



SORATHI BAHĀRVATIYĀS: MEGHĀNI'S FOLK TALES

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The Author: Jhaverchand Meghāni (1896-1947)

By means of the poem “Lāgyo Kasumbee- no rang” Meghāni deals with the ceaseless and everlasting flow, the true, sublime and ecstatic colour spread all around the nature, in human existence expanding thoroughly in the Universe. He indicates the dignified and lofty manifestation of true human spirit, soaked in this nectar like flow and absorbed in the abundance of the deep red colour symbolized as ‘kasumbee’. This symbol becomes really the mark of Meghāni’s diligent, persevering and devoted life and extraordinary works, particularly related to folklore.

His works, Particularly on Folklore:

Jhaverchand Meghāni was really a prolific writer as he has contributed in both prose and verse in formal as well as folk literature touching almost every type of literature. He recovered songs, stories, ballads, odes, fables, legends, elegies, fairy tales, etc. from the jaws of time and jotted down everything from whatever source he had. After getting varied materials and making comparative studies, he scrutinized and edited the great heritage. The extra-ordinary thing about his writing is that it reflects every important aspect of human spirit and culture. But seeing the varied and distinguished works of Meghāni it becomes very difficult for the critic of today to classify his works on folklore. In his relatively brief literary career of less than three decades he produced approximately 90 volumes of ‘biographies’ of Bahārvatiyās (outlaws), short stories, plays, novels, folk songs, ballads and poetry in general; original; translated or transcreated apart from the critiques immensely helpful for further research in the field of folk literature. As the fruit of his lifelong perseverance we get the works of pure folkloric nature in 16 volumes of tales and 10 of songs and some miscellaneous works.

He was in the 51st year when he died on the 9th March, 1947. About a hundred
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books during the quarter century of diligence, lifelong endeavour of exploration, compilation and creativity! And see his humbleness, true passionate love and faith to folk literature in the words in his letter to the celebrated Gujarāti poet Umāshankar Joshi:

“Let my other writing be surely erased (and what if certainly erased!), I’ll stand only with the name of folk literature alone. I will feel even the derogatoriness involved in it as my own.”¹

SORATHI BAHĀRVATIYĀS AND THE TEXT *SORATHI BAHĀRVATIYĀ PART-2*

‘Sorath’ is actually the region covered in old Junāgadh state and Sorathi means of Sorath, but here the word ‘Sorathi’ in the title of this book and other works of Meghāni denotes, as in the case of the term Kāthiyāwād, the whole of Saurāshtra region of Gujarāt, the western peninsula of India. Secondly ‘Sorathi’ is more suitable term than the ‘Saurāshtri’. Some miscellaneous incidents and tales of Bahārvatiyās are also included in Meghāni’s five volumes of *Saurāshtra-ni Rasdhār*, which are considered as the entrance door of his folk literature. After the fifth volume of *Rasdhār* there appeared the three wonderful and mesmerizing volumes of *Sorathi Bahārvatiyā* (1927-1929) with the style and narrative more vigorous and ripened.

Some English officials, historians and writers such as C.A.Kincaid, Capt. Bell, Justice Bimon, Aston wolf, etc. have given the attribute ‘outlaw’ to the Bahārvatiyās. In his prologue to *Sorathi Bahārvatiyā part 3* Meghāni writes under the title “Bahārvatān-ni Mimānsā” (Examination of Bahārvatān):

“Because of his disputes with the royal authority, if any man takes the way outside the state disregarding that state he is called Bahārvatiyo. In English language its synonym is ‘Outlaw’: means the one who goes out of the area of law and statute, refusing to obey the law and as a result remains deprived of the protection of the law too.”²

Meghani's use of the letter ‘Vā’ in the bracket for ‘Va’ is strange here. Because the two terms ‘Vat’ (dignity, self respect) and ‘Vāt’ (way, road) are utterly different sharing nothing in common. Even the *Modern Gujarāti- English Dictionary* adopts both ways – that of English interpretation and somewhat of domestic; according to it ‘Bahārvatiyā’ is one who withdraws

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himself outside the limits of a state, with a view to harras and molest it by frequent raids, and so compel it to come to terms with him; an avenger and the meaning of 'Bahār' (Bār) 'vatun': 1 Outlawry, 2 Revenge; vengeance. The term 'Bahār' clearly means out, but we are not to complicate the word 'Vat' by referring to the Sanskrit origin 'Vrut' or 'Vart' (set about) which is already suggested by the word 'Bahār', 'vat' simply deals with the sense of dignity, keeping honour- as it is also used as suffix in many words, e.g. Kshatriyavat (the honour or dignity as a Kshatriya), Rājvat (Royal credit), etc.

Actually the term 'Bahārvatiyā' is peculiar and unique in itself involving the resolute mission with hard and fast observances of righteous conduct and austere regulations. It should not always mean 'outlaw'. Infact the terms 'outlaw' and 'Bahārvatiyā' are very different involving two hugely different cultural phenomena and genuinely distinctive meanings. In Europe there remained only one sovereignty. The common people as well as the landholders, dukes all were bound to obey one whole Government, while in our country there were many big states as well as small ones, even with ten villages or less, all with their independent administrations. Therefore, even the landholder or duke of Huntingdom (Robinhood) gets outlawed and deprived of the protection by the one whole power when he violates the so called or defined rules. But in case of Jogidās Khumān and the king of Bhāvnagar it is a different issue – one is the ruler of only 84 villages of Sāvarkundalā very small but independent domain and the other having the kingdom of 1800 villages. So there is no question of forcing one out of the protection of the state when he actually does not belong to the state. Here the term 'Bahār' means out of his own home not the state. When the mighty kings, sometimes with the help of shrewd Britishers, captured the small domestic states, the lords of that states had to leave the family and the home for revolting against the capturer. They chose to keep honour either by doing (getting justice having the domain back) or dying. Yes, there were some Bahārvatiyās who were not actually the rulers but because of the tyranny and injustice of the law they themselves moved out to protest and not that they were thrown out by the authority. It was not perhaps customery in our culture. In that case too the term suggests the preference of being outsiders and also the rebellion of the valiant man for self respect, dignity and protection of virutes against the selfish law and oppression of power. They became outsiders of the enemy's state for some positive cause

and resolved to keep honour till the end of life either by getting justice or by facing death. The 'outlawry' is self made rather than enforced by the authority. In case of some Bahārvatiyās, particularly all the Bahārvatiyās described in part-2, there is no question of outlawry as they themselves had been the rulers of their respective states before they were snatched. That is why the researcher has kept the title *Sorathi Bahārvatiyā Part-2*, instead of *Sorathi Outlaws Part-2*.

The term also involves some striking principles, penances and human values such as protection of women, children, innocent, etc. Considering the atmosphere of Bahārvatiyā eccentric Meghāni states some contradictory phenomena mingled in it. He writes:

“The various atmospheres get woven around different entities –
Power and luxury around the king, pure and pious tranquility of austere land
around the 'Rushi' (sage) erudition, full of interest around the learned;
but around the Bahārvatiyā of course royalness with begardliness,
mercy with cruelty, generosity with the feature of looting,
gaiety with adversities and fearless dignity with treachery and deceit,
such dualities are stuck.”³

Many times the public shows more interest in the small incidents of the Bahārvatiyā's brave exploits than great heroism of some conquerer of the world, they enjoy, jubilantly, laughing over the incidents of his gay nature and feel pain hearing his cruel acts as if some beloved kinsman has committed errors, according to Meghāni. In his prologue Meghāni also throws light on the outlaws of foreign lands – Robinhood who was regarded as the universal darling of common people. He also describes the three cronies' very famous archers in the North England, William of Cloudelee, Clym of Clough and Adam Bell whose motto of life was heroism and merriment and so they were regarded 'merry outlaws'. He also depicts the unforgettable picture of brave Sangrāmsinh, the outlaw of Kāshee, narrated in the autobiography of Satyavir Shradhdhānandji.

The question of the type and nature of the literary form remains always controversial as discussed earlier. According to 'Upmanyu' who regards folktale as the unflinching art of folklife in his article "Folktale and Meghāni" – As Meghāni's field work increased he used to wonder,

hear the tale, note in short and remember, but while writing he gave the shape which attracts general interest. He writes:

“Meghāni’s folktale is not the simple straightforward photograph of the original (source). It is the artistic picture with enimated features. It moves between ‘Talk’ and ‘Tale’. It gives life to the details. He was interested not merely in the incidents, but more in the sublimity of the character and sensitivity, in the values of folklife... the aim is taste, interest and sentiment.”⁴

According to him Gream and Anderson have also made the folk tales interesting this way. He divides Meghāni’s folktales in five categories:

ð Fairy Tales: *Doshimā-ni Vāto, Dādājee-ni Vāto, Rang chhe Bārot*

ð Rasadhārs: Chārani style and yet remained between Kathā (tale) and navalikā (short story) with more literary form, story form

ð Vrata kathāo: The distinctive tales of our Gujarāt only. If the editing of folk songs has to be put among the best works of the whole of India, the work of ‘Kankāvati’

is to be regarded of International standard. Myths (Purakathās) live in rare societies today, they are living here still. The tales of saints and national heroes also move on with legend and evidences but they are biographies.

ð The tales of Bahārvatiyās: They seem biographical in a sense, seem history-based, and yet give the taste of folk tale that moves with the particles of both legend and history. It is ‘oral History’. When oral history would be considered at our place, the first name which has to be given in India would be of Meghāni (The Columbia University started the consideration of this subject, in 1948, the year after Meghāni’s death).

Pushkar Chandarvārkar says, “The stories of Sorathi Bahārvatiyās, Part 1, 2, 3 seem to be mini-novel like. These stories may be identified by the name ‘Sagas of Outlaws’ [Tales of Bahārvatiyās’ intrepidity]. But the incidents or events are not available to the extent of the characters of sagas in the tales. Meghāni himself writes... ‘There is no development of characters in all the talks, as merely an event or two of the life of the characters are at hand, the remaining strung in the darkness. He says, “The editor has understood the limits of these tales and called them Jivankathāo (Biographies.)”

According to Chandarvārkar, in folk literature the literary form of biography has been mentioned nowhere in the vast criticism of west. But an eastern thinker of folk literature has written that the literary forms of folk literature may be of course different to the opinions of different thinkers. So there is no point of disagreement in Meghāni's consideration of the literary form of biography. He further adds that the problem of where to put his three volumes of *Sorathi Bahārvatiyā* gets solved because of his addition of this form of tale. He says,

“The literature of folk tales in Ireland is prosperous with the Bahārvatiyas' literature. The popular term for this literature there is ‘Sagas of Outlaws’ [The historical heroic story/ family story of Bahārvatiyās.] Like in Saga the increase in the length is possible. The tales of Jogidās Khumān and Jodhā Mānek are lengthy.”⁵

Hasu Yāgnik also gets to the same way when he writes:

“The tales of Rasadhār, the biographies of Bahārvatiyās and saints are not Lok- Kathās (folk tales). Meghāni himself would have rarely used the term ‘Lok Kathā’ for these tales. In the introduction of his collections he has recognized these works as only ‘kathā’ (tale).”⁶

Regarding them as ‘legends’ or ‘anecdotes’ he further remarks that when the story of a Bahārvatiyā's valour-character-dignity gets perfected in the form of folk songs, gets resulted in Rāsadā it is said to be transformed in folk tale. As discussed in the prologue by Meghāni, most of the Rāsadā compositions about Bahārvatiyās are made by the professionals like Bhartuhari-tooree- Nāthbāvā and he noted that such Chārani extallation types got ceased after becoming buds only. He has also expressed the probability of some Rāsadā compositions of Bahārvatiyās by the womenfolk of the village. It attracts contemplation but no reason can be perceived for the social women composing the Rāsadās of Bahārvatiyās according to him. This statement by this authority on Meghāni is also thought-provoking. Why shouldn't the women folk compose the Rāsadās of Bahārvatiyās if they can compose other folksongs? Secondly it is very clear from the prologue and other tales that the common people had special feeling and attachment to Bahārvatiyās. The women also belonged to the same society. Moreover the hero- worship is

almost the dominant feature of not only Saurāshtra but of the whole civilization of our nation. There are many Rāsadās about the heroic persons, e.g. Jogidās Khumān, Rām Vālā, being sung even today in the villages. If it is the case, would you go on to regard them folktales?

Another debated issue about these tales apart from their being historic, biographic, legends or anecdotes is the dispute of their being folktales or Chārani tales. Regarding all the tales of saints and Bahārvatiyās historic and yet prescribing to assess whether all the incidents of these stories are historical or not, Narottam Palān writes,

“The prologue of Bahārvatiyās has really become Meghāni’s first attempt of the criticism of folk literature! Regarding the tales of Bahārvatiyās, Meghāni has mostly got the Chāran- told stories, these tales were and they are of course popular among lay men. Meghāni only wrote them and while writing he made some changes also. Particularly he has tried to delute the element of miracles as much as possible in the tales. Infact, today it seems that they should have been kept as they were.”⁷

The words to be noted here are – mostly Chārani tales, Meghāni made some changes, diluted the element of miracles which should have been preserved. Now, if they were and they are historic and popular among common folk why shouldn’t they be regarded folk tales? The scholar of Chārani lore and Chāran himself Ratudān Rohadiyā considers all the Rasadhār stories except one or two to be of Chārani literature. To him they cannot be included in Lok-Kathā, as their creators are Chāran-Bārot. He further writes,

“All the tales of Bahārvatiyās can be included in Chārani literature without even least hesitation. The Chāran has always put the eye- witnessed heroism to prevail among the common folk narrating by his word this way. Their motive is of inspiring the heroes of Kshātra (Kshatriya) society and commonfolk by setting an ideal before them. The Duhās and Chārani poems and the style of talking occurring in these tales give the proof of their being Chārani literature,

but on the other hand Meghāni has done some sprinkling of folk literature also by putting the Rāsadā at places, nevertheless barring the exceptions of the Rāsadā here and there, all is to be regarded as unmixed Chārani literature.”⁸

Here too, arises the question of Rāsadā, the vital factor of folk. Rohadiyā also says that the tales got prevailed among the folk. Then why shouldn't it be the lore of the folk even if it is created by Chāran? The remarks and observations of the scholars provoke debate on one hand but on the other they also allure us to think of Meghāni's extra-ordinary endeavour of editing and creating. No doubt, the tales are the products of Chārani literature, but they have been extremely popular among the folk. Secondly they were originally 'Vāngmāyā' (in oral tradition). It becomes really a difficult task, to relate the thing of 'mouth-to-ear' to 'eye' only. Even if there are some dangers of losing the naturalness of 'Vāngmāyā' and elegance of the original form; the effort is praiseworthy as it removed the still more dangerous possibility of losing them at all in the course of time; extra ordinary as it has remained as close as the elegance of the oral form. Hence, whether we call the tales biographies, history tales, legends, anecdotes, memorates or folk tales, whether they are regarded as pure Chārani tales or not, the form deserves no consideration, as the famous author and contemporary of Meghāni, Rāmnārāyan Pāthak, said as long as the substance is preserved. The disputes actually add to the extraordinariness of Meghāni's editing work as he has succeeded to attract the readers for about a century by editing the difficult to write 'Vāngmaya' of this pure historic Chārani lore, popular for years among common folk proving immense socio-cultural significance as he preserved the great treasure of our ancient heritage that is otherwise impossible a task to write as well as preserve.

One more important factor about Meghāni's editing is – he puts the original Chārani Duhā's as they are, as they are the soul and source of the tales. In Darbār Punjāvālā's words,

“Meghānibhāi has kept the poems of 'Dingal' and 'Pingal' as they were (without any change) in the folk-tales. Somewhere he himself has put the ancient poems like Duhās, Chhand, Savaiyā or Chhappā befitting the flow of the tale. By doing thus he has preserved the traditional form of Lok-Kathā. Secondly he has also proved the statement –

‘The Dingal, Pingal of folk literature is Vangmāya’⁹

According to Punjāvālā Sāheb, the classical as well as scientific form has been presented by Meghāni to whatever extent possible in the construction of the tales. The right order for the development – 1 Kathāvastu (Subject - matter), 2 Charitra- chitran (charactersketch), 3 Rachanā (construction), 4 Ulzan (Problem), 5 Charam Seemā (Climax), 6 Sandeh-janya Kautuhal (Curiosity produced of doubt) and 7 Samāpan (conclusion) all these phases have been preserved by Meghāni. The story of Hothal Padamani is its perfect example, but in the Jogidās Khumān like stories, where the different historical incidents are to be collected and written Meghāni has not followed this classical method purposefully according to him, as the message of values and culture is to be reached upto people vigorously. To get the values and culture reached together with interest is and it was the chief aim in Meghāni’s mind, according to him.

Here the aspect as important as form and perhaps more is the substance – the most significant one which must be considered. Meghāni himself says about his ceaseless effort of making this historic tales interesting and immortal by procuring and reconstructing the materials he had obtained –

“When you would be reading that tale of Jogidās Khumān which has been put in succession, you might be feeling that, it would have been dictated to the point by a single man! But for weaving (constructing) the whole cloth (plot) of the tale I had to obtain the threads from many a places,... and stitch and stretch... for weaving the whole cloth of the tale. After hearing numerous incidents from many a man, the whole calevar (body) was to be built by adjusting those threads (bones): And sprinkling the cavityful of the current of sentiment on it I animated life in it.”¹⁰

Some critics like Prabhudās Thakkar criticize Meghāni’s works severely on thematic as well as historical ground³¹. Sometimes it seems that some people criticize for the sake of criticizing only, or for being different from others. Former V.C. of Bhāvnagar University Vidyut Joshi, while talking on the subject of sociology and literature raises a question that why the Bahārvatiyās are not produced today? Actually the circumstances produced them. Prabhudās

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Thakkar says that Meghāni has broken the principle of ‘forgiveness’ as no sense of forgiveness prevails in the tales of Bahārvatiyās as they loot and kill people. He goes one step further raising the fear towards the fact of the youth getting influenced reading the stories – ‘are we to make them Bahārvatiyās?’ But these wise men, if they are really concerned about society, morality and historicity, should also observe the law and order prevailing at the time. Actually the so called great states, the big kings, Gāekwād, Bhānagar, etc. had gone immensely greedy for power and wealth and the Britishers taking their side worsened the situation. They all together went on to fleece the people in general to the bone as Britishers wished to suck the wealth to the extreme point and it was possible to get through these big authorities. While most of the overlords possessing smaller states, especially in Suarāshtra, were proud enough not to stoop before the foreign authority, the big states succumbed to them, saluted them and became dependant on their army. Therefore their lust for the expansion of their kingdoms was encouraged by the Britishers. That is what Colonel Walker’s shrewd treatise (1807) perhaps meant. So the big states captured the small states of these brave heroes and started to exploit all around. They supported the big traders, who gave them bribe to exploit the innocent, poor and middle class people who were otherwise very happy under the authority of their small rulers as they could easily approach them and find solutions of their problems because of the generosity of the overlords. While under the great authority there was nobody to hear their complains. More cruelty was almost exercised by the tyrant forces of those kings and Britishers, so much so that even the women and children were not safe. They gave orders to their soldiers, the Baloches of Gāekwād (at Okhāmandal) and the Sandhis of Bhāvnagar to exploit people. They not only looted people of their riches but of their honour too. They harrassed poor and even raped women in day light. The incidents in the story of Jodhā Mānek are full of this bare reality. The Bahārvatiyās were almost forced to revolt. Then why shouldn’t these scholars observe the morality, the social welfare under these big powers? Bahārvatiyās were actually the controllers of this corrupt and disgraceful act. That is why the authorities defamed them calling robbers and no common people had the courage to defend it. The irony is we are calling them robbers even imitating without recognizing the real scenario.

Yes, they looted the traders, but it was to prevent their exploitation over poor. What else would be the reason of burning their account books? They prevented the farmers of their own

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land from cultivating the land as they didn't want even a single seed of grain to reach these tyrants. The same practice was done by the great hero of our country Mahārānā Pratāp when Akbar captured his state. Shivājee of course looted Surat seven times, as Meghāni says to establish and feed his forces against the Mohmedan kings. Then why should these Bahārvatiyās be blamed too much, and not the original oppressors? No righteous Bahārvatiyā had ever used the wealth secured by the loot for his own. On one hand they looted, on the other they distributed it among the poor and needy people.

And even if you consider them looters and cruel men, they were not the crevices of that literature or the author as they did not actually produce them. On one hand you expect historicity and on the other you have the fear of immoral influence because of the real picture! And as Meghāni says folk literature has one sublime merit: natural truthfulness: Good or bad whatever happened, caused or thought, all these descending in word keep on flowing in new generations subsequently.

According to his contemporary author Rāmnārāyan Pāthak such literature is to be observed with mixed approach historic and poetic, the reader or listener can also think of the vulgar or—think of it with the view point of reality, remaining neutral. History is not only the clamour or thrush of the states but the mind of society of the time, social customs, social interest, intent also. That which is historically bad can also be seen. The conspiracy of blasting the parliament of England (with gun powder) can be reported in history, according to Rāmnārāyan Pāthak.

In the three volumes Meghāni narrates the tales of 13 Bahārvatiyās and the subject matter deals with the folk life, but it is not imaginative or apocryphal. It is of regional oral history of real heroic men, lionine in form and in heart. The chief among the reasons of 'Bahārvatā' was the torture and tyranny of big states such as Marāthā, Gāekwād, Bhāvnagar etc. and selfish law and double standards of British Company. Even the Judicial Assisstant of Kāthiyāwād, and later famous as Chief Magistrate of Bombay High Court, Rev. F.C.O. Bimon has written in his article:

“There was a great deal of fine true chivalry in the old
outlaws. They were almost without exception have been
driven into outlawry by oppression and few of them, at
least in early days, were guilty of wanton cruelty to women
and children or the old and feeble..... I believe I am

right saying that every one of the genuine old Kāthiāwār outlaws (with perhaps the exception of Jumā Gande) was wiped out, either by sword or the gallows or transportation, before I left Kāthiāwār. I had much to do with the last scene in many of these adventurous careers and as a rule while I had to enforce the law I could feel a genuine respect for these misguided hardly treated desperate men...’’¹¹

Together with Prabhudās Thakkar, Munikumār Bhatt also objects certain aspects of Bahārvatiyās, but it remains only confined to one or two sketches of Bahārvatiyās, that are included in Part- 1. One thing is notable about Munikumār Bhatt’s humble objection towards Meghāni’s two statements in his prologue. When Meghāni writes that the entire public under the Bahārvatiyā’s rule got beaten, got harrassed and yet (so generous that) perceived their intrepidity. He protests:

“The fact is certainly that the weak people moved on fearlessly in every Good Bahārvatā, the poor had no fear of being looted. Not only that but there remained the probability of getting something, and lessening the cruelty of the authority, and distributing the wealth of the traders addicted with the sense of extreme proprietorship, among poor people, thus the Bahārvatiyās used to set up equanimity among the public that was not equal and as a result secured their place in public heart. So in brother Meghāni’s statement – perhaps unknowingly – the fact that is depicted as the public merit is indeed dependent upon the Bahārvatiyās virtue.’’¹²

Secondly when Meghāni says that Bahārvatiyās perished on the perishing of their righteousness and he places the belief of the deity’s help in the support. Munikumar Bhatt protests that the Bahārvatiyā could not avail the shelter, the defence and the facilities which the state had. The only weapon of the Bahārvatiyā was his moral approach, his religious and righteous intent. By these two he could arouse faith in public heart, extend fearlessness about himself among the people. By giving up these two main and essential merits they give up their one and the only support and that is why the destruction takes place according to him.

These chivalrous and wonderful tales have been obtained during the period of our own freedom movement, except the tale of Jesājee – Vejājee, wherein the material is more of legends and with less historical evidence, as most of the Bahārvatiyās lived during the whole of the 19th century. The circumstances produced four types of Bahārvatiyās, depending on the causes, as classified by Kincaid:

1. Girāsdār (land- holders): Against the states that have seized their small states or property.
2. Unprovoked Bahārvatiyās: With their grievance against the authority for the good of others or purpose of charity.
3. Personal Revenge: For some family struggle or following some criminal act.
4. Robbers: Those who rose for theft and robbery.

SORATHI BAHĀRVATIYĀ PART-2

The Bahārvatiyās described in part-2 were real heroes in the sense that they themselves were the sons of kings, obeying righteous conduct till the end of their lives without any exception. All the austerities and regulations of Bahārvatā in the real sense of the term are observed in the life, exploits and interactions of these Bahārvatiyās. As the famous Gujarāti poet ‘Sundaram’ says reading these records the picture of the situation of Kāthiyāvād at that time stands out vividly before us. The kingdoms of Kāthiyāvād, their intrigues, their injustices, their tyranny, etc. are visible in these records. And together we see these cleansed and valiant Bahārvatiyās striving with heroism. The Bahārvatiyā Jogidās Khumān struggled with the king of Bhānagar. He rescued the public being crushed under the tyranny of the Sandhi Sepoys of Bhānagar state, tired out the state and got his estate. Jodhā and Moolu Mānek strived against the tyrant governors and Baloch sepoy of Marāthā state. A little history of Dwārakā presented before us is getting alive here. The last tale is of Jesājee- Vejājee who strived against Mohmad Begadā.

Most of the Kāthi Bahārvatiyās and the Bahārvatiyās narrated in Part 2 belonged to the first group, i.e. Girāsdār (Tālukdār). They became determined to do or die against the unjust invasion on their small states or property by the big power, as Kincaid also says,

“.....It always happened that the protecting state had acquired part of the Kāthi’s land, it hungered for the remainder. It would then provoke quarrels and on some pretext or other violate its agreement. It was then useless

for the Kāthi to seek redress in the state's own court, so calling together his servants and relatives and placing his wife and children in some friendly shelter, he would turn his back on the homestead where his family had lived for centuries and making Gir his Sherwood forest proceed to.....”¹³

This book is chapterized on the three wonderful tales of the first ranked Bahārvatiyās, as Kincaid appropriately regards them. According to him:

“The first types rare full of interest and vigorous and they well resemble the earlier outlaws of England. When the property of the courtier of Huntingdom was seized, the courtier left for Sherwood Forest, gathering his men. Till today he is famous as Robinhood.”

The first and foremost tale in the book is about Jogidās Khumān (1816-1829) and his generous enmity with the king of Bhāvnagar who captured his domain of 84 villages – Kundalā (Today's Sāvarkundalā). The mini novel like story in 21 chapters describing different incidents together with some more evidences and information covered in more than 80 pages, is the tale of the great saintly hero whom the great poet of Gujarāt, Kavi Nāhnālāl has honoured as ‘Jogi (Mystic) Bahārvatiyā’ exhibiting his feeling to write ‘RobRoy’ of Sorath on Jogidās and expressing his grief over Jogidās’ so little a place in the history book *Bhāvnagar Statistics* which is followed and mostly imitated by the English historian of the time, Captain Bell in his book *History of Kāthiāwār*, as stated by Meghāni himself. But Kincaid is almost fascinated by the character of this magnanimous man as he considered him to be the hero of the sublime Duhā received in his research and rendered the Duhā in a beautiful verse in English –

Dhruv chale, Meru dage, *Mahipat mele mān,
Jogo kin Jāti kare, Kshatrivat Khumān!
[The stars may fall from heaven's dome,
The pride of *thrones depart:
Yet valour still will make home,
In Jogā Khumān's heart.]

The second tale is of Vāgher landholders of Okhāmandal (Dwāarakā) Jodhā Mānek: Mulu Mānek (1858-1867) becoming Bahārvatiyās against Marāthā king who seized their Okhāmandal. It is also a huge tale, the longest with 30 incidents covered in more than 80 pages. The two brave Vāghers, the uncle and his nephew fell victim of the malice of Marāthā and the British, as Kincaid writes:

“He (Jodhā) came, as his name (meaning- brave warrior) indicates, from Mānik stock that at one time ruled Dwāarakā and Okhāmandal before the Marathās with British assistance established themselves therein. Rather than being killed by the enemy he chose to die, with the stroke of a Chāran’s sword.” The beautiful translation of the ballad on Jodhā’s exploit at Kodinar is made by Kincaid:

And he gave with open hand to each

.....

When Jodhā Mānek looted Kodinār.”

The third tale, of Jesāji-Vejāji (1473-1494) against the state of Junāgadh, is narrated in 11 chapters covering 34 pages. The story is more of miracles and legends with less evidence. It resembles the old age, especially when Mohmmed Begadā conquered Junāgadh in the later half of the 15th century and seized the tālukās of Jesājee- Vejājee. In 1493 the ‘Bahārvatā’ resulted in the compromise but after some time the Bahārvatiyās ended their lives strangely by killing each other.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIO- CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The word ‘Kāthiyāvād’ deals with historical significance. It is named after the community of great Kāthi warriors, land holders and rulers said to have originated from Sindh, after the 9th century AD, and came to conquer the Kāthiyāvād province – *Hāth Samsher lai Kāthi-e Kāthiyāvād kidho* (with the mighty sword in hand the Kāthi made Kāthiyāvād).

Kāthiyāvād which is now known as Saurāshtra has its own history, tradition and culture. It is belived to be the mainspring – Akshaypātra - an inexhaustible treasure of Gujarat’s folk literature. It is a unique land that is throbbing and alive and ‘has a history yet to be told’ in the

words of Meghāni. Not only old folklorists and poets but Englishmen like Kincaid were so much impressed by that region. In his poem “Envoi: Kāthiland” he declares his utter love:

Yes, Kāthiland I love you, right from Bāwli to Porbunder

Under any sort of aspect, any skies

And by Jove.....

And I'll take the Friday train to Kāthiland!

*The original word “Mahadhadh” (Ocean) is misunderstood here as ‘Mahipat’ (king).

Meghāni has written in his introduction – There were no government, courtly or public documentation to reach the conclusion whether the tales received by him were historic, half-historic or non- historic, they were not told merely by Chāran–Bhāt, the relatives of Bahārvatiyās, officials, common people of village, the participants of Bahārvatā themselves, eye-witnesses, etc. variegated knowers were approached and then this milking has been done. So he takes this material as the guide to some extent in the darkness of the history and with its support wants to explore the acts of the Bahārvatiyās as a whole. And the points for this exploration are: The Bahārvatiyās of other countries and provinces: The hearty attitude of country people: the reasons for that earnestness: The construction of Bahārvatiyās’ biographies in European literature; The Bahārvatiyās’ shelters, beliefs, worships etc., The oppression of big powers, the double standards of Britishers; The lack of national concept, political chaos and numerous other factors.

The popular literary figure Rāmnārāyan Pāthak is impressed with the historical and socio-cultural phenomena depicted in the tales. He writes:

“As Meghāni has used the language of old story-teller the historic view point gets some assistance too, we can be closely acquainted with the merits and demerits, strengths and weakness of the nature of Kāthiyāwād.”

History is not only the clamour or thrush of the states but the mind of society of the time, social customs, social interest, intent also. Not only in Saurāshtra but in many countries the works on outlaws have become very popular as they deal with the eulogies of bravery and valour.

Wherever and whenever bravery and valour took place the literature singing the praise was attracted. Meghāni in his preface quotes Prof. Gamier,

“The outlaw now as a humble poacher and as an ideal
champion of the rights of man against Church and state is a
natural favourite of the ballad.”

One significant aspect of the Bahārvatiyās of the time to be noted is the Bahārvatiyās’ fearless and brave encounter with the British authority. The big states were exercising oppression over the people in general. They also encouraged the shrewd capitalism of the traders and rich nobles who had almost become the blood-suckers by exploiting the public without any restraint as they used to bribe the governors and the big kings were encouraged by the British armies. Britishers actually wanted more and more wealth through them and they inspired them by supporting with arms and forces to capture the estates of small overlords and landholders and fleece their population, too. People suffered a lot because of this political chaos, material exploitation and moral degradation. According to Meghāni, the Bahārvatiyās believed that the English did not come here for the arbitration and justice, and they were responsible for the plight of the overlords as they assisted for the battles within our country between the big kings and the small rulers. Meghāni gives the example of Jogidās Khumān hearing about the degraded business of East India Company from the pilgrims all over the nation visiting Saurāshtra. That is why perhaps Jogidās did not allow even a single vessel of the British at the ports of Kāthiyāwād as depicted in the tale. The killing of the political agents and soldiers by Vāghers in second tale of part-2, Jogidās Khumān’s brave encounter with the special political agent, Barnwell stationed at Amareli with huge army with that purpose as mentioned by Meghāni in the prologue and many other examples justify the fact. So when the great kings of India and the leaders were under the control and command of the mighty British rule, the brave and the bold Bahārvatiyās faced them with heroic spirit and even proved to be the real challenge for them. Many Bahārvatiyās fought with the British soldiers and officers. They also sometimes attacked and highjacked them and kept with them for days.

It is really an interesting point that Bahārvatiyās disliked and confronted the presence of Britishers in our states. In a sense, they were the first rebels against Britishers, even before the rebellion of 1857. As the authority of the time was apparently against them, only the ugly side of

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their act has been recorded in the histories of different states. As these events are uncouth there arise a doubt of their being improbable and secondly these incidents are not recorded anywhere. There is certainly no probability of their place in the record of Bahārvatiyās' opponent authorities. It is common that their records describe the Bahārvatiyās in the words like 'rogues', 'robbers', 'rebels' and presenting their dark side they try to darken them more. And people would also feel their safety in concealing their good or bad experiences. The population had to suffer the rage of the authority on getting their meetings with Bahārvatiyās revealed, and so they also kept quiet. Gradually, as time passed, the fear of the state getting removed, the events of Bahārvatiyās started coming out. Secondly, historians like Captain Bell in his History of Kāthiyāwār and the writer who loved history, an experienced civilian, Kincaid in his Outlaws of Kāthiyāwār have drawn the superficial pictures of Bahārvatiyās with prejudicial and shallow outlook of English officials, according to Meghāni.

Meghāni was also aware of the difficulty of the discrimination of the extent of picturesque element and that of truth in these tales. He has remained conscious by not adding any fictitious character while performing the duty of the editor of historical material. And yet the editor has to be in harmony with the character and after attaining its historical nature and other light or dark lines he has to fill up the details of description on the basis of the impression on his mind as he cannot afford mere reporting of the historical subject matter, according to him. Meghāni assures in his prologue that he has not permitted his imagination except for the composition of words required to put the characters and the incidents in their proper perspective. But the documents and records of the English officials, even if they are superficial involving the shallow outlook of the administrators, become the reliable evidences of many such incidents as they were very near to the dates, time of the occurrences, for example, Kincaid's reference of Jodhā Mānek's raid on Kodinār during the time of 1857 rebellion. And so the study examines its historicity referring and comparing to the historical events, books and even the records of those enemy states and English officials who deliberately diluted, reserved and tried to curb the praise of the heroes as the poet Nhānālāl says. For example the historical ballad, at the end of the tale of Jogidās Khumān, which is composed by the poet laureate of Bhāvnagar state, though it deals with the praises of both Jogidās Khumān and the king of Bhāvnagar describes the surrender of Jogidās Khumān while in reality it was the case of the compromise in a dignified way wherein Jogidās is

considered to be the equal of the King. Secondly, there are no evidences of their imprisonment too. Moreover, as these events were not very old, there was the advantage of still having some witnesses according to Meghāni as most of the tales were of recent past except Jesājee – Vejājee all the Bahārvatiyās lived during the whole of the 19th century and especially after Colonel Walker’s shrewd Agreement (1807). The writer has obtained his material in three ways–

- 1) From the writings and documentations of English officials and historians like Captain Bell, Kincaid, Justice Bimon, Bhagwānlāl Sampatrām, etc.
- 2) From the traditions and talks of bards, other people, etc.
- 3) By visiting the knowers and relatives connected with the incidents directly or indirectly.

This way being the folk stories of the regional oral history, such stories are rare in Indian and international folklore, except in Rājasthān. Even Robinhood stories are not of such historical nature as Maria Leech Writes.

“..... No historical incident to parallel the story has ever been discovered” and “Robinhood is absolutely a creation of the ballad – muse.”¹⁴

Thus, the tales deal with the minute details of the historical, political and social backgrounds of the time, as Pushkar Chandarvārkar rightly regards Meghāni as the author observing history in folktales and making them social report. That is why the stories cannot be considered apocryphal but they belong to the history of Gujarāt. The eminent critic on Meghāni, Kanubhāi Jāni has written:

“The tales are the folk biographies of the regional oral history of Saurāshtra.”

In Europe these folk stories are of popular literature, here it is oral history concerned with distinct races, Nomadic men and women, their origin, places, customs, disguise, etc. So they have sociological, anthropological and ethnological significance. And Meghāni himself has also said that his focus was not only on the Bahārvatiyās but the history of folk life around them as it was really a wonderful and awe-inspiring culture of old Saurāshtra. To this light, Justice Bimon has also written,

“Yet as late as the eighties, Kāthiāwār was happy hunting

ground for wild adventurous spirits, and a paradise for young officials. The last of the great outlaws were still at large, romance, lingering spirit of Rājput chivalry brooded over the land. Waste and desolate plains, ranges of stony hills, jungles dotted everywhere with the oases of rich cultivation and innumerable forts, darbārs and palaces. The Kāthiāwār of those days was full of glamour and charm, and threw its own spell over all those who came within its influence.”

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