).

Map-1: Sub-Divisional (Taluka) Map of District of Kutch



Source: R.P. Arya, Gujarat Road Atlas, Jodhpur, 2004

People of Kutch

The composition of people of Kutch differs from those of other parts of Gujarat in number of ways, as this region has been greatly influenced by geographical and historical factors working overtime (Williams 1985:1). Over hundreds of years several social groups came to Kutch from different parts of the globe and gradually became part of the Kutchi tradition. The greater portion of the inhabitants of Kutch seem to have come from Sindh and Marwad; Thul Parkar followed next, and Kathiawad and Gujaratis were last to send their quotas (Khakhar 1876:167).

Among the chief Hindu caste are: Brahmin, Bania, Lohana Kanbi, Rajput Ahir, Bhatia, Lohar, Suthar, Darji, Kumbhar, Bava, Charan, Kharva and Vadha. Among the Muslims the main castes identified are: Saiyads, Sheik, Mughal, Momna, Khoja, Samma, Mamen, Khatri, Kumbhar, Sanghar, Jat, Miyana, Bhandala, Sumra and Ker (Patel 1971:171). The scheduled and nomadic tribes are mainly confined to rural areas, but some of them are also present in the urban areas (Ibid: 131). The main scheduled tribes are Kolis in Bachhau and Rapar talukas; Bhils and Vaghri in Bhuj; Pardhi in Anjar, Mandvi and Mundra Talukas. Other tribes are Hungora, Bafan, Miyana, Theba, Me, Meta and Kekal concentrated in Bhuj, Anjar Abdasa and Lakhpat, where they are mainly engaged in cultivation and cattle breeding. Kutch has been a significant confluence point for many different races and people. The nomadic pastoralists are certainly the most interesting and their links can be traced on the one side to Marwar and Mewar and Saurashtra and on the other side to Sindh Afghanistan Iran and central Asia (Ibid: 141). This paper deals with the one of the most important nomadic pastoralist community of Kutch '*Rabaris*', and thereafter attempts to historically situate them in the most colorful demographic mosaic of the region.

Nomadic Communities

Before studying about the nomadic communities of Kutch it is important to know about the nomadism and how far the Kutch cattle rearers can be called nomads. *Nomadism*; is a way of life of people who do not continually live in the same place but move cyclically or periodically. It is distinguished from migration which is non-cyclic and involves a total change of habitat. Adam Cooper (Cooper 1954:390-391) qualifies that nomadism does not imply unrestricted or undirected wandering; rather it is based on temporary centers whose stability depends on the availability of food supply and the technology for exploiting it. In his reckoning, the term nomad encompasses three general types: Nomadic hunters and gatherers, Pastoral nomads and Tinker or Trader nomads (Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol-8:753).

Pastoral nomads retain their herd as wealth, while they live on milk or on some of the young animals or on food delivered through exchange. They are therefore relatively more secure in their livelihood than are hunting nomads; their nomadism lends itself to the accumulation of wealth in herds and flocks, but less in products of handicrafts (Cooper 1954:390-391). The status of women among homogenous clans of pastoral nomads is almost equal to that of men, because of strict division of labour between the sexes. The care of the herds has remained a masculine occupation among herdsmen who have not been affected by contact with agricultural tribes. Among pastoral nomads exhaustion of pasture land and increase of population may lead to the branching off a number of families or to the movement of the main stock. If the migration is directed to the uninhabited areas, social organisation is not exposed to change. Contact with other peoples, especially between herdsmen and agriculturist, has led, however, to a clash of cultures, the resultant situation depends largely upon the

relative numbers of migrants, the nature of the culture of both groups and whether the contract is peaceful or through conflict (Ibid:390-391 and Davidson 1993:81). For e.g. Rabaris experience these cultural clashes very often;

“For the Rabaris of Kutch confront clash with agriculturists because, throughout India grazing land is rapidly shrinking. Previously farmers and nomads enjoyed a symbiotic relationship, grazers providing the farmers with dung fertilizers in exchange of grazing privileges. There were enough rooms for everyone, the farmers tilling the arable land, the graziers feeding their herds in the ‘jungle’, as uncultivated land is called. Today newly irrigated fields clog old migration routes and small-scale farmers are often close to destitution. They still want the animal dung, but do not want the herds eating crop standing between them and financial ruin. In the jungles wolves, jackals and hyenas attack the herds and the forest are crawling with dacoits and bandits. Thus, fight between Rabaris and local folks are common and people are killed and women kidnapped. The police routinely side with the villagers from common and people are killed and women kidnapped. The police routinely side with the villagers from whom they skim illicit income and in a system rife with corruption. There is no law the Rabari contrast, no social security not beyond the bonds of family and caste.”

There are several human groups in Kutch who practice pastoralism as semi-nomadic tribes. Besides Rabaris and Bharwads, the other pastoralists consist of two dozen nomadic and semi-nomadic Muslim groups who trace their origin from Sindh and beyond (Randhawa 1998:115, N: 4). The Jaths are largest among these groups. They are nomadic community spread over Kutch. The Jaths of Kutch appear to have started their migration to this area from Sindh in sixteenth century. Their main groups are Dhanetah, Fakivani and Garasia. The word Dhanetah is probably derived from *dhan* because of the wealth of their herds. A distinctive feature in the daily adornment of Dhanetah Jath women is a large gold ring worn in the nose. The Fakivani Jaths, from *Fakir*, were the holy men of their communities, but now are mainly cattle breeders. Living in the reed huts in the coastal areas of Lakhpat, they are the followers off Salva Pir, whose tomb is on a mud island in a creek of Lakhpat (Ibid: 115). The Jaths who settled down to cultivation are called Garasias, meaning landowner. They venerate a woman saint known as Mai Bhambi and there is a monument dedicated to her at Summasar, where they gather annually. The Garasia Jaths live mainly in the Nakhtrana region of Kutch (Ibid: 118).

The other smaller semi-nomadic groups live in the Banni area, a low lying sixteen hundred square kilometers pastureland close to the salt marshes of the Great Rann of Kutch and also in the surrounding areas. Racially these Banni herders stand apart from other people of the region. They came in groups from Sindh some five hundred years ago (Khakhar 1871:167). The main clans of these Banni herders are Halipotra, Raisipotra, Mutwa, Node, Hingorjah, Bhambha, Cher, Junejah, Kaskalee, Korar, Ladai, Nunai, Pathan, Baluch, Samejah, Sumra and Tabali. The Dhanetah sections of the Jaths also live in Banni. All these groups have similar Muslim marriage customs. Even though some groups are extremely small, with a dozen families only, they still practice endogamy, which had a curious inbreeding effect on their physiogamy. This is heightened by the fact that they fancy a flattened head and after birth their babies’ heads are so moulded with pillows. They are semi-nomadic in the sense

that their weddings are local as long as pastures, including Banni, can support their animals. Towards the end of the year they are used to travel to distant areas and return just before the expected monsoon (Randhawa 1998:119-120). Some other functional groups in and around Banni have attached themselves to these pastoral groups. Like the Meghwals, who dispose of carcasses of dead animals, prepare and tan the skins for making shoes, well-buckets, saddles and harnesses. Some Meghwals have even taken to herding (Ibid: 120). The two main nomadic groups of Kutch are Bharwads and Rabaris mainly practicing pastoralist nomadism. Mainly of foreign origin they now have become residents of Kutch, from where they move around to other parts of Kutch and sometimes even go far beyond the territories of Gujarat to Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana.

Rabari: A Community History through Their Legends

In terms of original home of Rabaris several theories are propounded and their folklore also manifest that they came from parts of Rajasthan and from Baluchistan towards Kutch. The original home of Rabaris was Marwar. According to one account, the Rabaris of Kutch had their home in Jhalra Patan in the time of Allauddin Khalji. In one of his expedition of Rajputana he heard about the extraordinary beauty of a Rabari girl of that place and wanted to marry her. The Rabaris crave a short respite too consider the matter, giving their bards as hostages. They then secretly left the place (Davidson 1993:87).

The cause for wearing black among Rabari women of Kutch is that long ago when all Rabaris lived in Rajasthan, the King of Jaisalmer fell in love with a beautiful Rabari woman, but her family said:

“Even though you are our king she cannot marry outside caste”. This did not please the king, the Rabaris knew they have to flee, and sitting together in a circle they threw salt in cup of water and drank it vowing never again to taste the salt of that country. As they fled the Raja dispatched his soldiers in hot pursuit. There was a massacre and rather than succumb to the king, the young woman prayed to the Mother Earth to save her. The goddess obligingly opened and swallowed her. Ever since the rabaris who made it to Kutch have worn black as sign of mourning and the place where the woman died is sacred to them. For that historic disjuncture there are virtually no marriages between the Rabaris of Rajasthan and those of Kutch (Also referred in Randhawa, 1998:116). It is important to note that except Kutch the rest of the Rabaris in other parts of Gujarat prefer to marry from Rajasthan and they go all along Sikar or Jhunjhunu of north Rajasthan to bring brides for their marriageable boys and men (EN-5).

The Rabaris are by tradition and profession given to camel rearing, and they trace their mythic origin to an ancestor who was the caretaker of the lord Shankar himself. In the Mahabhashya` of Pat`anjali we find mention of a group of four *Janapadas* names, one of which may be the Sanskrit form of Rabari. In a commentary on Panini IV 1.20 [Kielhorn Vol. II, p. 258] Pat`anjali quotes (Agarwal 1939:149-151): *Eidvid Eidvid: / pruth parth: / Ushij Praushij: / Darad Daarad:*

Here according to Vasudeva S. three of the names can be identified with a fair degree of certainty, as of all of them lie in the same geographical horizon. *Idvid* must represent the lands of the Arbaris, the area of the Sind-Sagar doab whose people were called the Aidavidas. North

to it was situated the *Prith* janapada, corresponding the modern Pothowar (in Pakistan) comprising the Rawalpindi districts. *Usi* comes next. No modern name philologically connected with it has survived. But proceeding northwards from Rawalpindi to Pothowar we come across the narrow strip of territory between the Jhelum on the east and the Indus on the west. From the position in the list of Patanjali, this strip of land seems to have been called *Usij* and its inhabitants were designated *Ausijas*. Next to *Usij* Patanjali mentions *Darad* which is certainly no other than modern Dandistan, which comes just after Kohistan and comprises the important tract lying east of Chitral. Here the Indus is in the last stage of its westward flow. *Gilgit* is janapada is frequently mentioned in ancient literature and was considered to be the home of *Paisachi* dialect. Patanjali tells us that the inhabitants of these four Janapadas were respectively unknown as *Aidvida*, *Partha*, *Ausija* and *Darada*. Philologically *Aidavida* is intimately connected with *Arbari* and it seems very, probable that the *Rabaris* of the present days in the *Sindh-Sagar* doab represent their ancient *Aidavida* ancestors. It also appears that originally they occupied that *Thal* area which lent itself excellently to camel rearing. Migrations of ancient tribes from the Punjab towards *Rajputana* and the South are well known in Indian history and political reasons a section of the home and migrated towards *Rajputana* and ultimately found a settlement in *Kathiawar* where they have retained to this day (Ibid:151).

The *Rabaris* link their origin with Lord *Shiva* through their mythical ancestor *Sambal*, whom *Shiva* created out of his sweat along with the Camel. Another version is *Shiva* that Goddesses *Parvati* look after the camel until one day she refused to do it any longer. So, he made doll out of grass, put life into it and entrusted camel to its care- that of the first *Rabari* (Campbell 1880: 80). According to another account, *Shiva* gave *Sambal* tree to his assistant *Ganas* and *apasaras* (celestial damsels), as wives and from them he had a son and four daughters. *Shiva* then asked *Sambals*, now that he had a huge family he should leave his celestial abode and live outside. From that time onwards *Sambal* was known as *Rahbari*, i.e. he who lives outside (Enthoven 1922, 1990:116). According to yet another tradition *Rabaris* were originally *Rajputs* who instead of marrying *Rajput* women married *apasaras*. Subsequently they were called 'Rahbari, goes out of path', because they did not marry *Rajput* women (Ibid: 116).

According to Campbell, the story of their origin is that *Shiv* 'while performing religious penance, *tap* created a camel and a man to graze it. This man had four daughters who married *Rajput* of *Chohan*, *Gambhir*, *Solanki* and *Parmar* tribes. Other *Rajputs* joined them and formed a separate caste besides *Rabaris* and *Bhopas* (Goswami 1970:71). According to *Rajratna Goswami*, *rabaris* are mainly successors of *Turks*, *Mongols* and *Berbers* and are supposed to have entered territories of India in fourth century AD. They came along with *Gurjaras* in India and settled down in parts of *Marwar*, *Sind*, *Kutch* and other parts of *Gujarat*. During later stages they evolved relationship with *Hunas*, *Kushanas* and *Rajputs*. Thus, *Rabaris* often consider themselves to be *Rajputs* (Enthoven 1922:71).

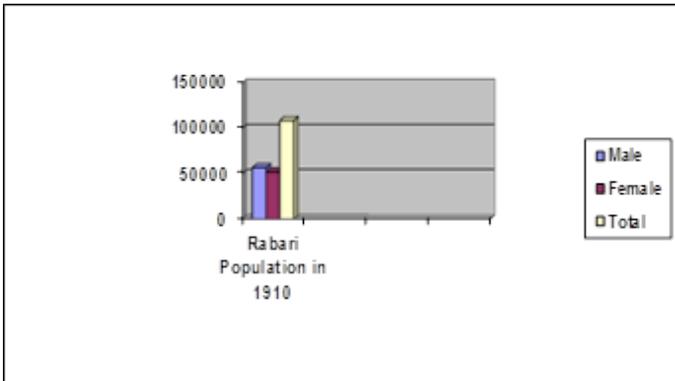
Location and Distribution

In *Gujarat* they are also known only as *Rabaris* unlike their counterparts in *Rajasthan* they are known as *Raikas*, *Devagi* or *Utwalle*. *Rabaris*

live at one place as long as grass is available for their sheep (Singh 1998:2902). The Rabaris constitute an extensive community. Geographically they are distributed over a wide area extensively from Kathiawar through Sindh and Rajputana to the Thal district of Sindh (now in Pakistan) the Sind-Sagar doab in the Punjab (now in Pakistan), where they are known as Arbaris, and where most of them, although given to their traditional profession of camel-rearing have embraced Islam. The Rabaris there are a prosperous tribe whose only wealth consists in the large herd of camel which they keep (Agarwal 1939:149). Rabaris are usually divided into four groups, identified on the basis of geographical criteria: The Rabari of Kutch, of Saurashtra, of north Gujarat, and of Rajasthan. Photographs of Flavoni cover the Rabaris of Kutch. They have subgroups. The 'Kachchhi' living in the western part of the peninsula and in areas surrounding the three city of Bhuj, the 'Dhebariya' who reside around the towns of Anjar and Mandvi, and the 'Vagadiya' present in the talukas of Vagad and Rapar (Flavoni 1992).

Rabaris continue to travel from one place to another according to the availability of grass. Generally they return to their native place for about a month during the Krishna *Janmashtami* (August-September) mainly for the marriage purpose. They call themselves Rabari Rajput (Singh 1998:2902). Rabari of Gujarat are distinct from their counterparts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana as unlike them they don't wear colourful dresses men usually wear white and women wear pure black. According to census of India, there population had been as follows:

Table-1: Population of Rabari Community in Gujarat-1910



Source: R.E. Enthoven, 1910

The Rabaris were reportedly divided into three groups: The Rabaris of Saurashtra, Rabaris of mainland Gujarat and Padhiyara Rabaris. Padhiyara Rabaris rear goats and sheep and continue to move from one place to another. They are mainly concentrated in and around Kutch area (Enthoven 1922:254, N-5). **Cultural Practices:** The Rabaris live in small hamlets of mud walls and thatched or tiled roof that are known as *vandhas* in Kutch. With the end of

winters when their pastures get dried they wander with their flocks and families towards east. Their movements towards search of pastures are known as *Dangs* (Davidson 1993:80), which extends as far as Thana in Maharashtra and to north in Banaskantha (Enthoven 1922:257).

The Rabari social organisation is characterized by a clan system: the clans are locally called *atak*. In Kutch they are divided into thirteen *atak* or subdivisions that are as follows (Ibid: 257):

1. Avalpura: Kramata,
2. Bhatti: Kalar, Gangar, Ghath and Ratti
3. Chavda: Badia, Ajkana, Kalbhana, Kataria
4. Chohan: Bostar, Rojia, Luni, Kacchhela, Bhangra, Sabdhara
5. Dabhi: Gurchhar, Ulva, Karbata, Dhagal
6. Padiar: Khambla, Pasuara
7. Parmar: Motan, Sukel, Sabdhara, Bheet, Gihad, Kola
8. Rathod: Nangasa, Shekha, Gujar, Daiya, Khekha, Vakhan
9. Sambal
10. Sisodia: Mori, Mordav, Dhumal, Meran
11. Solanki: Chelana, Khata, Dhumal, Meran
12. Tunvar: Bhima, Makvan, Travaya, Ravaya
13. Yadav: Al, Vaghel, Siwadia, Langhat, Kadva

Marriages generally happen within these clans. Girls are married from nine to sixteen and boys from twelve to twenty years of age. Sexual license before marriage is not allowed. If a girl commits sexual indiscretion with a man of her caste before marriage and becomes pregnant then slip is condoned by her marriage with the man involved. The man is also heavily fined. Among Rabaris polygamy is permitted. But polyandry is not practiced (Campbell 1880:80). Among the Rabaris all marriages take place on the same day i.e. Janmashtami. Widows generally remarry, where the best suitor is supposed to be the husband's younger brother. The rule of divorce is also common and both men and women are free to untie the marital knot. A divorced woman is allowed to marry second time, her marriage being conducted in the form of widow remarriage (Ibid: 80).

The position of women among Rabaris thus can be defined as a liberal one. Their value as a human being is reflected in heavy bride price. They own property rights and although they do not sit in *panchayats* or councils, no one doubts that they are equal partners at home. They need to cover their faces while they go out. The power distribution between both the sexes is fairly balanced (Davidson 1993:78).

Rabaris are mainly followers of Hindu religion. They generally worship '*mata*' or mother goddess. A few of them also follow Brijmargi Ramanandi and Shaiva sects. In Kutch many of them serve as priests in Mata temples. They worship the cobra snake on *Kalichaudas* or dark fourteenth in October-November. They also worship minor deities like, Pabu, *Yaakshas*, and *Kshtrepals* etc. Milk is very sacred to them, which they import to Brahmins. They do not pose much faith in sorcery and witchcraft and only a few visit places of Hindu pilgrimage (Enthoven 1922:256). For them places of veneration

are *mata* temples situated in Marwar, Sind, Baluchistan, and parts of Kutch. Among Rabaris each family has a she-camel called *mata-meri*, which is never ridden and whose milk is never given to anyone but a Hindu (Campbell 1880:257). Their priests are Audich, Sompura and Rajgor Brahmins.

Rabaris could be identified with the exquisite and fascinating attires. They by nature and their costumes exhibit the entire range of spectrum. It is the quality of their aesthetic preference which makes them unique, different and extraordinary. Their distinctive arts manifest themselves in the style of mud huts, mirror work, and exquisitely embroidered designs. Their aesthetic sense is verily displayed in the selection of colours -- red and black, violet and pink -- and floral geometric and herring-bone designs done by chain stitches. Their charming physique is profusely decked with ornaments made of silver and gold. Men also wear earrings, in particular, one called the *toliya*, semi conical and quite heavy. Of all the features which distinguish Rabaris from other communities, the most noticeable is dress with the striking chromatic contrast between stark black of women's shawls and the white of men's attire. On gala occasions, the whole costume of men, including the turban, is embroidered, although the style and background colour (white) remains unchanged. Outstanding feature of the women's dress is the long wooden black shawl originally white for the young women and either dark brown or black for the older ones. In the case of nubile or young married women, the shawl is adorned with miniscule deep red circular designs, made by 'tie-and-die' method. The widow's shawl is plain black.

Rabari villages are well kept and clean; the interior of the huts are remarkable in their spotlessness and orderliness. The harsh physical environment has kept the Rabari life simple, fulfilling only essential needs which include their aesthetic needs. But their life is always dignified. Never does one get the impression of grinding poverty, of material and moral degradation of the individual. In the Rabari cognitive system man, animal, and nature are viewed as a unity. Animals, especially camels, are inseparable inmates of the Rabari family. Forest, hill, and desert do not divide their life. On the contrary, nature unites them in their aesthetic appreciation, artistic manifestation, and ceremonial performances (Flavoni 1990:132).

For decades Rabaris have been camel herders wandering in the arid regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan in search of food and water for themselves and their animals. Far removed from the ever-fragmenting urban systems, the Rabari, once nomadic pastoralist's now largely sedentary agriculturists live in mud cow dung houses and spend their lives tending camel's goats, cows and buffaloes in perfect harmony with the surroundings. The hub of their existence consists of a series of adaptations to the parched environment threatening the very survival of life forms, and confirmation of their dependence on, and interdependence with nature and its resources through their holistic lifestyle, life cycle, life function and world view. This lifestyle manifests itself, among

others, in embroidery and embroidered motif for which Rabaris are known far and wide.

The Rabari community's socio-cultural milieu to the fore has many shades in the legend of their origin, finely interwoven with affinity and kinship, travel and migrations, rites and customs, nature and ecology, and art and artistic manifestation well provide insight into Rabari being. What emerges as significant and important is not merely the information but the underlying epic current that minimizes bend, distortion and ill-representation arising from studying a community from the outside (Mathur EN-6). The Rabari women produce finest embroidery when men folk are away tending the animals. Considerable outside influence is evident in terms of embroidery techniques, colour and material, perhaps due to earlier sea-faring and overland trading with the Middle East, Africa, Europe, China, and Central Asia and also to foreign invasions and migrations. One can see the influence of Cretan stitch of Greece, surface-interlacing stitches from Armenia and the French tambourine techniques (Randhawa 1998:135).

Looking to the class artistic hand of Kutch Rabari women in 1968 when there was drought in Kutch, an institution called *Shrujan* was established by Chandaben Shroff with the intention of supplementing the income of rural women by giving them embroidery work and supplementing the income of rural women by giving them embroidery work and marketing their products. This gradually created a tremendous demand, starting an ethnic wave in women's wear in the metropolitan cities of India. The demand has since continued and increased resulting in a resurgence of this craft (Campbell 1880:80). On the whole Rabaris are people who are carrying a distinct identity of their own since a long time in the region of Kutch and inspite of several hurdles both natural and evolved by humans around they tend to thrive their distinguished character because of which, they are described as "civil, obliging, honest, intelligent, contended and kindly (Ibid: 80)." The Rabari women are harbingers of the family as they rear and milk the cattle and then sell the products with excellent intelligence and shrewdness while managing money matters. Their artistic works in handicrafts also add to the family income. Their age-old traditions, customs, folklores, handicrafts are all virtues for Indian Society and their presence has undoubtedly enchanted the richness of Kutchi culture.

The life and culture of Rabaris present a cultural and community history. It is still suffering abeyance as many more explorations and rational studies are awaited for them. Due to limited textual evidences, the value of oral evidences gets prominence to understand and weave their past. The present study which is largely based on ethnographical and anthropological accounts that in their own right have become historical in its context, and it intends to know about the Rabari as a community in Kutch district and its past as evident in different documents and oral traditions. Much of the past of the nomadic tribes survives in folklore and memory that requires to be documented. Contrary to Rushbrook Williams' apprehensions expressed within a decade of Independence that;

“Kutch is changing so fast in response to the call of the Indian Union that in a year or two the few men who still preserve the oral tradition ‘oral history’ will vanish leaving no successors”.

Notes

1. The paper is a revised attempt after it presented an article on Nomads of Kutch: January’2001 and later discussed at Gujarat Itihaas Parishad, Bhuj, 2006
2. “Legend is a story handed down from the past which lacks accurate historical evidence but has been, and may still be popularly accepted as true, a body of such stories is known as legends”, The New Lexicon Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language, 1988 Ed.
3. Details taken through web resources e.g.: <http://Gujrat west India/Jain temples in Gujarat.Gujarat.htm>
4. T.S. Randhawa, *Kachchh: The Last Frontiers*, New Delhi, Prakash Books, 1998 “It is important to clarify that the term *Jat*” spoken with soft ‘t’, implies a very different set of people than those bearing a similar sounding of *Jat*. The former is a Muslim herdsman from Sind while the latter is a Hindu or Punjabi Sikh cultivator of North India.”
5. As per reports of R.E. Enthoven; In Kutch Rabaris are also known as *Bhopas*, *Raikas*, *Vishotars* and *Sinai*. The term ‘*Bhopa*’ is applied to them because many of them serve in the temples of the *matas* or local mother goddesses; distinguish from others by wearing red instead of white woolen turbans and a dhoti instead of trousers. *Mogha* means ‘mute’, ‘confused’ and bears resemblance to Sambal, their traditional ancestor who is said to have been prevented from exchanging words with his celestial wives on pain of separation. Rabaris are called Raikas after one of the celestial wife of Sambal. According to Bombay Gazetteer (1891) the term ‘*Vishotar*’ is applied to them because at the time of Parshuram’s prosecution, one of them saved the life of ‘vis’ twenty *Kshtriyas*. But another account states that *Vishotar*, more correctly *Vinsholtar* (twenty more than hundred) is applied to the gathering of hundred and twenty families. The headman of the *rabari* is also known as *Sinai* and hence any *Rabari* is called *Sinai*.’
6. Book Review of Francesco d’Orazi Flavoni as discussed by through weblink: Francesco d’Orazi Flavoni, *Rabari : A Pastoral Community of Kutch*, <http://kutch.com>

References

- Adam Cooper, *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. IX, New York, Macmillan, 1954
- Agarwal, Vasudeva S., ‘Identification of the Rabaris from Sanskrit Literature’, *Journal Gujarat Research Society*, Vol.III, No.3, Apr. 1939,
- Arya, R.P., *Gujarat Road Atlas*, Jodhpur, 2004
- Bhatt, S.C., *Encyclopedia of District Gazetteers of India*, Vol. VII, 1992
- Campbell, J.M., *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol. V: Kutch, Palanpur and Mahikantha*, Bombay, 1880 p. 80
- Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.8
- Enthoven, R.E., *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay* Vol., New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, First Edition-1922, RP. 1990

- Flavoni , Dr. Francesco d'Orazi , *Through A Photographer's Eye – Rabari, A Pastoral Community Of Kutch*, 7th Sep. 1992 - 13th Sep. 1992 Committee Room, India International Centre, New Delhi, 1992
- Goswami, Rajratna, *Gujarat nu Gaurav*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1970
- Jani, S.V., *Saurashtra no Itihaas* (1807-1948), Ahmedabad, Darshak Itihaas Nidhi, 2003
- Khakhar, Dalpatram Pranjivan, 'Castes and Tribes in Kachchh', *The Indian Antiquary*, June'1876
- Mathur, Nita, Book Review of Francesco of Francesco d'Orazi Flavoni, *Rabari : A Pastoral Community of Kutch*, <http://kutch.com>
- Patel, G.D. (ed.), Gujarat state Gazetteer: Kutch District, Ahmedabad, 1971
- Rajgore, Shiv Prasad, 'Kutch', *Gujarat Sarva Sangraha: Gujarati Vishwakosh*, Ahmadabad, Year Not Mentioned.
- Randhawa, T.S., *Kachchh: The Last Frontiers*, New Delhi, Prakash Books, 1998
- Robyn Davidson, 'Wandering with India's Rabaris', *National Geographic*, Sept. 1993
- Rushbrook, L.F. William, *The Black Hills: Kutch in History and Legend; A Study in Local Loyalties*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985
- Singh, K.S., *Indian Communities: N-Z*, New Delhi: OUP, 1998.

[The final revised version of this paper was received on 10 November 2014]