



Timeless Tales of Pabuji

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Introduction

I want to share all of my joy of coming across the folk stories of Pabuji. As a child, I have heard of many of these folk stories that are originally sung in the ‘Oral tradition’, not written but narrated. Every time the story is retold different textures get added, from one generation to another for hundreds of years. I heard them with great interest but I could not recall the stories later. I tried to find these stories online but only found the summarised version. On searching a little more I came across a translation of Pabuji’s ballads sung in the ‘Oral tradition’ in a book “The Epics of Pabuji” written by John D Smith. I had finally found the stories. All I wanted to do next was to recover them and make them known to people. This book was my attempt to recover these stories.

However, the three stories in this book are not only about holding on to the ancient tale but also about looking at these stories in a new light. Pabuji’s stories are driven by the secondary characters, but these secondary characters are often not emphasised enough. Through this book, I highlight the importance and agency of the secondary characters: Deval, Dhebo, and Pema. Pabuji’s stories are important to this project as an inspiration and to provide relevant context.

These stories are ancient but they give us a sense of the different struggles of people in their contexts. In recovering these stories, I attempt to take them beyond Rajasthan. I invite you to open “Timeless Tales of Pabuji” and dip into any story. My favourite? Every one of them is special. I leave you to discover yours.



The Tale of Saffron

“Long time ago, in the arid desert region of Rajasthan, men of all communities were compelled to migrate, for thousands of years, in search of livelihood or fortune. To follow the tradition of early marriage and betrothal, these men would marry women at an early age. Marriages in this region of Rajasthan were based on clan exogamy. These marriages took place between families that were almost 1000kms apart, where young teenage girls would live away from family in strange lands. The girl’s family would give grains and other produce as dowry to the girl and her husband’s family. One such girl brought Saffron from her homeland to Rajasthan and introduced the rang Kesariya that represents the golden dunes of this desert region. Kesariya rang was used by many (Hindus, Buddhists) in India showcasing qualities of sacrifice by Sannyasis. The Rajputs adopted the saffron turban and the saffron robes to represent their honour and sacrifice.”



A Charan Goddess named Deval had a magical mare and lots of cattle. She lived alone with her cattle near the village of Kolu. One day, Pabuji's friend Chando visits her assembly and calls out to her.

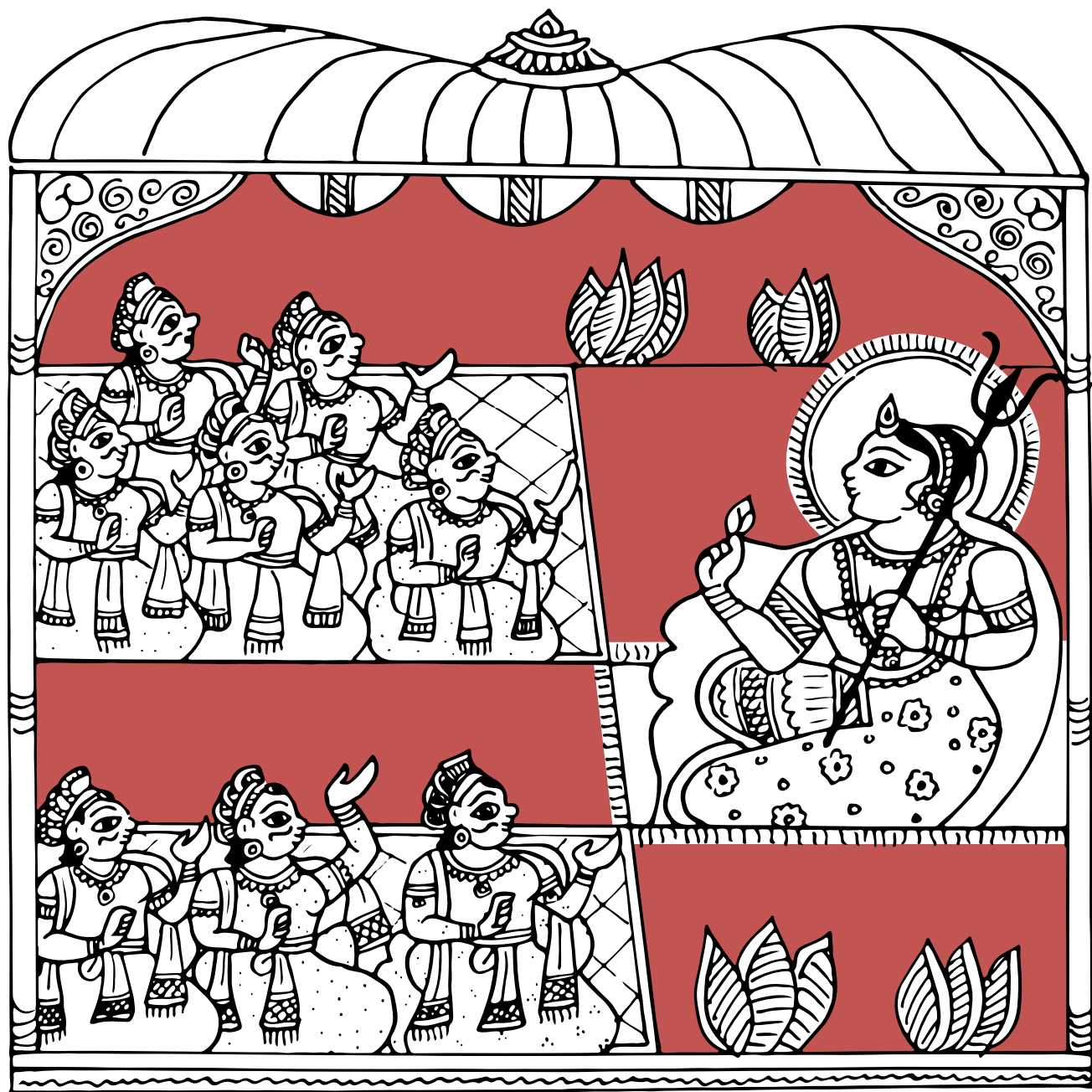
Hearing his call, Deval yells out of curiosity,
'O Chando, tell me what is on your mind?
On what great business have you come to my glorious assembly?
I shall help you with everything that I can!'

'O Lady Deval, today you have a great task to perform.
Without Saffron, Pabuji will not become a bridegroom!
O Lady Deval, only you know the features of Saffron!
Tell me the features of Saffron!
Tell me where can I find Saffron?'
Said Chando, desperately in need of help.

The wise Deval replied with all the rare knowledge she possessed,
'O Chando, Listen! There is Saffron in Lakkhu Pathan's village!
On my way back from Ano Vagelos wedding-processions,
I saw fields of Saffron in Lakkhu Pathan's Garden.
O Chando, let me get my trident of Mother Karni,
Let us make swift progress and help Pabuji!'

The Charan lady Deval went with Chando to Pabuji's fort. The proud Deval entered the assembly room crowded with courtiers with costly shawls over their shoulders. She shined brighter than everyone in the room as she asked Pabuji,





‘O Pabuji, I hear you have business with the Charans today!
I hear you want Saffron in your wedding processions.’

‘O Lady Deval, I hear you went to Ano Vagelos wedding-processions,
On the way back you saw fields of Saffron!
O Lady Deval, make swift speed!
Without Saffron, I will not become a bridegroom.’ Pabuji replied.

With all the wisdom in her eyes, Deval announced in the assembly,
‘O Pabuji, sit with an alert mind!
O Pabuji, I shall bring loads of Saffron for you!’

The fearless Deval took the trident of Mother Karni in her hand and set out to Lakkhu Pathan’s land. As she travelled she sang songs of Pabuji, the deity of the desert. She spoke highly of him to everyone she met on the way to Lakkhu Pathan’s land. When Deval reached her destination, she entered Lakkhu Pathan’s crowded assembly room and paid her respects. As she walked through the room she shined as bright as Mother Karni. Lakkhu Pathan could tell right away it was Deval who had come to his assembly.

The pompous Lakkhu Pathan asked,
‘O Deval, tell me what is on your mind!’

Deval replied humbly,
‘O proud king, hear what is on my mind!
O Lakkhu Pathan, the serious businessman,

I have come to your glorious assembly on a domestic matter.
There is known to be a plot of Saffron in your garden.
I have come for loads of Saffron!’

‘O Deval, my Saffron is very costly.’
Said Lakkhu Pathan as he threw shade at Deval.
Do you really have business with Saffron?
Why do you need loads of Saffron?’
Asked Lakkhu Pathan arrogantly.

His comments did not affect Deval. She stood calmly and replied,
‘O Lakkhu Pathan! In the barren desert lives the great Pabuji.
Without Saffron, Pabuji will not become a bridegroom!
Give me a few flowers and a little Saffron from your garden,
So that I can take it back home for Pabuji.’

The calm Deval made Lakkhu Pathan furious, he replied angrily,
‘O Deval, my flowers are for me alone!
If your Pabuji needs flowers, there is plenty ak in Marwar,
Pluck ak flowers and make a garland for Pabuji’s throat!
You can take garlands of ak,
But you will not get your hands on my Saffron,
Not today! not tomorrow!’

‘O Lakkhu Pathan, you are a great king.
If a king will not come to the aid of a king, then whose aid will he come?’



Give me a little Saffron and my Pabuji will become a bridegroom!’
Said Deval, the wise Goddess.

Once again her wisdom made Lakkhu Pathan furious. His arrogance made him lose his calm and he impulsively blurted out,
‘O Deval, I employ men like Chando and Dhebo to oversee my granaries, and men like Pabuji fan me when I go to sleep on my bed. I have no saffron for you today, nor tomorrow.’

Deval became angry. The calmness on her face vanished. The crowded assembly witnessed the changing aura and coldness surrounding everything. Deval’s wisdom helped her keep calm and she left Lakkhu Pathan’s assembly

room. She set out and travelled back to Kolu. As she travelled she sang songs of Pabuji, the deity of the desert. She spoke highly of him to everyone she met on the way to Kolu. At last, she reached Pabuji’s assembly room.

At her arrival, Pabuji rushedly asked,
‘O goddess Deval, what is on your mind?
In what kind of mood did Lakkhu Pathan discuss matters with you?’

‘O Pabuji, he said that he would employ Chando and Dhebo to oversee his granaries, he said that he would employ you, Pabuji, to serve in his bedchamber.’
Said Deval, with disappointment.





After hearing Lakkhu Pathan's harsh words Pabuji asked Chando to bring Kesar Kalami from the underground rooms. Kesar Kalami was a mare that he secured from Deval years ago. She shined as bright as Deval. Pabuji started preparing to fight Lakkhu Pathan with Chando's help. Deval knew it was going to cause a lot of havoc, but she remained calm throughout as if she knew something strange.

As Pabuji took Kesar Kalami to fight the battle he said,
'O Goddess Deval, Kesar Kalami is a true blessing!
O Goddess Deval, I am taking her to fight against Lakkhu Pathan.
I will secure that Saffron and become a bridegroom.
Lady Deval, give me your blessing!
With your blessing, we shall win this battle.'

'O Pabuji, I have been to the far shores of the seven seas.
There I found Kesar Kalami, the mystical mare.
She will help you with all you need!' Said Deval, with wisdom in her eyes.

Pabuji mounted Kesar and as he mounted, his brave leading warriors conversed with him. The other horses raced and their hooves were beating on the earth and Kesar Kalami shone in the sky. Pabuji reached Lakkhu Pathan's assembly and started the fight out in the open. Lakkhu Pathan had the magic power of the twenty-four pirs and would not accept defeat. Pabuji had given his mare a sudden jerk of the bridle and made her rise up high. With the power of the pirs Lakkhu Pathan erected spears everywhere beneath the mare. Lakkhu Pathan had put spears for twenty-four kos around the mare. Pabuji found himself in a difficult situation and remembered Deval's words of how Kesar Kalami will help in the time of need.

Not knowing what to do Pabuji said
'Mother Kesar, there is no room now to set foot on the earth.
How can I now descend to the earth and fight against Lakkhu Pathan,
When he has covered every inch with spears?'

To his questions the mare Kesar spoke out,
'O Pabuji, in the middle of the spears you can see a single great spear,
If you can somehow pull it out, Lakkhu's magic power of the twenty-four pirs
will completely vanish, and you can defeat Lakkhu Pathan with that spear.'

Not knowing how to do that Pabuji asked, 'Mother, how can I take the spear?'

The mare replied, 'O Pabuji, I shall rise into the night sky with its constellations,
from there I shall come down on my back. When I am coming down on my back,
do not let any spear touch your body, and you will easily take the great spear.'

Suddenly, Kesar rose high, and from there she returned on her back. As she
returned on her back, she suddenly came near the spear, and Pabuji took
the spear. When he took the spear, the magic power of the twenty-four pirs
which was in the spear vanished. Now Lakkhu Pathan had no power left.

He put his hands together in supplication and stood before Pabuji and said,
'O great lord, spare my life!'



Pabuji's companions killed every man in Lakkhu Pathan's army and plucked the Saffron from his gardens. They filled Deval's oxen that were standing there with loads of Saffron. They defeated Lakkhu Pathan so badly that he regretted not helping Deval when she asked for help. The same night Pabuji returned to Kolu with his men. On their way back they heard songs of Pabuji, the deity of the desert. On the third night, they reached Kolu and entered the assembly where Deval waited patiently.

As Pabuji entered his assembly he said,
'Chando my chieftain, make swift speed, put the oxen-loads down in the court at Kolu! Chando my chieftain, have Kesar Kalami tethered in my sight!'

Pabuji was seated in his court at Kolu, close in front of him were seated his brave leading warriors.

As he met Deval he said,
'O Goddess Deval, I have won the battle of the Saffron! O Goddess Deval! Kesar Kalami is a true blessing!'

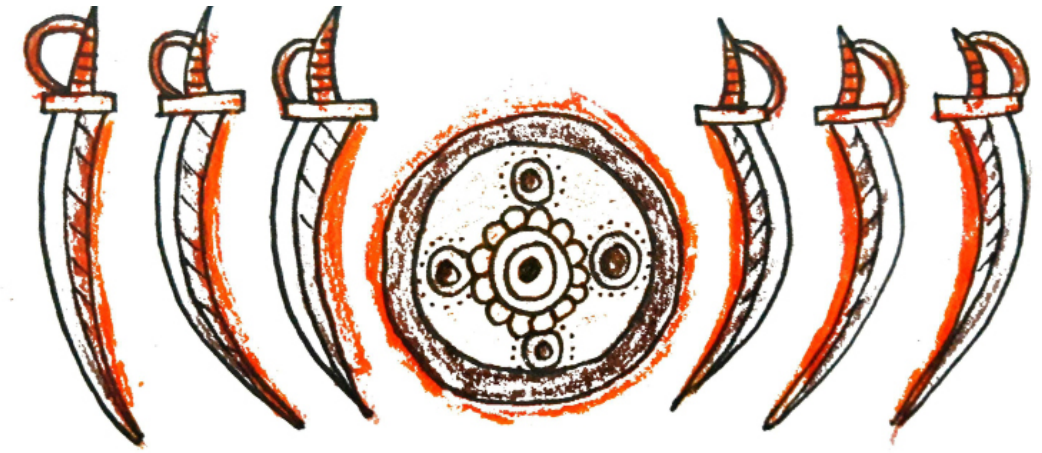
Hearing the good news Deval replied,
'O Pabuji, you were destined to win this battle! It is destiny that played its role'

Deval smiled as she talked about destiny playing its role, almost as if she wrote that destiny herself. The assembly room started the wedding procession, Deval and Chando put the Saffron into a clean tub and dyed Pabuji's turban, after that they dyed Kesar's horse cloth and after that, they dyed the chieftains' great turbans.



The Tale of Jayal

“Many communities in Rajasthan went through ‘Rajputisation’. They adopted the value system of Rajputs for legitimization, as being a part of the smaller communities they did not have access to many political occupations and power. Various communities went through this process in different ways: some fabricated the genealogy by bribing Brahmins and some converted into Rajputs through hypergamous marriage. As Rajput was an ‘open caste category’, it was available to everyone who served in the state army which enabled them to translate this service into grants and power at the local level. So, there was no one true Rajput community, anyone who possessed power of money or the valour similar to a Rajput could become a Rajput. The Rajputana was not defined by blood but by the code of honour and sacrifice.”



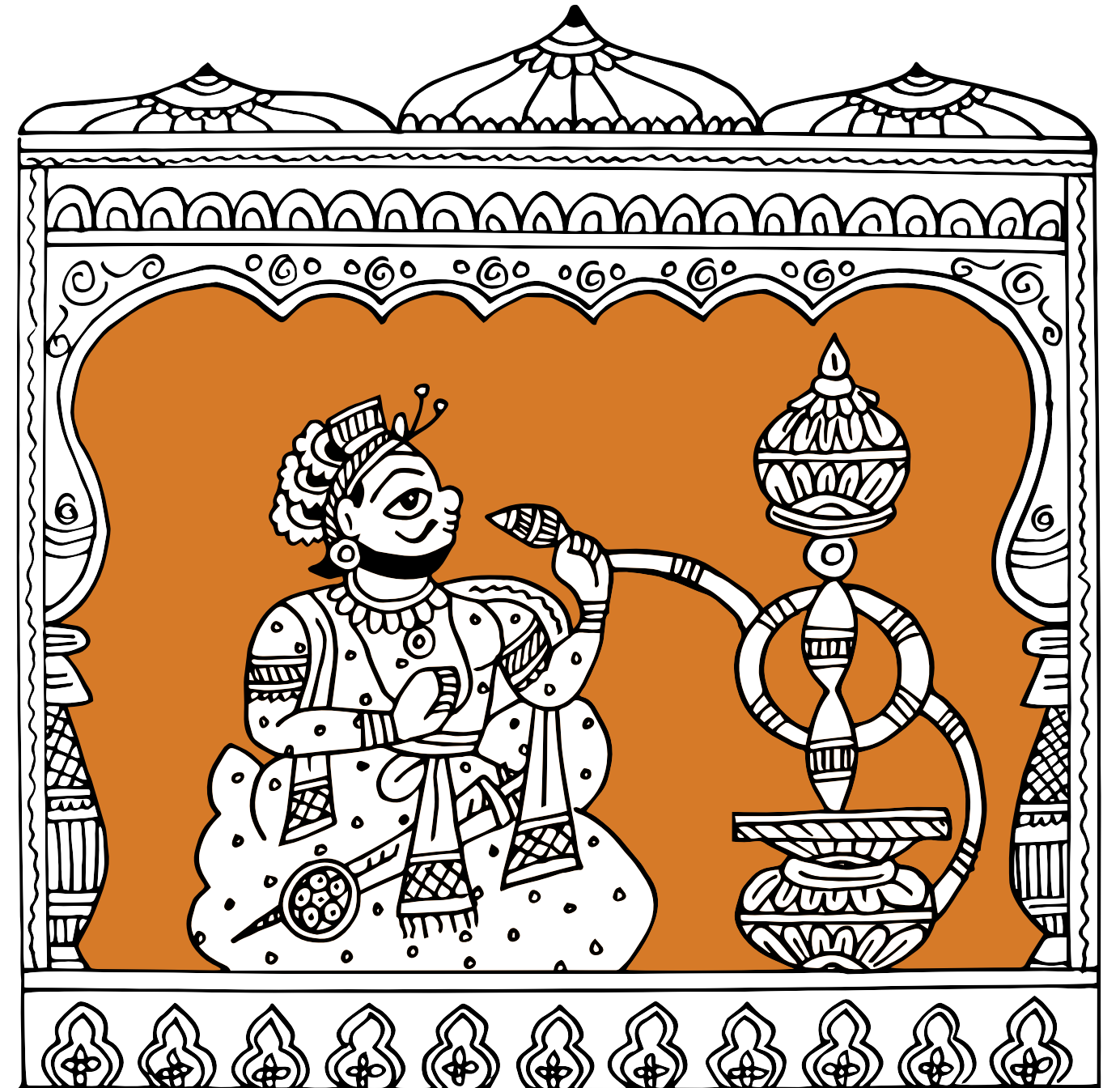
Dhebo was born in the land of Gujarat with his brother Chando. Dhebo and his brother were abandoned by their father after their birth when a brahmin cast their horoscope that they would bring horrible misfortune to their father. The two brothers were brought up by a fisherman from the Bhopa community. Dhebo had an insatiable appetite for food and drinks. On the other hand, Chando was a calm soul, loved and appreciated by everyone around him. They both were fine brave men with pride running through their blood. They were no Rajputs but every act defined them as one.

The two brothers met Pabuji in a deep forest and soon became his companions. They were committed to him with their whole heart. One day, Chando was discussing the rude comments that Saragde Khichi made while he was on business, in Pabuji's assembly, in Dhebo's presence.

Chando said,
'O Pabuji, no matters can be discussed!
There is no way to discuss matters with Saragde Khichi.
O Pabuji, Saragde Khichi said he would employ Chando and Dhebo to oversee his granaries, he said that he would employ Pabuji to serve in his bedchamber.'

The chieftains were shocked, a strange silence occupied the assembly room walls. As Chando proceeded to narrate the incident, Pabuji interrupted and said,
'Chando my chieftain,
We shall solve this matter at the earliest,'

Dhebo was filled with anger as he could not stand Saragde's harsh words. He felt





a rage inside but he kept it to himself. Dhebo set out with Pabuji and others to fight Saragde Khichi. They travelled to Jayal where Saragde ruled to settle matters. The team of Chieftains on horses ran at great speed and in front of them, all was Dhebo on his horse Haranagar. Dhebo was violent and an impetuous servant of Pabuji. He possessed all the qualities of a Rajput warrior, a man of noble character. Soon they reached the Saragde Khichi's assembly and the war started. Pabuji and his army of men started fighting against Khichi. Dhebo was unstoppable, his anger was coming to the surface, he could feel the rage growing inside of him. All the nearby vultures start circling above Dhebo, waiting for him to provide them with food. Dhebo was a man of such noble character that he could never refuse any request. His motivation to kill Saragde doubled as the she-vulture's asked to be fed.

Dhebo listened to the vultures and said,
'O she-vulture's, wait a little while,
Today I will satiate your hunger with fresh organs of Saragde Khichi!'

Dhebo shot arrows as if Savan was pouring down. He slew Saragde Khich's excellent army with his expertise, but he left Saragde Khichi alive. Scared for his life, Saragde tried to run away but Dhebo seized his left arm. As Dhebo kept him from running away, he cut out Saragde's vital organs from behind. Dhebo the opium addict killed Saragde Khichi. Dhebo won the first battle all with his valour, he won the first battle before Pabuji.

As Dhebo dragged Saragde to the she-vulture's, he looked at the sky and said,
'O she-vulture's, the feast is ready,
O she-vulture's, I hope this satiates your hunger!'

Everyone looked at Dhebo with disappointment. He won this battle alone but it made no one happy. He killed Saragde and saved the bloodshed of his people, but it made no one happy. He saved hundreds of villagers from the wrath of Saragde Khichi, but it made no one happy.

Unable to understand the reaction of Pabuji's army, Dhebo asked,
'O Pabuji, Why are you irritated?
O fellow Chieftains, Why are you irritated?'

Pabuji exclaimed,
'Dhebo my chieftain, you have made our name truly immortal in the land,
We have taken on a feud against (Saragde's son Jindrav) Khichi of Jayal!'

'O Pabuji, what are you scared of?
You have formed a foolish idea in your head!
We shall not leave any Khichi alive.' Dhebo replied.

Pabuji informed Dhebo as he sighed,
'O Dhebo, we have done ill in this land,
Today we have begun a feud against Jindrav!
Jindrav is known as a knight equal in strength to us.'

To this Dhebo replied,
'O Pabuji, I am not scared of any power!
I am a man with no power,
But I am a man of great valour.



I will choose to die for my people,
But I will not succumb to the fear like you.'

Pabuji's army looked at Dhebo with respect in their eyes, as if they found a Rajput in a Nayak boy. Dhebo's courage shook the crowd but Pabuji had something else going on in his mind.

To bring the situation under control, Pabuji announced,
'O Chieftain Chando, Let us marry my sister Pema to Jindrav Khichi.
O Chieftain Chando, make swift speed,
Take garlands for a bridegroom.'

Dhebo could not believe what he heard. Rejecting Pabuji's solution he said,
'O Pabuji, Jindrav is a cruel soul.
O Pabuji, Rajputani Pema is a gentle soul. O Pabuji, this shall not end well.
O Pabuji, have faith in our warriors, we shall defeat Jindrav at all costs.'

'Dhebo, you caused this havoc on us,
By marrying my sister to him he will become my brother-in-law.
He shall not harm his own family,' said Pabuji.'

Dhebo felt ignored and despised. After all, his valour brought him distress. The
Nayak boy felt helpless, as he was torn between his faithful commitment to Pabuji



and his conscience. He was no Rajput but every act defined him as one. Clenching his mind and soul, he supported Pabuji's decision and set out with Chando to take the marriage proposal to Jindrav Khichi. They paid their respects as they reached the assembly of Jindrav and brought to notice the proposal of marriage. As Chando put on Jindrav the garland of flowers, Dhebo saw a stern gaze on Jindrav's face, as Jindrav thought, 'I shall cause Pabuji's sister to grieve her marriage!'.

Dhebo's conscience overpowered his commitment to Pabuji and on his return to Pabuji's assembly he said,
'O Great lord Pabuji, nothing seems right.
By all means, marry your sister Pema to him,
but Jindrav will not give up the feud!
I saw it in his eyes!
He will not give up the feud.'

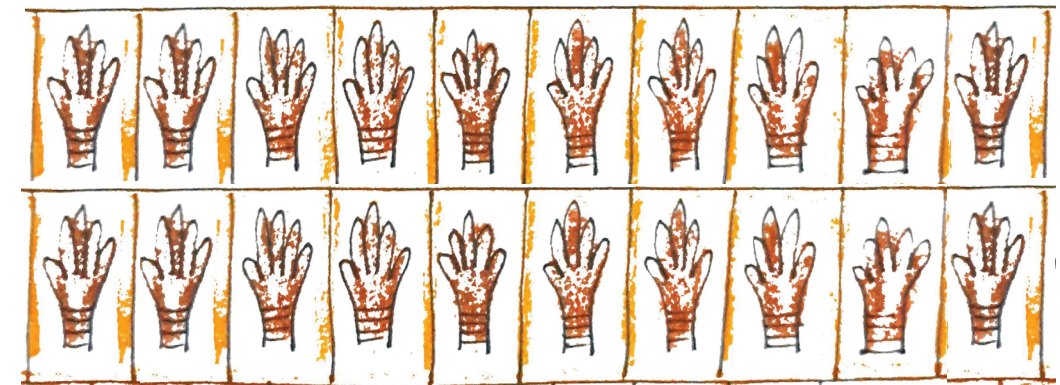
'O Dhebo, he will become my brother-in-law,
He shall not harm his own family,' said Pabuji ignorantly.

Then came the day when Jindrav came to Kolu with a wedding procession. He wedded Pema and set off with her. Dhebo stood in one corner of the assembly with a heavy heart on the day of the wedding processions, as he fought his conscience for the very last time. At last, the Nayak boy showed the loyalty of a Rajput. He was not a Rajput but every act defined him as one.



The Widow's Pyre

“An ideal Rajput woman is assumed to be a ‘Pativrata’. She is not a sacrificer of men, but herself. Her sacrifice of self strengthens the husband’s family. An ideal Rajput woman is assumed to be a ‘Sativrata’. She protects her husband throughout his life and upon his death, her duties are over in this world. So she becomes a sati to protect her husband in the afterlife. A Rajput woman is expected to devote her life to everyone but herself. They are taught modesty, obedience and self-effacing sacrifice. However, not all Rajputani’s gave into the pre-existing social norms. Many Rajput women fought against the injustice and arrogance of Kings with power like Kuramdevi of Mewar and Rani Padmini of Chittor. These women not only defended their Rajputana honour and sacrifice but also fought for their freedom. They are known for their decisiveness and independence of thought in the times when women were suppressed.”



Pema was a resilient Rajputani. She married Jindrav Khichi at her brother Pabu and Buro's orders to avoid a big fight between Jindrav Khichi and Pabu, in her father's kingdom Kolu. To save Kolu she had to live under the wrath of Jindrav Khichi. One day as Pema sat in her Palace, she saw the light of the ascetic's fire.

As she saw the light in her garden, she thought to herself,
'No Jogi comes to the kingdom of this wicked king,
No Jogi comes, no brahmin comes.
Who has set up an ascetic's fire today in my garden?'

Pema put on a dress of the maidservant to hide from the guards and set out to the garden. Khichi let no queen out of his sight. He overlooked everything the Queens did and surrounded them with guards. While Pema hated it, the other Queens saw it as a sign of love. Pema knew how to trick the guards, she was not like other Queens and so she fooled the guards and went to the garden.

She took a bowl of milk with her and called out to the little boy she saw,
'O master-Jogi, where are your house and home?
What kind of master-Jogi are you who have come here practising austerities?
O master-Jogi, take this bowl of milk in your
hand, drink the milk of the white cow!'

The boy replied,
'O my father's sister, I am Rupnath, the eldest crown prince of king Buro.
O father's sister, I have come to take revenge on that Jindrav!
He killed everyone in Kolu. I shall not spare him.'



Pema was surprised at his courage. She was the only one who knew of Khichi's true powers. She saw him kill hundreds of people day and night. She saw how heartless he was.

As she heard of the details of how Khichi killed his brother's, she began to weep and said,
'O son, you are only twelve years old;
How will you fight Khichi?
How will you kill him?'

To that Rupnath replied
'O father's sister, you have known this Raakshas for years,
You have faced his wrath all these years,
You know what he is like,
O father's sister, tell me his features,
Help me kill him.'

Pema was confused. She was a true Rajputani, who did all that was expected of her to save her family even if it came with a great personal loss. But she had lost her family and there was no greater loss she could feel. Her values expected her silence but silence brought her only sorrow.

Driven by the loss of love in her life, Pema said,
'O son, I live with this sorrow that my Khichi was the end of my family,
But I prayed every night for his end.
I prayed for that one soul that would end his life and take revenge.

The lord has finally granted me this wish, but I cannot let you do this alone.
O son, I shall help you kill Khichi and take revenge.’

‘O father’s sister, tell me how to kill Khichi,
I will do as you direct and kill him at once.’
Said Rupnath.

Pema took a second to gather her thoughts, as she knew everything
Khichi was capable of. She wondered if she should do it herself, but she
believed in the Rajputana blood that ran through Rupnath’s veins.

Pema sat him down and started to narrate the vicious features,
‘O son, Khichi lives in a strange palace,
You will have no idea if it’s water, land or a palace.
O son, in front of his palace, are snakes and tigers as guards,
First, a snake-god will bite you,
If you escape from the snake god then the tiger will not let you go, and
If you escape from the tiger then Khichi will not let you go.
O son, at this moment I speak as your mother,
Heed my words and return to me!

‘O father’s sister, my head may fall,
but I shall kill Khichi and take your revenge.’, Said Rupnath.

As Rupanth was about to set out to kill Khichi, Pema prepared a basket
of things to kill the snake-god, the tiger and Khichi, she knew it all.

As she handed the basket of things to Rupnath she said,
‘O son, take this ring I wear, as you enter the palace
and place this ring on the ground,
It will go rolling down the slope, follow the ring
and take a left as you see the ground.
O son, do not take a right or you will drown in the deep water,
And die, die in the lake!

O son, there is more!
When you encounter the snake god,
Put this bowl of milk in front of the snake,

The snake will start to drink the milk,
Escape the snake and go ahead.

O son, there is more!
When you encounter the tiger,
Take with you two goat’s heads,
And give them to the tiger and go further in.

O son, there is one more thing!
As you go further in, you will find Khichi sleeping in his palace.
Kill him at once and return to me.’

Pema had a heavy heart as she saw Rupnath leave. She could not eat, sleep or move as she thought of what would happen. She stood in her palace and saw the clouds moving day and night. As soon as Rupnath reached Khichi's palace, he did as Pema directed and entered Khichi's palace. He saw Khichi sleeping and started to boast about killing him for his wrong deeds and taking revenge.

As he conversed with Khichi,
Pema called out to Rupnath and said,
'O foolish child, you sit there discussing matters with your enemy,
Have you not learnt what he is capable of?
O little boy, you are delaying!
Kill him at once and return to me.'

Then at his father's sister's words, Rupnath drew his dagger and cut off Jindrav Khichi's head. It was the middle of the night when he cut off Jindrav Khichi's head and the stream of his blood flowed downwards. Pema collected it in her curd-churning bowl and started churning the blood with full force; she took out all her anger at once. While she churned the blood in the middle of the night, Khich's queen wondered if she had gone mad.

The fearless Pema heard them whispering. As the Queens whispered, Pema announced angrily,
'O mad Queens, when Khichi killed my family,
You churned your curd in the middle of the day.
Today my Rupnath killed your Khichi,
And I am churning his blood in the middle of the night.'

When Pema said these words Khich's queen shouted and lamentation broke. The guards surrounded Rupnath from all four corners. Rupnath asked Pema for help and Pema directed him to a mare Dhel that belonged to Rupanth's father and Pema's brother, Buro. Dhel was captured by Khichi when he killed everyone in Kolu. Rupnath followed Pema's detailed instructions and escaped with Dhel. Dhel took Rupnath to Girnar and with him, he took Khichi's head. Widowed Pema felt no sorrow for her husband's death. She felt calm but as a Rajputani she felt distraught. Pema knew she had to become sati to keep the honour of a Rajputani. She asked Rupnath to send her Khichi's head, then Rupnath struck Khichi's head with a blow and it reached Pema. Pema wore her wedding Pila and became sati. Pema killed her husband but she still kept the honour of a Rajputani. Her life was not easy till the time she became sati. She was torn between her duties and her heart, but she reflected pride and valour.

