

Also, Dokkhin Rai, the Ghazi and Bonbibi have to be placed together in shrines, point out the villagers, to show how different *jatis* and must coexist and come to an agreement when dealing with the forest. Many Sundarbans islanders say that the most

important factor for ensuring their safety in the forest, apart from entering the forest 'empty handed' and 'pure hearted', is that they should entrust their lives to Bonbibi, live up to her injunctions and not dwell on their differences. ❖

Primal vs. Primitive: Observations on the Ecology of Rain in Gujarati Folksongs

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Folksongs are often referred to as expressions of a primitive society, or as primitive expressions of a social group. But this notion of primitive has pejorative overtones, implying that the society that produced or uses such cultural elements may be crude or less developed, maybe even undeveloped, in some way. Thus, when examining Gujarati folksongs, some analysts have called attention to their primitive qualities. They note, for example, their expressions and attitudes concerning rain, a natural phenomenon, and explain that the sentiments expressed in such songs derive from the simple and less-developed social systems that fall victim to such natural elements.

However, it is also possible that such attitudes can be viewed from a different perspective, one that is supported by an examination of similar attitudes expressed in the hymns of the Rigveda. When we examine these hymns, there is no doubt that they express many similar attitudes toward the natural environment that we find in Gujarati folksongs. Additionally, particularly in their outlook toward rain, we find attitudes that have been consistent for millennia. Analysis of the similarity of ecological attitudes in these different cultural expressions, created thousands of years apart, may suggest a primal source for the attitudes articulated in selected Gujarati folksongs, one that is fundamental to human existence, rather than simply the outpourings of undeveloped minds. Therefore, it is important to examine the differences and similarities between the Rigveda and selected Gujarati folksongs regarding the relationship between humans and rain, to determine the "nature" of the continuity of such attitudes and sentiments.

India lies in a region of the world that has a particularly complex relationship with rain and rainfall. Situated in a climatic zone that is affected by monsoons, the effects of rain (and drought) are more intense here. Therefore, we should expect that the cultures of the

region have paid more attention to matters of rain than in other regions with less variable patterns.

Folklorists (Chaudhury, 1971) have suggested that our attraction to folk literature stems from its explanations of the puzzles of life developed by primitive societies. Thus, the vagaries of nature become the very source of folk expressions in their various forms, and ecology and nature the very subject and force that cause these verbalizations. It can be argued that such a connection to the natural world, and the need for explanation of it, is not a primitive urge but a primal one. Thus, such a desire existing in sophisticated societies as well as primitive ones indicates some inherent quality beyond a desire to explain phenomena that requires advanced skills to understand. Rather, this ongoing need speaks to a continuous and continuing characteristic built into humans, one that goes beyond reverting to primitive explanations.

We can explore this phenomenon through an examination of continuing expressions of sentiments and feelings across thousands of years, providing evidence of a continuous strain of attaching man to nature in its life-giving properties, particularly regarding rain and rainfall. When folklorists (Bhagwat, 1958) have examined some of these expressions they have found connections to ancient texts, suggesting an historical, rather than a modern, source for some of the attitudes expressed. In particular, studies of Gujarati folksongs have postulated Vedic roots (Gupta, 1964, Chandervaker, 1963), suggesting that these attitudes toward rain spring from an essential ecology embedded within the cultural psyche and, in a period of increasing global warming, provide a counterbalancing primal concern toward respect for the environment.

The attitudes expressed in the Rigveda are an indication of the relationship of the humans to the natural world, and may encompass beseeching, praising, expressing fear and giving thanks, besides providing descriptive information. Though the descriptive information is helpful in providing a context for the emotional component, it is the emotional/attitudinal concepts that provide an indication of the ecological

perspective, particularly in relation to rain. These aspects of expressed attitudes can be compared to similar sentiments found in Gujarati folksongs. Though we can see some differences in the metaphors (or lack of metaphors) between the rain-centered hymns of the Rigveda and the folksongs from Gujarat, it is also clear that the basic range of sentiments expressed, and even some of the metaphors, have varied little over the millennia, suggesting a consistency of attitudes that goes beyond the label of "primitive."

In both the Rigveda and Gujarati folksongs the rain is personified in various forms. In many instances pleas or requests are addressed to a specific deity who is responsible for the production or cessation of rain. In some cases the deity is addressed as a deity, a higher order of being with supernatural powers. In other instances, the relationship with the deity is of a more personal nature, more like a relationship between humans. Rather than examine the rituals associated with propitiating the rain gods regarding either too much or too little rain, we will look specifically at the words of the songs (in translation) and the sentiments and desires they express in contrast to comparable verses of the Rigveda, also in translation.

The theme of historical continuity in Indian folk culture has been presented in various studies of Indian folklore. We can examine some passages from selected verses of the Rigveda and previously collected Gujarati folksongs to examine some of these observations.

- **effects of rain on creatures:**

Rigveda

...the plants shoot up...

Food springs abundant for all living creatures
(Griffith translation, book 5, hymn 83, verse 5)

Gujarati folksongs:

Pour for the sake of ants and worms
(Desai, 1963, p.95)

The birds and beasts are waiting for thee
(Patel, 1974, p.59)

- **effects of rain on streams:**

Rigveda:

...let the liberated streams rush forward
(Griffith translation, book 5 hymn 83, verse 5)

Gujarati folksong:

The water currents of rivers flow very swiftly...
(Chandervaker, 1963, p.62)

- **rain as milk of heaven:**

Rigveda:

...Imperial Kings, bedew us with the milk of heaven
(Griffith translation, book 4, hymn 63, verse 5)

Gujarati folksong:

Clouds thunder and rains pour
As it pours it will spread
It is a rain of milk
(Desai, 1963, p.95)

When we examine the folksongs, we see many more with descriptions of the problems associated with lack of rain. While this is consistent with comments about the essential pessimism of the folksongs when compared with the Rigveda (Crooke, 1926), there are several plausible explanations for this. First, the Rigveda is a set of hymns. It would be inappropriate to include complaints regarding current conditions in hymns. Second, there is a generally more descriptive quality regarding aspects of daily life in the folksongs in comparison to the Rigveda, so problems would thus tend to be more prevalent.

A lack of extensive metaphor in folksongs may be deliberate. In an analysis of the structure of Gujarati prose, poetry and songs, Durbin (1971) found that the grammatical language and pattern of songs are altered to be consonant with the melody, rhythm, rhyme and musical structure on and through which the words are enunciated and carried. Along with the addition of certain syllables to enable the words to match the melodic structure, several different speech patterns are eliminated toward this same end. That is, grammatical simplification occurs. It is possible that, to a similar purpose, metaphorical allusions are eliminated, or at least reduced, as well. If so, we could postulate that the transition from Rigveda to folksong was not simply a "dumbing down" of its metaphorical components, but a move to enhance the fit between the language and the musical structures that were used to create the songs. Though we have concentrated on the songs themselves and not the rituals surrounding them, it is clear that the rituals that accompany such songs, including their location, time of year, weather conditions, etc. would, in effect, render some of these messages easily understood without close attention to the words.

Through an examination of the content and attitudes expressed in both Gujarati folksongs and the Rigveda we have discovered both similarities and differences in regard to consideration of rain and rainfall. The similarities in attitude may be attributed to the primal human relationship with rain, at once thankful yet fearful of the capriciousness of the natural and supernatural powers. The consistency across the centuries and millennia provides yet another illustration of the continuity of Indian civilization and its cultural and ecological attributes, and helps to contradict the primitive label applied to such folksongs. The differences in the expression of these attitudes may be attributed to a variety of factors. The language of Gujarati folksongs meets the needs of the localized cultures while expressing universal attitudes toward rain. In-depth study of Gujarati folksongs in their original language should be undertaken to further explore these issues. In our own time of climatic change it is important to note the primal connection of mankind to rain, providing hope for continued attitudes respecting the power of nature and appreciating the bounty of rainfall.

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Forests, Wild Beasts and Supernatural Powers: A Folk Tale from Sunderbans

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This folk tale is based on a few eighteenth century accounts. It relates to how forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who also often worked as *malangis* (salt makers) allegedly protected themselves or at least believed to have secured them from tigers and alligators, who abounded the forest tracts of Sunderbans.

The insalubrious and dreary climate of the Sunderbans and the fact that it was infested by wild animals, particularly tigers and alligators, rendered it risky and dangerous for the inhabitants. Many of them were reportedly carried away or devoured by tigers and alligators. The tigers had caused terrible havoc among the cattle, the wood-cutters, the cultivators and their family. The depredations of a single fierce tiger had frequently compelled the cultivators and wood-cutters to abandon their lands even if at the cost of that land relapsing into a jungle. Thus the southern portion of the Sunderbans which comprised the jungle tract along the seashore was almost entirely uninhabited except for the occasional wanderings of the groups of wood-cutters and fishermen. These jungles were also infested by enormous alligators that were often found asleep or basking in the sun completely motionless, appearing like a log wood. The wood-cutters were often deceived by their appearance until the alligator was woken by a shot or vigorously scrambled into the waters or attacked the wood-cutters. Tigers too infested the margins of the forests but frequently swam towards the seashore and attacked the people in the anchored boat.

The forests – though infested by tigers and alligators – were the sole source of livelihood of the wood-

cutters. This fact made them intensely superstitious and prejudiced by their belief in forest spirits. They were confident that their safety depended entirely upon supernatural agency. None of the wood-cutters or the *malangis* ventured into the forests without a *puja* (worship) performed by a *Brahmin* (priest) or a *Fakir* or a *Pir* (saint). So strong was the conviction amongst the *malangis* about the performance of this *puja* that they even sought payment from the East India Company for the *Brahmins* or the *Fakirs* to conduct the *puja*. The Company was rarely convinced by this demand of the *malangis*, yet it was compelled to make the payment for that seemed to be the only way of motivating the *malangis* to manufacture salt in tiger-infested zones of the Sunderbans.

The *malangis* or the wood-cutters refused to go to the forests to cut wood unless accompanied by a *Fakir*, who had, as they believed, acquired supernatural powers from the presiding deity, whom he propitiated with offerings over the tigers and other wild animals. A large number of boats with the *malangis* proceeded together in a party, taking a *Fakir* with them. These *Fakirs* were generally Muslim devotees, who claimed to possess magic charms against the terror of wild animals. Living by the riverside, these *Fakirs* were greatly revered by the forest dwellers and wood-cutters, who offered them food and *cowries* to win their support and goodwill. Invariably, these *Fakirs* were also carried away by the animals but the longer they lived, the more they were venerated. It is believed that the Muslim wood-cutters had assigned particular portions of Sunderbans to their *Pirs*. In the huts of the *Fakirs*, they raised a small mound of earth, like a grave and prayed before it prior to the commencement of their operations. The Hindu wood-cutters too like their Muslim counterparts, had allocated parts in Sunderbans