



**“The serpent & the brave king: unravelling threads of tradition & rituals through folk story within Jat community”**

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By  
Bhagyashree Mandia  
(2229123)

Under the Guidance of  
Dr. Nivea Thomas K and Dr. Surabhi Jiwrajka

Assistant Professor of English and Cultural Studies  
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)  
Bannerghatta Road Campus  
Bangalore, India  
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### *Abstract*

This paper looks into the intricate mythology of the Jat community in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, centered on the legend of Tejaji Maharaj, the Jat ruler who, despite existing four generations ago, is still worshipped by the community. An encounter between the king and a snake is the key incident of the narrative, from which the king gets protection from the venom of the serpent while the latter regains its integrity. Anthropological work, lengthy conversations with members of the community (mostly family), and a quantitative analysis attempt to find patterns and alterations in the story's essence is the core of the research. In addition, by reading various literary sources, this review shows the combination of different religious and cultural traditions and historical backgrounds to reveal the tapestry of Indian folklore. It exposes an integral relationship between various external and internal factors, rediscovering the core of various traditions within the country that are so intricately connected at their core, and emphasizes the strong ethics that often reverse the course of challenging circumstances. It also demonstrates how legends, such as Tejaji Maharaj and Pabuji, remain relevant to Rajasthan culture and often have the same components of courage, ethics, and charity. This research broadens our understanding of oral traditions, cultural identities, and the unique interconnections of religious symbolism and folklore in nuanced cultural including the gap between folklore studies and cultural anthropology. This study aims to document and investigate the many versions of the Tejaji Maharaj story, acknowledging the temporal, familial, and regional changes in the narration processes by conducting fieldwork and holding conversations but also conducting archival work. The inquiry also investigates the religious or behavioural connotations of the practices phrases, and activities presented in the tale to establish whether the processes are still valid in modernity

### *Introduction*

Rajasthan is home to the legendary warrior and social reformer Veer Tejaji who is revered in North Indian states. He was brought up by Jats, a people known for their great number of sagas, epics, and strange tales of self-sacrifice by individuals on behalf of relatives who are always ready to die for their family to maintain justice, dignity, and honest beliefs such as liberty, veracity, faithfulness at all times; consequently preserving one's worthiness. One of these fighters was Veer Teja Ji. There is no doubt that [1]Gupta, S. (2 C.E., October 1) In Rajasthan there lived the most famous folk deity called Veer Tejaji. His birth date according to historians is Friday Magha Shukla 14 samvat 1130 (29 January 1074). He was born into the family of Jat Dhaulya gotra. His father was Chaudhary Tahar, a chief from Karnal located in Nagaur district, Rajasthan. For the Lord Shiva, his parents used to show great devotion. According to tradition, his mother Ramkunwari had to travel to Tyod and worship Nagaraja to conceive her son. She gave birth to a child called Teja whose name referred to his unusual brilliance as she had received blessings from Nagaraja himself. Teja married Pemal who descended from Raimal who was the headman of Pather in Jhanjhar Gotra. They were both children (six and nine months old) when they were wedded together at Pushkar Ghat on Pushkar Purnima in 1074 AD Gupta, S. (2 C.E., October 1). On the day of Teja Dasmi (Bhadrapada Shukla Dasmi), fairs are held at some temple towns across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana where people celebrate bravery and sacrifice of warrior Tejaji. On Bhadrapada Shukla Dashmi, which fell on a Saturday, 28th August 1103 AD Tejaji died fighting attackers defending cows in Sursura, Kishangarh, Ajmer. It is Sursura that Mukti Dham means. In the Rajasthani village of Parbatsar, District Nagaur, every year during the eleventh day of lunar month Bhadrapad Shukla Paksha (Aug.-Sept.) there is held a large gathering called Mela Tejaji. Rajasthan houses folklore. Such countless stories have shaped a firm tradition of an alternative faith and more concrete aspects that are worldly than

spiritualist in folk songs, bhajans, dance dramas and painting schools besides thousands of bardic singers depicting the brave deeds by the folk deities. These were popular heroes who not only laid down their lives for others but also won over people's hearts with their heroism, ethicality and disinterestedness. The rural people in Rajasthan adore the gods of folk faiths, irrespective of their places and creeds. Oral literature is made up of compositions like songs, hymns, dramas and folklore such as "Khayal," "Beawal," and "Katha." It is almost everywhere in the state where Tejaji is revered. On the tenth day of Bhadrapad, there are performances of Tejaji's "Beawala," whereas others have his "Katha" or his "Khayal" which illustrates some significant moments in his life at different places. This concert attracts hundreds of attendees each year. Besides this, lots of songs are sung by peasants that epitomize courage, determination not to give up easily and keeping one's word

### *Research Objectives*

- Identifying and analysing the symbolism in the folk story, particularly those related to the king's promise, the snake's bite, and the subsequent boon.
- Collecting and documenting different versions of the Veer Tejaji Maharaj story within the Jat community. Analysing the variations in storytelling, considering regional, familial, or temporal differences in the narrative.
- Investigating the social and ethical dimensions embedded in the folk story and its rituals. Analysing how the story's characters and the associated rituals reflect cultural norms, ethics, and moral values within the Jat community
- Documenting the specific practices, chants, or ceremonies associated with the rituals mentioned in the story.
- Exploring if and how the folk story and its associated rituals are still relevant in contemporary times within the Jat community. Investigate any adaptations or modifications to these rituals.

### *Research Questions*

- How has the Tejaji Maharaj narrative been transmitted across generations within the Jat community, and what variations exist in the storytelling tradition across different regions?
- How do individuals within the Jat community practice folk healing associated with the snake's protective boon? What are the beliefs and practices related to the use of the thread-rolling ritual as a preventive measure against snake bites?

### *Theoretical/conceptual framework/approach/Methodology*

Narrative Analysis will help in dissecting the structure of the legend. Development of the narrative, significant other incidences causing such legends to still prevail and thematic progression can be further analysed in detail, this analysis can reveal underlying patterns and motifs within the narrative, shedding light on how the story evolves over time and across different retellings within the Jat community. Additionally, by closely examining the actions, motivations, and symbolic significance of these characters, through the research we will also be able to uncover deeper layers of meaning embedded within the narrative. For example, the king's integrity and the snake's blessing may symbolize broader cultural values and beliefs within the Jat community. Another aspect of the study that has been looked into with the assistance of narrative analysis is the way that religious symbolism and ceremonial practices are woven into the story, impacting its meaning and significance within the spiritual framework of the Jat the community. The study will lead to a deeper understanding of the complex connections between religious traditions and folklore.

Symbolic interactionism highlights how shared meanings and symbols influence how people interact with one another and behave. This legend will look at the significance that symbols like the snake, the thread, and the Ganesh Chaturthi celebration hold for the Jat population. To learn more about the cultural relevance of the story and the rituals that surround it, research also looks at how community members interpret and comprehend these symbols.

Comparative Analysis – Two characters that are ingrained in Rajasthan's rich cultural legacy are Tejaji Maharaj and Pabuji. Despite having different historical backgrounds and narratives, a comparative examination reveals a number of structural and thematic similarities between these two highly esteemed people. One notable parallel between the stories of Pabuji and Tejaji Maharaj is their portrayal as heroic figures who exemplified courage, morality, and compassion. The two main characters are portrayed as righteous warriors who battle mighty opponents and obstacles to preserve honour and protect their towns. Tejaji Maharaj is revered for his unwavering devotion to duty and honour, as shown by his vow to return to the snake in the face of grave peril, whereas Pabuji is revered as a valiant warrior who protects his people from oppression and outside risks. Furthermore, the legends of Pabuji and Tejaji Maharaj also deal with sacrifice and family responsibilities. Through his battles to protect his sister and then his wife from enemy forces, Pabuji's story demonstrates his strong sense of duty to his family and community. Similar to this, Tejaji Maharaj's unwavering commitment to respecting family responsibilities and keeping his word is demonstrated by his readiness to fulfil his promise to the snake—even at the cost of his own life. Both works also look at questions of loyalty, unity, and group cohesiveness. The bonds that Pabuji established with fellow fighters and his loyal horse, Kesar Kalami, serve as a powerful example of the value of camaraderie and support among one another during challenging times. Similar to this, Tejaji Maharaj's selfless acts of bravery and his relationship with Lachha Gujar show how resilient compassion and human connection can be in the face of adversity.

A preliminary fieldwork was done beforehand, by taking some telephonic interviews of some of the family members, particularly from the family members who are from Rajasthan (maternal side). Furthermore, the researcher travelled to her native and got in touch with their paternal cousins and collected audio interviews from them.

### *Literature Review*

The following part discusses the rich tapestry of Indian folklore, which includes stories from antiquity such as the Jatakas, which predate the popular Grimm fairy tales. When compared to fables such as "Br' Rabbit and the Tarbaby," it highlights the oral storytelling that these tales still retain. The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a boom in the development of Indian folklore, with scholarly interest growing significantly following India's independence. The interaction of multiple religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Jainism, coupled with Dravidian and Aryan influences, results in the richness of Indian folklore. Despite this diversity, integration of Vedic and Sanskrit elements into many racial and religious contexts shares a common thread. Miss Bhagwat's work is acknowledged, implying that she might take into account new developments in the subject. She lists ten categories of tradition and provides brief explanations of each, including riddles, myths, and legends (Kirkland 413).

“Legends are stories about heroic characters—whether they are human or have superhuman abilities—like St. George, Robin Hood, and Hereward the Wake”. These stories frequently have historical roots because people like Hereward spearheaded real resistance efforts against the Normans in post-Conquest England. Legends are frequently strongly associated with certain places, which end up becoming synonymous with the stories themselves. Sherwood Forest, the home of Robin Hood, Tintagel, the birthplace of King

Arthur, Stonehenge, and Dover Castle, which is home to the preserved skull of Sir Gawain, one of Arthur's most famous knights, are among the examples (Torch, university of Oxford).

The Britannica article highlights the complex interactions between people and nature by examining the significant roles that plants and animals play in myths from many cultural perspectives. It enumerates six basic relationships that are prevalent in myths and represent various cultural viewpoints: opposition, descent, mixture, transformation, identity, and similarity. Examples that highlight these ideas are the divergent perspectives of farmers and hunters (Britannica).

The encyclopaedia article examines the complex history of interactions between humans and animals in mythologies worldwide, from everyday creatures to legendary creatures like dragons. These stories, which usually come from hunter-gatherer tribes, give animals meaning by depicting their special abilities and interactions—such as marriages, fights, and communication. These stories are made more complex by the transformation between human and animal forms, which reflects a variety of cultural beliefs. Instances from the Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Slavic traditions demonstrate the power dynamics in play. It also discusses the function of shamans, especially in South America, where they are believed to be able to converse with animals or change into animals such as jaguars (encyclopedia).

Native American mythology emphasizes the idea of shape-shifting and the close relationship that exists between people and animals, especially bears. We talk about totemism, the phenomenon in which certain tribes develop relationships with particular animals, and the cultural significance of animals, such as dogs representing loyalty and snakes for both destruction and healing. . While snakes are often associated with rainbows, which are linked to rain and fertility in many cultures (Australia, India, North America, Africa, etc.), ancient Chinese beliefs tied serpents with rain that brings life.

Examples from Hindu mythology, like the serpent ruler Kaliya (once, until the god Krishna defeated him, a five-headed serpent king by the name of Kaliya poisoned both the land and the water. After Krishna spared Kaliya's life, the serpent king worshiped him. Kadru, another snake goddess, is supposed to have had a thousand children and to still be a snake in human form. One of Kadru's offspring, Shesha was the world snake that the gods used to churn the oceans. Priceless items like the moon, a healing tree, and the Amrita, which stands for the water of life, arose as a result of these actions) show the various ways that snakes are interpreted around the world. Snakes have also been connected to water and land as many of them are aquatic animals.

The portrayal of animals in folklore, where they frequently have positive relationships with people. In contrast to Aesop's fables, which emphasise ethical principles, these stories show animals adopting heroes who have been abandoned, helping people mysteriously and having speech and intelligence. They highlight reciprocity, which holds that treating animals with kindness results in benefits for individuals as well animals and occasionally in life-changing events, and they depict the peaceful cohabitation of people, animals, and the natural world (NEH.GOV).

The complex interaction between animals and humans, concentrating on the idea of "fame" in anthropocentric cultures has also been researched. It looks at the ways in which some animals are made into "heroes" or "idols," even though most animals are denied the opportunity to exist as "animals". These extraordinary animals—real or imagined—have legendary or allegorical roles in society that affect the feelings and actions of people. The study investigates how societies choose and accept animals as "legends," taking into account a range of elements including biology, cultural history, literature, and theory (Cornell University).

Nandini Sahu talks about how Sanskritic and Brahmanical influences have marginalised regional customs in Indian culture. She challenges the common division

between myth and folklore by highlighting their connections. In order to show how folk traditions adapt and challenge established religious standards, particularly in light of shifting gender roles, Sahu examines the instance of Ahoi Maa, a North Indian folk deity. Figures such as Ahoi Maa coexist with popular goddesses like Durga, even though they do not fit into the cosmic hierarchy of Brahminical Hinduism. This illustrates how alternative myths may be incorporated into popular ideology (Sahu 3, Sahu 5).

Storylines centred on basic human experiences like love, parenthood, and death are very similar across boundaries of culture. These universal themes, which have their roots in common biological and life cycle events like ageing and birthing, add to the global folktale library. Even though there is scientific disagreement over the origins and transmission of stories, myths and legends are important parts of cultures and teach important lessons in ways that are memorable. Short stories are a powerful tool for information transfer between generations, providing upcoming generations with a variety of cultural perspectives.

Like the story of Tejaji Maharaj, the story of Pabuji is an integral part of Rajasthani culture and has great significance for the Jat community. Known as the "Rajasthani Robin Hood," Pabuji is regarded as a folk hero who personifies courage, morality, and compassion. His story, which has been passed down orally through the generations, tells of his courage and his unwavering commitment to upholding justice and protecting his people. The story of Tejaji Maharaj and Pabuji are similar in many aspects. Driven by a feeling of duty and honour, the noble characters in both stories face great obstacles and foes. In the same way that Tejaji confronts the snake and swears an oath of loyalty, Pabuji faces a number of hardships while working to protect his people against injustice and persecution.

Tejaji is a member of the Jat network, a predominantly peasant community. Cattle are easily visible as treasured property in Rajasthan, wherein animal husbandry both supports and dietary supplements agriculture. Consequently, Tejaji's selfless sacrifice to store cows is the source of his godlike reputation Gogaji, a special deity, also lost his life at the same time as saving the 12 cows (in Volume 1, Issue 4 of the *contour*.Weebly.Com), but in his example, the cows had been totally his, and he died protective them from his circle of relatives. The peasantry likewise holds him in high regard, and with a purpose to produce better plants, they tie a string known as "Goga-Rakhdi," which has nine knots, to the plough and the plougher's wrist (Murdumshumari Report No. 14) Similar to Tejaji, Gogaji is connected to snakes, and it is stated that the poison turns into ineffective really by using recalling Gogaji as a "Jahir Peer."

### *Analysis*

In one version of the story, the king is travelling to a location which the narrator is not sure (neither did she enquire further on it) when he comes across two agitated snakes. Only one of the serpents is saved by the king, who is also assisting in their escape from danger. Disturbed by the death of its partner, the surviving serpent tries to bite the king out of spite. But the king, aware of his duty-bound responsibilities, promises to return to the snake after completing his tasks, giving the snake permission to bite him. When the king returns, he is obviously stained with blood, however it's unclear where the blood came from in this version. Taking note of the king's state of affairs, the snake asks where shall it bite. With great courage and bravery, the king gives the serpent the order to bite his tongue. The serpent grants the king a boon, impressed by his bravery.

In an alternate narrative, the king, who is between twenty-two and twenty-three years old and has just gotten married, follows the tradition common in various towns (prevalent at that time) of picking up his bride from her parents' house. On this journey, the king has an unexpected meeting with a black cobra which ends in the snake attempting to hurt him. This dangerous situation does not dissuade the king from his determination to carry out his

matrimonial duties, and so he requests the serpent to hold off its attack until after he returns. But when the king gets to his in-laws' residence, he finds out about the livestock theft, which results in a fight with the thieves. He gets hurt in the skirmish that follows. However, once his wife gets home safely, the king goes back to the spot where he first encountered the serpent and repeats his wish to be bitten. In another version told in the setting of the family, the king goes on a military expedition and stumbles upon the snake. The king promises to keep his word to the snake after the war, even though there will be an impending battle. As promised, after the fighting stops, the king goes back to the designated spot, where the snake bites him and grants him a boon.

In "Veer Tejaji: A Deity of the Peasantry," an article by Dr. H. S. Chandalia, the story of Tejaji's valiant attempt to save cows is explored. The custom that prevailed in his area required the chieftain to start field ploughing following the first downpour. Tejaji's mother gave him the responsibility of ploughing the fields because his father and brother were away during this crucial time. Tejaji became abgry when his sister-in-law took too long to bring supper, so he set out to bring back his wife from her parents' house. In the middle of family strife over old grievances, Tejaji had no idea that he was married. On his way to pick up his sister, Tejaji had to deal with Meena Sardar's aggressiveness, which resulted in a fight. He then arranged for his sister and wife to be reunited, setting out on a treacherous and difficult journey that included a confrontation with Meena sardars. Teja encountered a snake, which Teja figuratively saved, as a result of Tejaji's determination to recover the stolen cows. Tejaji kept his word to return to the serpent, even when doing so resulted in injuries; eventually, he was bitten by its poison.

The interviews that were done—especially with the researcher's father provide insightful information about the various ways that the Tejaji Maharaj story is interpreted and the ways that it varies by region. Although the sisters of the researcher have moved from their hometowns of Rohtak and Sonipat in Haryana to Indore, the story's core has not changed much. Subtle differences do, however, show up, illustrating the community's oral traditions' versatility and distinct interpretations.

One participant highlights the cultural value of Teja Dashami beyond its mythological components by recalling a family practice of celebrating the festival without the traditional tying of the Tati thread. However, accounts from the interviewees show minor variations in the sequence of events leading up to Tejaji's meeting with the snake. From a warrior preparing for battle to a the ruler embarking on a journey to perform his duties to his marriage, the stories show how the Tejaji Maharaj legend can be applied to a variety of social circumstances. One can find a more thorough analysis of the Tejaji Maharaj story online, with a focus on its significance to Hindu mythology and cultural symbolism. Tejaji's position as a hero and protector of cows is largely a result of the Jat community's cultural mindset, which views cattle as a representation of riches and prosperity.

Tejaji's life narrative and brave deeds are illuminated by Dr. H. S. Chandalia's research, which situates them in the sociocultural framework of rural Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana. Tejaji's story, which emphasises duty, honour, and selflessness, of his meeting with the Meena Sardars and his final sacrifice confirms his place as a beloved deity among the people. Religious beliefs and folklore are mutually reinforcing, as seen by the Jat community's practices around Tejaji Maharaj, such as wearing amulets bearing his name as a barrier against snakebite. Veer Teja's vast network of temples across Rajasthan is proof of his continued influence as a protector and benefactor.

The narrative revolves around a complicated web of cultural symbols and moral precepts. The protagonist's unwavering commitment to duty, demonstrated through bravery and self-sacrifice, sets an example for the community and upholds the values of compassion, fortitude, and integrity. He assumes responsibility for the cows' rescue in all of these stories,

prioritising it over his domestic responsibilities, and he successfully accomplishes the heroic task of releasing the cows. It may be interpreted as a sign of his religious convictions, but in reality, it symbolises his sense of duty to other living creatures. As a peasant, he values cows' financial worth equally as a source of revenue. Another thing that is evident in is his dedication to following upon his word.

Despite his wounds, he goes back to the snake to carry out the agreement he had with it. Almost all heroes that are sung about in oral literature possess these kinds of heroic traits Gupta, S. (2 C.E., October 1). The evolution of the narrative over time highlights how adaptable folklore is it absorbs new interpretations and meanings within shifting social situations. The tale of Tejaji Maharaj continues to have a profound impact on the collective consciousness of the Jat community, strengthening spiritual beliefs and cultural identity. This resonance extends beyond oral traditions that have been passed down through the years to modern activities. When the peasants begin ploughing the fields during the season of rain, they begin by way of making a song Teja-ter, songs that are committed to Tejaji. They think that this bodes well for the plants and could result in a strong output. (Swami 83). Because Tejaji's life and theirs are similar, the peasants can relate. They must cope with occasions which are just like Tejaji's. As a end result, the songs function a source of idea for their normal responsibilities and worldly lifestyles. They don't have anything to do with the supernatural, the religious realm, or the concept of emancipation.

Tejaji is regarded as a god of snakes, much like Gogaji, some other folks god of Rajasthan. It's normally believed that if a person bitten by means of a snake wears Tejaji ki Tant, a string of Tejaji, tied to his proper leg, the poison will no longer damage him.(Gazeteers from Rajputana District 34) Following the suitable services and prayers, the thread is cut for the individual who has been brought to the shrine of Tejaji. In most of the woman singers' songs, Tejaji is requested to undo the consequences of the Black Cobra's poison. (Choyal 5) Another track tells the tale of ways the snake's poison not affects the victim just by accepting the call Tejaji.

### *Research Gap and Relevance*

The legends of Tejaji Maharaj and Pabuji are briefly examined in the analysis, but a thorough comparison could be conducted. A thorough analysis of their similarities and differences with respect to story structure, cultural relevance, moral issues, and societal influence can provide important insights on the methods of folklore transmission and development both inside and outside of the Jat group. Though the tale of Pabuji and legend of Tejaji draw very similar themes of bravery, selflessness, and uprightness of character, narratives like that of Pabuji always find their way towards the mainstream, and others remain confined to specific regions or communities.

In addition to serving as symbols of the peasantry, Tejaji and some other deities have additionally been important social reformers. Numerous historical bills reveal how caste turned into used to divide society, with many groups appearing as untouchables. Unlike the traditional Brahminical order, these folks deities showed those tribes a completely liberal and friendly method and granted them all the freedom to belief their faith as they felt was appropriate. The majority of folks deities thus became presiding deities of the labouring people and aided the peasantry in particular in claiming their identity and independence.

The research contributes to the field of folklore studies by conducting this comprehensive study and providing an in-depth knowledge of the Tejaji Maharaj's narrative, its development, and its cultural ramifications within the Jat group. This research broadens our knowledge of oral traditions and provides a framework for investigating the intricate



relationships that exist in various cultural contexts between religious symbolism and folklore. By ensuring that these tales are not lost to modernity, research into the Tejaji Maharaj legend will contribute to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural legacy. To determine the mutually beneficial connection between folktales and religious frameworks, the study closes the gap between studies of folklore and religious beliefs. By examining how Tejaji Maharaj's narrative was incorporated into religious rituals, the study provides an interdisciplinary viewpoint on the cultural dynamics of the Jat the community. An examination of the three main elements of the Tejaji Maharaj story bravery, honesty, and supernatural favors offers important background information for comprehending the social mores and beliefs that are characteristic of Jat society. Gaining a more profound understanding of these ramifications makes it easier to appreciate the shared identity and perspective.

### *Scope*

Comparing the legend of Tejaji Maharaj to other legends from the Indian subcontinent or other cultures may aid in our understanding of cross-cultural mythologies and narrative systems. Furthermore, by comparing and contrasting themes, motifs, and story elements, scholars can identify patterns and unique aspects of legends in a variety of cultural contexts. A more thorough understanding of the Tejaji Maharaj's narrative and its significance to the Jat community could be achieved by combining multidisciplinary perspectives from the fields of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. Anthropological perspectives could investigate the legend's symbolic meanings and rituals in relation to broader cultural frameworks, while sociological analyses could focus on how the legend affects community dynamics and social structures. Tejaji Maharaj's narrative, indigenous knowledge, and cultural legacy must be digitally saved and conserved because oral traditions are dynamic and modernization poses a risk of cultural loss. Digital archives or multimedia platforms could facilitate the recording and dissemination of various oral histories, customs, and cultural practices, so aiding in the preservation of the legend for future generations.

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