



The Vahivancas of Barots As Sources of History: a Case Study of Vahivancas of Parajiya Soni Community

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KEYWORDS:

It is common believed that before the dawn of the modern age India did not possess any historiography of any value and the study of Indian history were introduced by the Europeans. This impression seems to be inappropriate because our tradition of historiography is totally different from the modern concept of History which originated in Europe. As far as Historical sources are concerned we have abundant material in the form of the Puarans and other sect's scriptures and other indigenous sources. Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang noticed that each province in India had its own official for maintaining written records of good and evil events, calamities and fortunate occurrence. We have also ancient tradition keeping records of cast genealogy. Some of the Puranas also kept genealogy like "Harivasham Purana" has kept the genealogical records of Suryavans and Chandravans¹. During latter time some cast Puranas also emerged. The existence of a cast of genealogists known as Bhats and Charans were over the whole of India.. A peep in to one such a social practice will establish that we have been efficiently modern in restoring history much before the colonial rule.

After the 1970's there was awakening regarding the keeping the genealogical record in the whole world. During 1976 in America, a novel named as a "Roots: The Saga of an American Family" written by Alex Haley created huge uproar in American society². It tells the story of Kunta Kinte, an 18th-century African, captured as an adolescent and sold into slavery in the United States, and follows his life and the lives of his alleged descendants in the U.S. down to Haley. The release of the novel, combined with its hugely popular television adaptation, Roots (1977), led to a cultural sensation in the United States. The novel spent weeks on The New York Times Best Seller List, including 22 weeks in that list's top spot. After that so many intuitions were established to keep genealogical records and to create awareness on this subject. This paper sketches the important of Vahivance in writing of history. With the help of Vahivance records of Parajiya Soni this paper sketch the impo-
 rance importance of this practice in to the Historical Research.

MEANING OF "VAHIVANCA"

The term "Vahivanca" derived from the "Vahi". According to Bhagwatgo-mandal¹ (Gujarati Lexicon) the term Vahi has lot of meaning but mainly it is used as the book of account or book for the record of Genealogy. This book is two to three feet long, and six to twelve inches broad and folded in the middle. The man whose occupation was to maintain such a book of Genealogy came to be known as a Vahivanca. Although it is said that such records were preserved on palm leaves, there are no evidences available as on date no vahivanca books are found written in Sanskrit or Prakrit. The oldest one is dated Vikram Samvat 1776 (A.D. 1740). Some Barots have Vahi which is more than 500 years old but it has not been found yet. It is written in Devanagari Script, and the language is old Gujarati. One of the records takes us back to A.D. 1234 - although the book in which the genealogy is found is of a later date. It is the genealogy of Rathod Rajputs from Village- Radhvanaj, Taluka -Matar, District -Kheda. The genealogy does not seem to be dititious because it can be corroborated by an epigraph. The epigraph was found in the small shrine on the outskirts of the village. The epigraph is also broken, but the following words can be read clearly: Sri Samvat 1290, Raja Jagdev. (Samvat 1290= A.D. 1234)². There was also dispute regarding the area which this practice is following. In 1957 Prof. A.M. Shah has worked on this social practice, he mentioned that this practice prevailing in Central Gujarat, North Gujarat and Saurashtra, and also described this system as non- Sanskritise tradition and not prevailing in higher castes of Gujarat³, but Prof. Balvant Jani expert in the subject have different view he was in favor that this system all over the Gujarat and majority community except some in Lohana anad Nagar commu-nity⁴.

He classified five communities in the Gujarat which engage with this work.

1. Barot or bhat- the Barot is one of the eighteen bardic castes in Gujarat mention in the Bombay gazetteer. During the monarchy, Hindu raja and chieftain used to have a Barot in their court who attended them to public occasions and ceremonies, he loudly sounded the the Rajas praise and proclaimed his mainly high surroundings title. They also used to cheer the troops with their songs and to compose versus defaming the enemies, they also composed the poem on love and death, there also worked as story teller. Mainly the Bhat and Barot engaged with this activity. Majority of cast have Barot or Bhat as there genealogical recorders. Very few casts have other people for genealogical records rather than Bhat and Charans. The other name of this community was Bahmbhatt and Rao, According to Puranic source it emerged from Partilom marriage between Brahmin and Kshatriya. Barot mainly keeps records all the community while Rao mainly kept records of state poet. Within this community some were called as Ranimnaga Barot who kept records of queen of Kshatriya.
2. Raval - community divided in the two part one was Vahivancha Raval while other was Dakiya Raval. This community only kept records only of Charan. This community mainly Brahmin community. According to mythological story, during time of rule of Lakha Fulani in Kutch one of the Brahmin has change the girl in royal marriage , that's why he was outcasted, latter on one of the Charan teach him the techniques of record. The descendants of this Brahmin were became Ravals and kept records of Charan.
3. Charan - Charans mainly kept records of Ksatriyas, these records mainly in the poetry form. Although both Barots and Charans follow the same occupation but they follow two different traditions in their poetry, Charans compose their poetry in dialect known as Dingal, a poetic dialect of Western Rajsthan while Barot compose in Braj Bhasa. Both of this community was called as Devi Putra. They considered as sacred because both of this community practiced Tragu (suicide) to protect Dharm(truth). There was a wider spared belief that the shredding of blood of Bhat and Charan, brought ruin on the person responsible for it.
4. Mir - There mainly Hindu Barot latter on became Muslim and kept the genealogical records of Bharvad community. In Saurshtra they also have Halai Khatik records. Mirs were also known for their poetry and art of singing in Saurshtra⁵.
5. Thirthgor- Thirth Gor mainly living in the religious places like Vad-nagar, Drawka, Somnath and other religious places, they kept records of those who visited pilgrim centre. One of shortcoming of those records that they kept records only records of those of come to pilgrims.

PROCESS OF RECORDING

The Vahivancas' Genealogical records were built up through a process of periodical recording. The process would begin when a Vahivanca decides to accept a lineage group in a village as his patron. He would record the Genealogy of the lineage by visiting the patron's village and according to what is known by the members of the lineage. The older informants would be more useful than the young⁶. The Vahivanca would enter as many of the following details as available, beginning from the first known ancestor to the present generation: 1) the name of the man, his wife, father, clan, lineage and village. 2) In case a man has two wives, the record mentions who is the senior, and who the junior. Also, the offspring with each respective partner would be distinctly mentioned in the chronological order 3) the names of sons and daughters in chronological order. 4) All the above details would be mentioned

for married sons. 5) For married daughters, the name of the respective husband and of the husband's father, clan, lineage, village as well as the date of his visit would be mentioned. At the time of recording, all the members of the family as well as few respected people of the village would need to be present. That would make the records of the Vahivancas have a Documentary value. Once the recording is accomplished, the head of each family in the lineage gifts in cash and kind to the Vahivanca, which would also find mention against the name of the patron in the book with date. Afterwards, the Vahivanca would periodically visit the members of the lineage, and would each time record the births and/or marriages that may have taken place during the period between two visits⁷.

FEATURES OF VAHIVANCE

After the death of a Vahivanca, his sons would inherit his books and would follow their father's procedure. A Vahivanca's book, thus, becomes a record of genealogy of many generations. When a Vahivanca's son inherits books from his father, he also inherits a particular number of patrons from him. The number of books, thus, would progressively increase since the onset of the occupation of Vahivancas, and this process is still going on. Each Vahivanca would, in his possession, have books commenced at different dates. If the members of the lineage remember facts about the immigration of their ancestors into the village, the Vahivanca would record these details as well. If, after the commencement of recording in a book by a Vahivanca, a member of the lineage leaves his original village and settles elsewhere, the Vahivanca would go to the member's new residence for further periodical recording. The Vahivanca would also record this change in the book. For instance, the Patanwadiya Kolis of central Gujarat are served by Vahivancas of North Gujarat, because of the former's migration from that region. Barots would be extremely secretive about their books, and would be suspicious of people who want to know about their possessions or records⁸. Barots would provide valuable information recorded in their books only to their patrons. They had also evolved a secret language called "Parsi" which was also used, sometimes, by Sonis in the medieval time⁹. The reason being that sonis would not want to reveal their business to other people. The Vahivanca makes genealogical chart in the same way as anthropologists do. The information from Vahivanca is divided in two parts: The mythical part may be divided into two subdivisions: For the first subdivision, the Vahivanca draws material mainly from the Hindu Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and from the Puranas. In this part are to be found accounts of the origin of the universe, of the four varnas, and of the caste, clan, and gotra of the lineage in question? The Vahivanca tries to show that the structural groups within the caste have their origin in the epics and Puranas. The second subdivision of the mythical part of the genealogy maybe called mythic history. In this part, the Vahivanca tries to boost the status of his patrons by associating the latter fictitiously with some historical figures and events.

PARAJIYA SONI

Parajiya Soni's have been goldsmiths cast in Gujarat since last 800 years and they have made Saurashtra & Kutch as their homeland. His genealogical record (Vahivance) is still intact by the Barots. Recently one descendent of this Barot Shri Sagarkumar Barot has written 17 books on the basis of this Vahivance. This Vahivance kept history of this community of 1500 hundred years. The Vahivance records show the first reference to the word Parajiya Soni (Gold Smith of Parajiya Caste) is in the year 145 AD. This is believed to be the time when Shree Hinglaj Mataji blessed the Parajiya Kshatriya's with the art and skill of the Suvarnkar (goldsmith)¹⁰.

Records stated that they belonged the Kshatriyas and were ruling the Parjav region of the Indus valley. Latter division land amongst descendants forced them to change the profession. The elders keeping their faith in Shree Jagdama Mataji advised the community to go on a pilgrimage to the Temple of Shree Hinglaj Mataji (now in Baluchistan in Pakistan) on the top of the Kohla hill.¹¹ The legend has it that the community on reaching their prayed to the Mataji for her blessings. Mataji blessed the community with the art and skill to practice the profession of Goldsmith. Shree Hinglaj Mataji gave them three Tools for creating gold ornaments namely. Thus Hukamsinh Parmar became to be known as the first gold smith of Songadha Parajiya Kshatriya Samaj. He handed over this legacy to the younger generation along with the guiding values and principles of Mataj. Gradually the rest of the Kshatriyas began joining the profession and thus the Parajiya Soni Samaj came into existence. The idealism, Virtuosity & Sincerity of Shree Hukamsinh Parmar became a way of life¹².

The Vahivance records also show their migration towards Gujarat in Year 1152 of Vikram Savant in the Hindu calendar or near the end of the 10th century AD. In Year 1152 of Vikram Savant in the Hindu calendar or near the end of the 10th century AD. Songadha region faced a terrible famine & drought infamously known as the Valvaliya famine this famine forced the Parajiya Kshatriya's to resettle them elsewhere. The leading Parajiya's of that time were... Shree Narvir Nandaji Chavda, Shree Gangaji Chouhan, Shree Damaji Barad, Shree Vir Dada Jasraj Barad. They led the community to the kingdom of Siddhraj Jaisinh Dev in the princely state of Siddhpur Pattan (Gujarat). The goldsmith's of the state were of Gurjar caste, they did not like to share their profession with the Parajiya's. Therefore they attacked the parajiya's but lost the battle miserably. The Barot of Parajiya's "Shree Kalyan Rao" mediated between the warring parties and advised them to make an appeal to the King for a just solution. One the mythological story from Vahivance records stated that after watching divine blessing on Parajiya by Hinglaj ma Siddhraj Jaisinh as a token of appreciation he gave the Parajiya's the right to rule the kingdom of Siddhpur Pattan for a period of three and half days. Shree Nandaji Chavda became the king of Gujarat and Shree Gangaji Chauhan become his prime minister for a period of three and half days. On the Third day of ruling Shree Nandaji Chavda honored the King Siddhraj and offered him his most beloved Black Stallion in gift and returned the kingdom. As a remembrance of this event the King Siddhraj proclaimed that henceforth the descendants of Shree Nandaji Chavda shall be known as the Patels (elders) of Parajiya Soni Samaj. Shree Gangaji Chavda and his descendants were given the degree of Patlaiyee (Lordship of particular territories) their descendants ,i.e., the Patt's , Dhorda's, Bhindi's and the Lodhiya's are also known as Patels. Since then the Parajiya's started practicing their craft of goldsmith along with the Gurjar Soni's. They were also accepted as warriors, craftsmen, advisors, wise-men, faithful, loyal and sincere people by the society.¹³ In the year 1101 AD that is in the sixth year of coming into Siddhpur Pattan some of the Parajiya's decided to resettle themselves in the Sorath / Khatiyawar area of the Gujarat. But due to enmity between the two kings of that time they were not permitted to cross the border. But the persistent and clever Parajiya's managed to achieve what they set out to do and settled themselves in Kathiyawar. Some of the Parajiya's settled themselves in Gharana village and hence came to be also known as Gharana Soni's or Girnara Soni's. Their kept their memory of their origin alive and kept the purity of their blood by avoiding inter caste marriages and kept following their traditions and rituals. Thus they ended up being Independent communities and came to be known as Girnara Parajiya Soni.

After the death of King Siddhraj the prince Paadraj took over the rule. The Jains were favored by the new King therefore the Jains gradually became to be more influential and powerful. These lead to loss of mistrust and the parajiya's settled their decided to migrate to Kutch area of Gujarat. At that time the people of the Kutch region were being harassed by dacoits. The brave Parajiya's solved the problem with their might and acumen and resettled themselves as Parajiya Soni's and developed their business. The Parajiya's revived the ancient culture of these villages and set up three more villages viz. Parjav, Devaiya and Happa In Naliya Taluka of today's Gujarat The Kshatriya's of Songadha came to be known as Parajiya Sonis. When they settled in other regions they came to be known by distinctive names viz. Parajiya Pattni Soni, Garana Soni, Kutchi Soni & Sindhi Parajiya Soni. Today there are approximately 51 sub - castes of the above mentioned first three Soni Castes. The total population of Parajiya Soni's is estimated to be around 1,30,000 settled all over the world Today this art of creating exquisite Gold Jewellery has taken the Parajiya Soni community all over the world; where they have been successful in establishing themselves in business environments totally alien to them. They also have contributed significantly towards the socio-economic development of these countries

CONCLUSION –

During the 19th century many Historian used these source for the construction and writing of the history of event. During last several years these sources remain still unexplored. These sources are reliable and authentic. Vahivancas would provide introduction about his cast, origin of cast, documentation of sale of land and house, these paper encourage scholars to explore these sources. Thought the records of Parajiya Soni peep in to the history of Gujarat and their migratory pattern. The records of these communities intact since last 1500 years. These records also peep in to the social condition of the Gujarat. It also shows the various group emerge within the Parajiya Soni Samaj.

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