

Important saints and folk deities of Rajasthan

Folk deities

A new trend becomes visible in the life of the people of Rajasthan from thirteenth century onwards in wake of the entry of Islam following the Turkish invasion in this region. In an atmosphere of the increasing influence of Islamic culture and the social ethos riddled with obscurantism and ostentatious ritualism, there appeared enlightened thinkers and reformers who worked for socio-religious reforms. They made people realise that the temple, idol and ritualism associated with them is meaningless. Remembering the Almighty and keeping Him in one's heart is the true path to salvation.

In this period, some great people were born in Rajasthan who showed a new way and led the people by example. They were men of character and perseverance. The people not only followed their path but deified them, and worshipped them as their god or followed them as the wise men or saints. In this chapter, we will study some such great personalities.

Gogaji

Gogaji's name is taken with great reverence amongst the five Pirs worshipped in Rajasthan.

Pabu, Harbhu, Ramde, Manglia, Meha
Panchun pir padharjyo, Gogaji jeha.

His father's name was Zewar and mother's name was Bachchal. He is considered to be a contemporary of Gorakhnath and Mahmud Ghaznavi. Gogaji had a property dispute with his cousins Arjan-Surjan. Arjan-Surjan brought an



army of Muslims and surrounded Gogaji's cows and had a fierce battle with Gogaji. In this battle, Gogaji killed Arjan-Surjan, but he himself also attained martyrdom saving the cows.

Dadrewa, the birthplace of Gogaji is called Shirshmedi, and his memorial is called Ghurmedi. Bhadrapada Krishna Navami is celebrated as Goga Navami in Gogamedi (Hanumangarh) and all over Rajasthan, in the memory of Gogaji. On this day, he is worshiped as a warrior with spear in hand, or as a snake demigod. His place of worship, with snake idol engraved on stone, is usually under the tree of Khejdi in villages. It is believed that by worshipping Gogaji as 'Jahir Pir', the poison of snakebite becomes ineffective. He is worshipped as 'Nagaraja' by the Hindus and 'Gogapir' by the Muslims.

Tejaji

Veer Teja was born in 1073 CE on Magh Shukla Chaturdashi to Taharji and Ramkunwari in Kharnal village (Nagaur). When Tejaji went to his in-laws at Paner to pick up his wife Pema, on the same day Mer people stole the cows of Lachha Gujar. On the request of the Gujar, he went to free the cows when on the way he found a snake at a place called Sursura. Tejajii, stopping the snake from biting him, promised that he would come back to him after freeing the cows. After a fierce fight, Tejaji succeeded in getting the cows freed. Even after being badly injured, he went back to the serpent as promised. Due to the wounds on the whole body, he put forward his tongue for the snake to bite. He died on Bhadrapada Shukla Dashami in Sursura (Kishangarh) succumbing to the snakebite. On the occasion of Teja Dashami (Bhadrapad Shukla Dashami) a huge cattle fair is organised at Parbatsar, Nagaur from Panchami to Purnima.



Tejaji, like Gogaji, is revered as the god of serpents. Tejaji is depicted as a warrior riding a horse and holding a sword, whose tongue is getting bitten by a snake. It is believed that if a Tant (chord) is tied on the right leg of the person bitten by a snake, the poison becomes ineffective.

It is not necessary that these beliefs and stories related to folk deities are true word to word. Their basic objective is to give common folk the message associated with these stories, such as protecting the weak, keeping one's promise and so on.

Pabuji

Pabuji was the son of Dhandhalji Rathore. He was born in 1239 AD at Kolu.

According to a popular belief, historian Muhanot Nainsi and Mahakavi Modji Ashiya, Pabuji was born 1.6 kms off Barmer, in a village called Juna of Khali Khabar. The name of his mother was Apsara. Pabuji was married to Sodhi, daughter of Surajmal Sodha of Amarkot. During the marriage ceremony, his rival, brother-in-law, ruler of Jayal (Nagaur) Jindrao Khinchi surrounded the cows of Deval Charani due to the previous grudge. Deval requested Pabuji to get his cows freed. After taking only three pheras (rounds around the sacred fire), he rode on saffron kalami mare of Deval Charani to protect the cows. In a fierce fight, in 1276 AD, Pabuji, along with many companions, attained martyrdom. The common folk worship him as a folk deity for his bravery, sacrifice, keeping promise, protecting the refugee and his martyrdom while protecting the cows. The main place of his worship is in Kolu (Phalodi) where a fair is held every year in his memory. His insignia is popular as a horseman with a spear in his hand.



Pabuji is worshiped as the god of camels. He is credited to be the first to bring camels to Marwar. The Bhopas sing 'Pabuji ki phad' when the camels regain health. The villagers consider him to be an incarnation of Lakshmanji.

Devnarayanji

Devnarayan was the son of Bagadavat chief Bhoj and Sedu Gurjar and was born around circa 1243 AD. His father was killed along with twenty-three of his brothers in a conflict with the ruler of Bhinay even before his birth. In order to protect him from the Bhinay ruler, his mother Sedu took him to Malwa to her maternal home. As a ten-year-old boy he was returning to Rajasthan to avenge the death of his father, when he married Pipalde, daughter of Jai Singh Dev Parmar in Dhara Nagari en route. Thereafter, he went to Bhinay to take revenge where Devji killed Bhinay Thakur in a fight over cows.



The main place, where he is worshipped, is in Asind (Bhilwara) where a fair is annually held on Bhadrapad Shukla Saptami. His followers mainly are Gujjars who worship him by singing the 'phad of Devji' and the poetry of 'Bagadavat' related to Devji and Bagadavats. It is believed that if sung for nine hours every night, it would complete in six months.

Mallinathji

Mallinathji was born in 1358 AD. He was the eldest son of Rawal Salkha of Marwar and Janide. After the death of his father, he began to look after the administration of his uncle Kanhadde at Mahewa. He became the ruler of Mahewa in 1374 AD after the death of his uncle Kanhadde. In order to expand his territory, he defeated the army of Nizamuddin, Subedar of Malwa under Firoz Tughlaq in 1378 AD. Inspired by his queen Rupade, he became a disciple of Ugamsi Bhati in 1389 AD and received diksha in yoga-sadhana. According to a legend, he was a man with precognition and could perform miracles like the devatas (gods).

Mallinathji collected all the saints of Marwar and organized a huge Hari kirtan in 1399 AD. In the same year, on Chaitra Shukla Dwitiya he died. He has a temple in Tilwara village (Barmer) on the banks of Luni river, where a huge cattle fair is held every year from Chaitra Krishna Ekadashi to Chaitra Shukla Ekadashi. The western pargana of Jodhpur was named Malani after him. He is still highly revered in Malani (Barmer).

Ramdevji

Ramdevji, son of Ajmalji of Tanwar dynasty and Mainade was born in Undu-Kasamer village, Sheo tehsil of Barmer district. He is considered to be a contemporary of Mallinathji. In his childhood, after receiving Pokhran region from Mallinathji, he ended anarchy and terror there by killing a cruel person, named Bhairav. He was married to Netalde, daughter of Dalji Sodha of Amarkot. He gave Pokhran in dowry to his niece and went on to settle in a village called Ramdevra (Runiche) and took samadhi on Bhadrapada Shukla Ekadashi in 1458 AD. Here, a huge fair is held on Bhadrapad Shukla Dwitiya. Communal harmony is the main feature of this fair.



Where Hindus worship him as an incarnation of Shri Krishna, Muslims worship Ramdevji as Ramsa-pir. Generally, Ramdevji's 'pagliye' (foot prints) are installed in villages on a high platform under a tree. These places are called 'Than'.

Kamadia Panth was founded by Ramdevji. Terahtaali dance is performed at Ramdevji's fair by the followers of this sect. Ramdevji was a brave hero as well as a social reformer. He opposed caste system, idol worship and pilgrimage.

Mehaji Manglia

Mehaji Manglia is one of the five pirs of Rajasthan. He was a contemporary of

Rao Chunda. He was born in a Kshatriya family, but was brought up in a village Manglia, by his maternal grandfather and therefore became famous as Mehaji Manglia. Due to his self-respecting nature, he made many foes. Finally, he attained martyrdom while fighting Rao Ranangdev Bhati of Jaisalmer. He was a good Shakun Shastri. He is worshiped as a folk deity for helping people and protecting them. He has a temple in Bapni where a fair is organised on Bhadrapada Krishna Ashtami.

Harbhujji

Harbhujji was the son of Maharaj Sankhla of Bhundel (Nagaur) and a contemporary of Rao Jodha (1438-1489 AD). After the death of his father, he left Bhundel and started living at Harabhajmal. Here, by the inspiration of Ramdevji, he renounced his weapons and took diksha from his Guru Balinathji. There is a popular belief that while Rao Jodha was trying to free Mandor from Mewar, he gave a dagger along with his blessings to him. When this territory was freed by Jodha, he gifted 'Bengti' village to Harbhujji.

Harbhujji was considered a good Shakun Shastri, vachansiddh (the one whose words always come true) and a great man who possessed magical powers. His main centre is at Bengti (Phalodi). On fulfilment of their wishes, devotees offer prayers at 'Harbhujji ki gaadi' in his temple here.

Do you know?

Kallaji, who showed exceptional bravery and courage during the invasion of Chittor Fort by Akbar, is popular as a four-handed folk deity in Mewar region. It is believed that even after Kalla-ji was beheaded, his torso reached Rundela while fighting the Mughals.

Saints

Dhanna

The credit for initiating religious movement in Rajasthan is given to Saint Dhanna. He was born in Dhuwa village in Tonk district in 1415 CE in a Jat family. His nature was religious right from the childhood. Later, Dhanna went to Kashi and became a disciple of Acharya Ramanand. Under the influence of Guru Ramanand, he became a follower of Nirguna Brahm. Guru Ramanand instructed him to do bhakti (worship) while staying at home. He exerted to keep himself pure while staying in his ancestral occupation of agriculture. Dhanna guru had great faith in devotion. He was of the opinion that the Ultimate End can be achieved only through devotion towards one's guru. He considered chanting of god's name as the means of achieving God. He always opposed ostentatious ritualism.

Pipa

Khinchi Rajput Pipa was the ruler of Gagron (Jhalawar). He is believed to have been born in 1425 AD. Later on, Pipa went to Kashi and became a disciple of Ramanand. Like Dhanna, he was also instructed to remain steadfast in bhakti while leading the life of a Grahastha. On Pipa's request, Acharya Ramanand, along with his disciples, visited Gagron on his way to Dwarka. At that time, Pipa also left his kingdom and joined him along with queen Sita.

After this, he went to Toda (Tonk) and made Shursen, the ruler of Toda, his disciple, when he distributed his wealth among the saints. After travelling to many places, he returned to Gagron and started living in a cave at the holy confluence of Ahu and Kalisindh. Here, his temple, abode and cave are visited by the devotees. There is a grand temple of Pipaji in Samdari village of Barmer district. Here, a major congregation of his followers of Darji (Tailor) society is held every year on Chaitra Shukla Purnima.

Abundant literature related to Pipa is available in handwritten manuscripts, which include Pipa ki katha, Pipa-Parchi, Pipa ki Vani, Saakhiyan, Padas etc. Chitaavani, a handwritten treatise from the 17th century composed by Pipa, has also been found.

Pipa has said that guidance of the guru is necessary for the attainment of god. He considered bhakti (chanting god's name) as the main means of attaining salvation. Pipa insists on worshiping god and opposing idol worship. Pipa did not believe in inequality. He supports the oneness of human beings, saying that in the eyes of god all beings are equal.

Jambhoji

Jambhoji, the founder of Vishnoi sect, was born in 1451 AD on Bhadrapada Krishna Ashtami. He was born to Lohatji, a Rajput of Panwar dynasty of Pipasar (Nagaur), and Hansa devi. After the death of his parents in 1483 AD, he went to live in Samarathal (Bikaner) and spent his time in satsang and Hari-charcha (discussion).

In 1485 AD, he introduced Vishnoi sect at this place. Those who follow his life and thoughts are called Vishnoi. He ordered his followers to follow twenty-nine principles. Sacrificing their life for welfare of animals and protection of trees has been a tradition of this sect. Jambhoji is also called an environmentalist due to his attachment to the environment. Major texts composed by Jambhoji are Jambh Samhita, Jambh Sagar Shabdavali, Vishnoi Dharmaprakash and Jambhsagar.

In 1536 AD, he gave up his mortal body in Lalasar village and his memorial was made near Talwa village. This place is called Mukam. A fair is held here twice a year on the Amavasya of Phalgun and Ashwin.

Jasnathji

The founder of the Jasnathi sect, Jasnathji was born in 1482 AD in Katariasar (Bikaner). He was the foster son of Hamirji Jyani Jat and Rupande. According to a popular belief, he performed a very rigorous penance for twelve years at Gorakhmalia (Bikaner) and gave the message of pity towards all beings. Jasnathji shattered the arrogance of a tantrik named Loh Paangal. He also gave his blessings to Raolunkaran to be the ruler of Bikaner. Impressed by his miraculous powers, Sultan of Delhi Sikander Lodhi gave him land near Katariasar. Jasnathji and Jambhoji met each other in 1500 AD. On Ashwin Shukla Saptami in 1506 CE, Jasnathji took samadhi at Katariasar at the tender age of twenty-four. His teachings are available in the collections, Simbhadada and Konda.

Katariasar is the place of penance and deeds of Jasnathji. Huge fairs are organised thrice a year here on Ashwin Shukla Saptami, Magha Shukla Saptami and Chaitra Shukla Saptami.

Laldas

Laldas, the founder of Laldasi sect, was born on Shrawan Krishna Panchami in 1504 AD at Dholidub village of Alwar in Mewat region. His father's name was Chandmal and mother's name was Samda. Lal das got diksha from fakir Gadan Chishti of Tijara and left Dholidub and built a hut on 'Singh Shila' in Bandholi village.

To remove religious and social evils spread in the Mewat region, Laldasji stressed on moral purity. Saint Laldas preached to adopt the goodness of both Hindu and Muslim religions. He believed that God and Allah are the same. One who hurts others, puts his own life into trouble. The Meo Muslims consider Laldasji as pir. Laldas ki Chetavniyan (Warnings of Laldas) is his main poetic text. He left for heavenly abode at the age of 108 years in 1648 AD at Nagla. His samadhi is in Sherpur where a fair is held on Ekadashi and Magha Purnima of Ashwin month.

Saint Haridas

Saint Haridas, the founder of the Niranjani sect, was born in Kapdod village of Didwana tehsil in 1455 AD. His original name was Hari Singh Sankhla and initially he was a plunderer, but the teachings of a sanyasi changed his life. In 1513 AD, he attained enlightenment and named himself Haridas. He preached Nirguna bhakti and opposed social evils. In this sect, the divine is called 'Alakh Niranjan' or 'Hari Niranjan'. The spiritual thoughts of Saint Haridas are compiled in books titled Mantra Rajprakash and Haripurush ki Vaani. He left for heavenly abode in 1543 CE at Didwana.

Dadudayal

Dadudayal, 'Kabir of Rajasthan', is believed to have been born on Phalgun Shukla Ashtami in 1544 AD in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. After receiving diksha from a saint named Buddhan (Vriddhanand), Dadu came to live in Sambhar in 1568 AD. He started the work of a carder (dhunia) and began preaching from here.

In 1575 AD Dadu came to Amer with 25 of his disciples, where he resided for the next 14 years. Dadu also visited Fatehpur Sikri in 1585 AD to meet Mughal emperor Akbar.

Dadu then travelled to the states of Dhundhar and Marwar giving sermons en route. In 1602 AD he came to Naraina, a village adjacent to Phulera and he gave up his body in 1603 AD on Jyeshtha Krishna Ashtami. Dadu's body was kept as per his instructions at a nearby place called Dadu Khol under Bherana hill. Dadupanthi regard this place very sacred.

Dadu gave his teachings on Brahma, jiva, jagat and moksha in a simple language (Sadhukkadi). The teachings and ideas of Daduji are found in texts called Daduji ki Vaani and Dadu ra Duha. Dadu, like Kabir, was a reformist, believer in conduct and a seeker of the Ultimate. Dadu strongly opposed rituals, caste-system, idol worship, orthodoxy etc. Garibdas, Miskindas, Sundardas Bakhnaji, Rajjab, Madhodas etc. were his prominent disciples.



Mirabai

A devotee of Krishna, poet and singer Mirabai was one of the greatest saints of the sixteenth century India. Mira is also known as 'Radha of Rajasthan'. She was born circa 1498 AD in a village named Kudki (Pali) in the house of Ratan Singh, son of Rao Duda Rathore of Merta. Her father Ratan Singh Rathore was the vassal of Bajoli. Mira was raised in Merta at her grandfather's place. In 1516 AD, she was married to the crown prince Bhojraj, the eldest son of Rana Sanga. She became a widow at a young age. Her brother in law Rana Vikramaditya did not appreciate Mira sitting and singing hymns amongst the saints. Vikramaditya also tried to kill Mira by getting her bitten by a venomous snake and a poisonous drink, but Mira's devotion to Krishna did not lessen.



Mira got the inspiration of worshipping Krishna from her grandmother. Once,

seeing a wedding procession of a groom, the girl Meera was thrilled and went to her grandmother and eagerly inquired about her groom. The grandmother said, Giridhar Gopal. From that time, Mira devoted herself to Giridhar Gopal.

Mira, in her last years moved to Ranchhor temple at Dakor in Dwarka, Gujarat and she merged with her Giridhar Gopal in 1547 AD there. The padavlis (metric verses) of Miraji are very popular and a part of the folklore.

The main feature of her devotion was that she gave importance to emotions and reverence over knowledge. Meera's bhakti has been of sweet sentiment (love for Krishna and direct union with him).

Saint Ranabai

Ranabai, 'the second Mira of Rajasthan', was born in a Jat family in 1504 AD on Vaishakh Shukla Tritiya in Harnawa village (near Makrana), Marwar. Her father's name was Ramgopal and mother's name was Gangabai. Ranabai, a disciple of saint Chaturdas of Palari, was a devotee of Krishna. At the age of 66, Ranabai took samadhi on Falgun Shukla Trayodashi in 1570 AD at Harnawa village. A huge fair is organized here annually on Bhadrapada Shukla Trayodashi.

Saint Mavji

Saint Mavji was born in 1714 AD in Saabla village. To give his thoughts a lasting and concrete form Mavji established a sect called Nishkalank (holy and sinless). It is said that when he was 12 years old, he left home and started doing penance (tapasya) in a cave at the confluence of the Mahi and Som river. It was at this place on Samvat 1784 Magh Shukla Ekadashi on Thursday, that he attained enlightenment and on the same day he established Beneshwar (Vena Vrindavan). After this, he started preaching religion and accepted people of all castes, without any discrimination as his disciples.

He purchased paper from Ahmedabad with the donation received from a Patel, his devotees from Lasara and composed five big texts consisting of 72 lakh 96 thousand verses, by staying alone at Dholagarh. Written in the style of debate, they are called Chopada.

These Chopadas of Mavji are taken out only on the day of Diwali. The followers of Mavji consider him as the 'Kalki avatar', the tenth incarnation of Vishnu. He has a large number of followers in Dungarpur district. The main temple is in Saabla where there is a four – armed (Chaturbhuj) statue of Mavji riding a horse with a conch (shankh), a disc (chakra), mace (gada) and lotus (padma). A fair is organised at Beneshwar Dham on Magh Shukla Purnima at the Triveni confluence of Som, Jakham and Mahi rivers.

Ram Charan

Ram Kishan (childhood name of Ram Charan) was born to Bakhat Ram and Devhuti Devi of a Vaishya clan on Magha Shukla Chaturdashi in 1719 AD in a small village Sodha, in the erstwhile Jaipur state. In 1751 AD. Ram Kishan became Ram Charan after receiving diksha from Maharaja Kripa Ramji in Dantra village of Mewar. Seeing adverse attitude of the sadhus towards religion at the Galataji's fair in 1758 AD, he lost interest in the world and Ramcharan ji became a recluse. After this, he went to Bhilwara, and selected a lonely place (Miyani ji ki Chand Baori) for tapasya, and began to preach nirgun bhakti and love towards all. Ramcharan went to Kuhada village after being harassed by idolaters. On receiving an invitation from Shahpura, he moved there. The ruler of Shahpura, Ran Singh built a canopy and established a monastery for him. He died in 1798 AD at Shahpura chanting the name of Ram. His spiritual teachings are compiled in a book called Anubhav Vaani.

The sect founded by Ramcharanji is famous as Ramsnehi sect. There are four main branches of this sect. Ramcharan is said to be the founder of Shahpura branch. Dariyavji, Hariram Dasji and Ramdasji are considered to be the founders of other three branches of Ren, Sinhathal and Kherapa respectively. Phuldol festival of Ramsnehi sect has its own peculiarities.

Maharshi Navalram

Maharshi Navalram, founder of the Naval sect was born at Harsolav (Nagaur) on Bhadrapada Krishna Ashtami, Vikram Samvat 1840 in a lower family belonging to the Dalit community. Taking note of his inclination towards spirituality in childhood, his father Khushalram sent him to the Saint Kartaram of Ramanand sect. Saint Kartaram named him Navalram and preached to him the Nirguna and formless (Nirakar) God. Maharshi Navalram travelled from place to place in the country and emphasized the importance of education. He sensitized people by opposing the religious and social evils prevailing in the society, orthodox outlook, ostentation, witchcraft, Sati system, untouchability, purdah system, child marriage etc. Maharshi considered truth, Guru and devotion to God helpful in attaining salvation. He supported monotheism and emphasized the worship of formless God.

Saadhe bhai hum nirguna deedaara

Naam anaam mein naa hi, abhe akhand swaroop hamara.

Maharshi Navalram composed hymns, couplets, shlokas, verses and chaupais in Marwari language. Mansingh, the ruler of Marwar, respected him very much. The main Peeth of Naval Sect is in Jodhpur.

Sangliya Dhuni (Sikar)

This Ashram, situated in Sangliya village of Dhod Tehsil of Sikar District is the

main centre of Sarvangi Sect, which was established by Lakkardas Maharaj in 1649 AD. This sect believes in the equality of human beings instead of caste differences. The followers are taught to walk on the right path while expressing disbelief in amulets. The main salutation of the followers is 'Jai Saheb'. Satsang is organized in the Ashram on the Amavasya and Purnima of every month in which spiritual hymns are sung instead of pretentiousness. Baba Khinwadas College is also being run by the Ashram to promote education in rural areas. For the establishment of this college, President K R Narayanan honoured Peethadhishwar Khinwadas Maharaj of the Ashram.

Exercise

Multiple choice questions

1. Which of the following is not included in panch pir?
(a) Pabuji (b) Gogaji
(c) Ramdevji (d) Tejaji
2. Tejaji was born in which district?
(a) Nagaur (b) Ajmer
(c) Pali (d) Jodhpur
3. Whose disciple was Dhanna?
(a) Kabir (b) Ramanand
(c) Pipa (d) Dadu
4. Who was the founder of Vishnoi sect?
(a) Asnathji (b) Jambhoji
(c) Laldas (d) Kabir

Very short answer type questions

1. Where is the main place of worship of Devnarayanji located?
2. What were the names of Ramdevji's parents?
3. Who is called the Kabir of Rajasthan?
4. When and with whom was Mirabai married?

5. Who was the founder of Ramsnehi sect?
6. Where is the main temple of Mavji located?

Short answer type questions

1. Write a brief note on folk deity Tejaji.
2. Mention the main thoughts of saint Haridas.
3. Highlight major aspects of the life of Krishna devotee Mira.
4. Why is saint Ranabai called 'Second Mira'.

Essay type questions

1. Write a detailed article on Panch pir of Rajasthan.
2. Illustrate the character of two prominent women saints of Rajasthan.
3. Highlight the life and teachings of Dadudayal.

Project work

1. Prepare a chart of the major folk deities and saints of your district.

Imagine

1. You are a devotee of Ramdevji and have returned after participating in Ramdevra fair. Share your experiences with your friends.