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The Geography, Art and Culture of Rajasthan

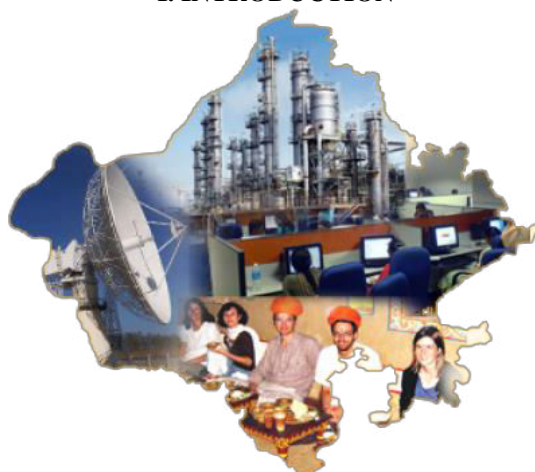
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ABSTRACT: Rajasthan - Rajputana earlier name is a land of royalty and heroic warriors. With India becoming an independent nation, the largest state in India. It is land locked and has borders with Punjab and Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the East and Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh in the South. It has international border with Pakistan. Aravalli ranges steadies the state from South West to North East, and forms a natural barrier to the monsoon winds, so that the land gets progressively drier west to the Aravallis, Culminating in the Fragile desert environment of Thar. Rajasthan is also a state which is rich in its amazing variety of traditional skills. Its handicrafts, tie and dye work, hand block printing, quilts, blue pottery, statue making, marble craft, embroidery, brass work, miniature painting, enamel ware woollen and hand knitted carpets, sandal wares and exquisite Gems and Jewellery, fit to adorn the nobility are some of them. This range is perhaps unmatched in India. It is a land of colour, music and dance, festivals and rituals. The landscape covers the expanse from forested and hilly, to pastoral and flat, to shifting sand dunes and this makes it a tourist paradise. Tiger Reserve and National Park of Sariska and Ranthambore, Ghana Bird Sanctuary of Bharatpur and many other such places are major attraction for tourists. Rajasthan is known for its colourful and vibrant lifestyle, with the numerous fairs and festivals that are organized here. They are also a reflection of the indomitable spirit of the Rajasthanis who have learnt to enjoy themselves even in the all of conditions. The state also glows with its historic past of royalty and magnificence. Known as "a land of courage and gallantry", Rajasthan has always fascinated people from far and wide. The indomitable forts, splendid palaces, amazing sand dunes, tranquil lakes, beautiful temples, exotic wildlife, etc of this state leave you truly mesmerized. It is full of so many contradictions that are even hard to comprehend.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, culture, geography, desert, vegetation, music, painting, food, festivals

I. INTRODUCTION



Like its varying topography, Rajasthan has varying climate. The weather or climate of the Rajasthan can be broadly classified into four distinct seasons. They are - Pre-monsoon, which is the hot season preceding the monsoon and extends from April to June, the Monsoon that occurs in the month of June in the eastern region and mid- July in the western arid regions, the Post-monsoon that commences from mid-September and continues till November and the Winter that extends from December to March, January being the coldest month of the year. The average temperature in winter ranges from 8° to 28° C (46° to 82° F) and in summer the average temperature range from 25° to 46° C (77° to 115° F).[1]



Map of Rajasthan depicting cities

Rajasthan has varying topographic features though a major part of the state is dominated by parched and dry region. The extensive topography includes rocky terrain, rolling sand dunes, wetlands, barren tracts or land filled with thorny scrubs, river-drained plains, plateaus, ravines and wooded regions. In a more broad way the topography of Rajasthan can be divided in the following regions- the Aravalli or Hilly regions, the Thar and other arid regions, the Plateaus including Vindhya and the Malwa, Fertile plains including the Mewar, the Forest Regions and Waterbodies including Rivers and Salt Lakes.[2]

The soil and vegetation of Rajasthan alters with its wide-ranging topography of the state and the availability of water. The varied kind of soils available in Rajasthan are mostly sandy, saline, alkaline and chalky (calcareous). Clay, loamy, black lava soil and nitrogenous soils are also found. Owing to the limited rainfall seasonal vegetation such as a few grass species, shrubs and dwarf trees can be found. However food crops are grown in the plains that are drained by the rivers and streamlets owing to the alluvial and clay soil deposits. The hilly tracts of the Aravali are characterized by the black, lava soils that sustain the growth of cotton and sugarcane.[3]

The Thar Desert or the Great Indian Desert encompasses about 70% of total landmass of Rajasthan and hence it is identified as the "Desert State of India". The Rajasthan desert which forms a major portion of the Thar Desert is the biggest desert in India and encompasses the districts of Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner and Jodhpur. In fact the Rajasthan Desert comprises the desert triangle of three cities - Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jodhpur. The desert becomes very hot during the summer and it experiences extreme climate with an average annual rainfall less than 25 cm. Days are hot and the nights are cold.

Rajasthan is the abode of certain flora and fauna that are particularly endemic to arid regions and are specially adapted biologically to survive in the dry, waterless regions of the state. Owing to the varied topography one can find an assortment of flora and fauna and avifauna in Rajasthan. The tree species found are teak, bamboo, varied species of acacia and khejri. Some National Parks house numerous species of herbs and plants that have medicinal values. The fauna of Rajasthan consists of 23 species of lizards and 25 species of serpents including the Spiny Tail Lizards and the Russel's Vipers. Other wildlife species include Antelopes, Indian Gazelles or Chinkaras, endangered Great Indian Bustard, Black Bucks, the Nilgai or the bluebull, wild cats, silver foxes and so on. There are about 450 species of avifauna including various migratory birds.

II. OBSERVATIONS

Rajasthani Music has a diverse collection of musicians. Major schools of music includes Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaipur. Jaipur is a major Gharanas which is well-known for its reverence for rare ragas. Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana is associated with Alladiya Khan (1855–1943) who was among the great singers of the late 19th and early 20th century. Alladiya Khan was trained both in Dhrupad and Khyal styles, though his ancestors were Dhrupad singers.[4]



Ghoomar and chari dance

The most distinguishing feature of Jaipur Gharana is its complex and lilting melodic form. Rajasthani Paintings - Colorful tradition of Rajasthani people reflects in art of paintings as well. This painting style is called Maru-Gurjar Painting. It throws light on the royal heritage of ancient Rajasthan. Under the Royal patronage various styles of paintings developed, cultivated and practiced in Rajasthan and reached its pinnacle of glory by 15th to 17th centuries. The major painting styles are phad paintings, miniature paintings, kajali paintings, gemstone paintings etc. There is incredible diversity and imaginative creativity found in Rajasthani paintings. Major schools of art are Mewar, Marwar, Kishangarh, Bundi, Kota, Jaipur and Alwar. Phad paintings (Mewar Style of painting) is the most ancient rajasthani art form. Phad paintings, essentially a scroll painting done on cloth, are beautiful specimen of the Indian cloth paintings. These have their own styles and patterns and are very popular due to their vibrant colors and historic themes. The Phad of God Devnarayan is largest among the popular Pars in Rajasthan. The painted area of God Devnarayan Ki Phad is 170 square feet. [5]



Some other Pars are also prevalent in Rajasthan, but being of recent origin they are not classical in composition. Another famous Par painting is Pabuji Ki Phad. Pabuji Ki Phad is painted on a 15 x 5 ft. canvas. Other famous heroes of Phad paintings are Gogaji, Prithviraj Chauhan, Amar Singh Rathore etc.



III. DISCUSSION

Men in Rajasthan wear dhotis, kurta and paggar or safa (kind of turban headgear). Traditional Chudidhar payjama (puckered trousers) frequently replaces dhoti in different regions. Women wear ghagra (long skirt) and kanchli (top). [6] However, dress style changes with lengths and breaths of vast Rajasthan. Dhoti is worn in different ways in Marwar (Jodhpur area) or Shekhawati (Jaipur area) or Hadoti (Bundi area). Similarly, there are a few differences between paggar and safa despite both being Rajasthan headgear. Mewar has the tradition of paggar whereas Marwar has the tradition of safa. Rajasthan is also famous for its amazing ornaments. From ancient times Rajasthani people have been wearing jewellery of various metals and materials. Traditionally women wore Gems-studded gold and silver ornaments. Historically, silver or gold ornaments were used for interior decoration stitched on curtains, seat cushions, handy-crafts etc. Wealthy Rajasthanis used Gems-studded gold and silver on swords, shields, knives, pistols, cannon, doors, thrones etc. which reflects the importance of ornaments in lives of Rajasthanis.[7]



Camel , paggadi and lehngaa (cultural basics)

Rich Rajasthani culture reflects in the tradition of hospitality which is one of its own kind. Varying degree of geography has resulted in a rich cuisine involving both vegetarian and non vegetarian dishes. Rajasthani food is

characterized by the use of Jowar, Bajri, legumes and lentils, its distinct aroma and flavor achieved by the blending of spices including curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chili, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, cumin and rosewater. Rajasthani cuisines are a whole lot of varieties varying regionally between the arid desert districts and the greener eastern areas. Most famous dish is Dal-Baati-Churma. It is a little bread full of clarified butter roasted over hot coals and served with a dry, flaky sweet made of gram flour, and Ker-Sangri made with a desert fruit and beans.



Ghewar sweet dish



Gatte ki sabji

IV. RESULTS

Festivals hold an unusual lure for the people of Rajasthan and they find any number of reasons to celebrate. Chances are, while travelling in the state, you will come across a number of local fairs and festivals in which you can participate. However, some of the larger and more important celebrations are listed below. This list does not include those festivals that are common to all parts of the country such as Holi - Festival of Colors, Diwali - Festival of Lights and Dussehra - Festival celebrating victory of Good over Evil. The Pushkar Camel Fair is one of the largest in India and the only one of its kind in the entire world. During the fair, Lakhs of people from rural India flock to Pushkar, along with camel and cattle for several days of livestock trading, horse dealing, pilgrimage and religious festival.[8]



Kalbeliya dance

This small town, becomes a cultural phenomenon when colourfully dressed devotees, musicians, acrobats, folk dancers, traders, comedians, 'sadhus' and tourists reach here during Pushkar fair. According to Hindu chronology, it takes place in the month of Kartika (October or November) beginning on 'ashtmi' 8th day of Lunar Calendar and continues till full moon ('Poonnima'). The camel and cattle trading is at its peak during the first half of festival period. During the later half, religious activities dominate the scenario. Devotees take dips in the holy "Sarovar" lake, as the sacred water is known to bestow salvation. The Chandrabhaga fair is held every year at Jhalarapatan in the month of Kartik (Oct-Nov). The River Chadrabhaga runs here and is considered holy by the people residing in this part of Rajasthan. On the Full moon night of 'Kartik', thousands of pilgrims take a holy dip in the river. The fair, held on the last day of Kartik, attracts devotees who bathe in the holy waters at this spot which is known as Chandravati.[9]



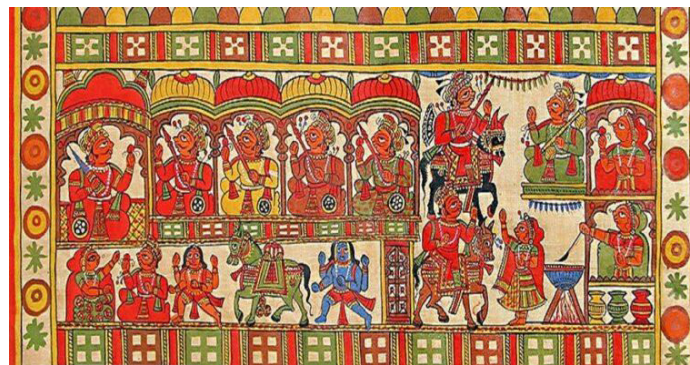
Jaisalmer desert festival

A big cattle fair which blends religion with commerce is held here. Livestock like Cows, horses, buffaloes, camels and bullocks are brought from distant parts for sale. Traders from various parts of Madhya-Pradesh and Maharashtra converge here and brisk trading takes place. The fair provides an opportunity for the tourists to acquaint themselves with the people of this region and their rituals and traditions. This eight-day fair held every year during the month of January - February, is popularly known as the cattle fair and is the second largest in Rajasthan.[10]



Blue pottery

Nagaur Town is the most picturesque of Rajput townships. The town becomes a sea of animals, trading over 70,000 bullocks, camels and horses every year. The bullocks are known for their fleetness. Not only are the animals lavishly decorated, even their owners flaunt their colorful turbans and long moustaches. From shearing sheep to handsome marwari horses to spices all compiled in one fair. Attractions include the 'mirchi' bazaar (largest red chilly market of India), wooden items, iron-crafts and camel leather accessories.



Sports like tug-of-war, camel races, bullock races and cockfights; jugglers; puppeteers, storytellers; and exciting campfire evenings are held to entertain the tourists. Folk music of the Jodhpur variation echoes the tranquil desert sand.[11]



Jaipuri jootis (footwear)

V. CONCLUSIONS



Rich Rajasthani culture reflects in the tradition of hospitality which is one of its own kind. Rajasthan region varies from arid desert districts to the greener eastern areas. Varying degree of geography has resulted in a rich cuisine involving both vegetarian and non vegetarian dishes. Rajasthani food is characterized by the use of Jowar, Bajri, legumes and lentils, its distinct aroma and flavor achieved by the blending of spices including curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chili, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, cumin and rosewater. [12,13] Major crops of Rajasthan are Jowar, Bajri, Maize, Ragi, Rice, Wheat, Barely, Gram, Tur, pulses, Ground nut, Sesamum etc. Millets, lentils and beans are most basic ingredients in food. The majority of Hindu and Jain Rajasthanis are vegetarian. Rajasthani Jains do not eat after sundown and their food does not contain garlic and onions.[14]



Dal baati churma (delicacy)

Rajasthani cuisines are a whole lot of varieties varying regionally between the arid desert districts and the greener eastern areas. Most famous dish is Dal-Baati-Churma. It is a little bread full of clarified butter roasted over hot coals and served with a dry, flaky sweet made of gram flour, and Ker-Sangri made with a desert fruit and beans.[15]

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