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Reflections on Chivalry and Sagacity in Rajasthani Folklore and Culture with Special Reference to Laxmi Kumari Chundawat's *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat*

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Abstract: Rajasthani folklore is a vibrant and intricate tapestry that weaves together the cultural, historical, and social fabric of Rajasthan. Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat was a prominent author and politician known for her contribution to Rajasthani literature and culture. *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat is a collection of Rajasthani folktales showcasing the rich cultural heritage and traditions of Rajasthan. These folktales impart moral lessons and ethical values, often through the actions and decisions of the characters. Light-hearted, witty tales and humorous anecdotes illustrate the cleverness and wisdom of the Rajasthani people. These stories often highlight the importance of intelligence and resourcefulness in navigating life's challenges. Her writings celebrate women's traditional roles while advocating for their empowerment and recognition in a changing society. Her folktales with ethical lessons serve to reinforce societal norms and values. The present research paper provides insights into the Rajasthani people portrayed by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat in her stories that serve as a powerful reminder of the values of bravery, leadership, cultural preservation, resilience, and unity.

Keywords: Chivalry, culture, folktale, Rajasthan, tradition

*Rajasthani is the language of valiant people, literature of Rajasthan is the
literature of the brave, it has a unique place among the literatures of the world.*

(Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel)

Literature is a crucial component of conserving the cultural values of any society. Rajasthani literature reflects the cultural ethos of past centuries and serves as a window into the state's diverse culture and history. Each region of the state manifests its own history, beliefs, and ways

of life through writings that contribute to the rich heritage of Rajasthani literature. This literature depicts nature, folk deities, court scenes, tales of heroism and divinity, geo-cultural specificities, and more. It is exceptionally rich, providing precise information about the socio-economic conditions of the time and highlighting how the native rulers and people valued the preservation of their culture. Rajasthani literature spans a variety of genres such as *khayat*, *vanshavali*, *marasya*, *veli*, *vaat* etc. Historical accounts to praise and appreciate their kings and their achievements are referred to as '*Khyaat*'. The term '*Khyaat*' is derived from the Hindi word '*khyati*', meaning praise or reputation. '*Vanshavali*' are documents created by court members to preserve information about their king's lineage. '*Marasya*' term is associated with death, and they are posthumous accounts written to honour a king. The written accounts created to celebrate the glory of the kings, their rule, and their achievements are known as '*Velis*'. '*Vaat*' or '*Baat*' is a Rajasthani word which means a story. Rajasthan is culturally rich, with numerous stories about its native people, and '*Vaat*' is one way among many to present Rajasthani tales in a colloquial tone.

Rajasthani royal families have influenced the region's literary landscape. Many rulers served as patrons of literature, and their works have celebrated Rajasthani history, culture, and philosophy. Rajasthani folklores are often associated with kings and kingdoms. Rajasthani princesses and queens have also contributed to Rajasthani literature. Rani Padmini's story is legendary, and she has been immortalized in numerous literary works and folklores. Maharani Gayatri Devi, a remarkable figure in Indian history, is known for her elegance, political influence, and literary contributions. One of her most famous literary works is her autobiography, *A Princess Remembers*, which provides fascinating insights into her life, from her childhood in the royal family of Cooch Behar to her experiences as the Maharani of Jaipur. Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat, a remarkable Indian author and politician, hailed from Rajasthan. She was the elder daughter of Rawat Vijay Singh of Deogarh, Mewar. She married Rawat Tej Singh of Rawatsar. Chundawat was a scholar of Rajasthani folktales and verses. She joined the Indian National Congress party and served as a Member of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly from 1962 to 1971. She was also a member of the Rajya Sabha from April 1972 to April 1978 and served as the President of the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee.

Chundawat's literary contributions include several books in Rajasthani and Hindi, such as *Mumal*, *Devnarayan Bagadawat Mahagatha*, *Rajasthan ke Ritee Rivaj*, and *Lenin ri Jeevani*.

She was honoured with the Padma Shri award in 1984 for her contributions to Rajasthani literature. *Mumal* is a fascinating piece of Rajasthani literature that captures the essence of traditional storytelling, blending folklore, romance, and tragedy. The tale is deeply rooted in Rajasthani oral traditions, celebrating themes of love, sacrifice, and destiny. *Mumal*, a princess from Jaisalmer, was known for her beauty and intelligence. Mahendra, a prince from Marwar, fell in love with her, leading to a passionate yet tragic romance. The story explores themes of misunderstanding, separation, and fate, making it one of Rajasthan's most cherished folktales. The book captures the essence of Rajasthani storytelling, blending history, folklore, and poetic narration. It reflects the cultural richness of Rajasthan, preserving its oral traditions in written form, showcasing the grandeur and mysticism of Rajasthani desert life.

Chundawat's writings are used in folklore research across India. She contributed to the formal recognition of Rajasthani as a literary language. The book *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat, translated by G. L. Mathur as *Folklore of Rajasthan*, is a collection of Rajasthani folktales. The title, *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat*, is a poetic metaphor for storytelling and reflection. Written in Rajasthani dialect, the book retains the lyrical and rhythmic quality of oral storytelling. It is a significant literary work that explores Rajput legends, folklore, and historical narratives. The book captures the valour, traditions, and heroic tales of Rajasthan, preserving the essence of Rajasthani chivalry and showcasing the region's rich cultural heritage, bringing these timeless stories to a wider audience. Stories depicting social customs, rituals, and festivals offer a glimpse into the unique cultural practices of Rajasthan, imparting moral lessons and ethical values through the actions and decisions of the characters. They also highlight the customs, rituals, and festivals unique to Rajasthan, preserving the region's cultural heritage. These themes are interwoven into the fabric of *Folklore of Rajasthan*, creating a rich and diverse collection of stories that continue to captivate audiences. Light-hearted tales and anecdotes showcase the wit and humour of the Rajasthani people.

The Incorporation of natural elements in folklore reflects the close relationship between the people and their environment. Rajasthan's desert landscape, wildlife, and natural resources often play a crucial role in these tales, underscoring respect for nature and sustainable living practices. Famous Rajasthani poet Kanhiya Lal Sethia writes in his poem *Dharti Dhoran Ri*:

मदुआ ऊंट अणूता खाथा।

ई रै घोड़ा री के बातां?

धरती धोरां री।

ई रा फळ फुलड़ा मन भावण,

(The gentle camel walks proudly beside us!

What to say about the horses of it?

O Earth, rich and prosperous!

The fruits and flowers here captivate the heart.)

Camel, horse, elephant and various other birds are portrayed in *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* by Laxmi Kumari Chundawat. The title of the book bears the name of a bird, *Chakwa*, and asserts that Rajasthani people are fond of natural resources and always try to protect them. *Chakwa-chakwi* are mythical birds who cannot survive separation. The *Chakwa* bird is known as the Ruddy Shelduck in English and is commonly referred to as the Brahminy Duck. This bird is recognized for its striking orange-brown plumage and is often associated with folklore and poetry in Rajasthani culture. In her story *Rajputani*, too, Chundawat refers to *chakwa-chakwi*, which asserts the importance of this bird for Rajasthani people. Chundawat employs several other important terms deeply ingrained in Rajasthani culture, such as *Sawan*, *Annadata*, *Akha Teej*, *Papiha*, and *Khama Ghani* etc. *Khama Ghani* is a reverent greeting used by Rajasthani people, especially the Rajput community. *Mangal Rat* is another important work by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat, capturing the rich cultural traditions, folklore, and Rajput ethos of Rajasthan. It weaves together historical narratives, folk tales, and poetic expressions, providing insights into Rajasthani social customs and valour. *Mangal Rat* plays a crucial role in preserving Rajput heritage, interweaving traditions, rituals, and folklore that define Rajasthan's cultural identity.

In Rajasthani folklore, human characters embody wisdom and strength, especially Rajasthani women. The Rajasthani tale of *Panna Dhai* tells the story of Panna Dhai, a maidservant who saved the future Maharana of Mewar, Uday Singh, by sacrificing her son. Her bravery and selflessness are celebrated in Rajasthani folklore. Another prominent figure is Pabuji's sister, celebrated for her intelligence and bravery. Her story is a testament to the

strength and resilience of Rajasthani women. Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat herself is a torch bearer for women's empowerment. Her successful life presents a motivation for all women who wish to excel in their lives. In an interview with Sapna Mahesh, she tells how she overcame every challenge that came her way to become a successful politician. She bravely faced every challenge that came her way and lived a dignified life that has become an inspiration for future generations. Not only her own life story but her literary corpus also portrays chivalrous female characters.

Ke Re Chakwa Vaat by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat features several stories that highlight themes of women's chivalry. These stories feature strong female characters demonstrating courage, resilience, and wisdom in the face of adversity. Her stories reflect the cultural and social dynamics of Rajasthan, showcasing the empowerment and resilience of women in various contexts. These folklores can also be regarded as a treasure house of moral teaching for the lessons they impart to humanity. Tales like *The Intelligent Sethani*, *The Eccentric Prince*, *A Man is Known by the Company He Keeps*, etc. reflect the chivalry and sagacity of Rajasthani women. In the tale *The Intelligent Sethani*, the Seth challenges his wife, stating, "If you are more intelligent than I am, then show it by undertaking my heavy responsibilities" (1). When Sethani happily accepts this challenge, Seth sets a strange condition before leaving home, "You must also bear a son born to me before I return; only then will I acknowledge you as the intelligent daughter of an intelligent father" (1). Sethani becomes enraged when Seth brings her father's name in their discussion, but accepts this strange challenge as well. Her sagacity is revealed at every step of the story. The Seth leaves her entirely resourceless, yet she establishes the trade again. She meets Seth disguised as *Gujri* and acquires his ring, which she later presents as proof of her authenticity. When Seth doubts her and accuses her of being immoral, she surprises everyone by stating, "This is the child of the owner of the ring" (5).

The other tale, *The Eccentric Prince*, also presents a princess who, with her utmost bravery and intelligence, saves her self-respect and deals with the strange conditions of her whimsical husband, who cannot tolerate the sight of one-eyed people. Prince's one-eyed uncle decides to teach a lesson to the prince by creating an illusion that his bride is one-eyed. The prince gets enraged and leaves. Due to the uncompromising situations created by the eccentric

prince, the king keeps the princess in one of the state buildings. The princess kept her patience during this difficult time. Later in the story, when the prince sees her, there is “no end to Prince’s joy when he discovers that his wife is a bewitching beauty” (8). The prince decides to bring the princess on the occasion of the coming *Teej* festival. The prince becomes sick on their journey back home. In the deserted place, seeing a hut, the princess goes to a hermit to seek help. But when she comes to know about the immoral designs of the hermit, she musters her courage and “seeing a sword hanging on the wall, she picked it up and flashing it, she came out of the cottage. When the hermit checked her progress and prevented her from getting out, she killed him with his own sword” (13). The chivalrous and sagacious princess not only saved her modesty but also protected her husband.

The Clever Woman is another tale of Rajasthani dauntless princess, who is ready to marry a prince with strange vow that, “he would take his meals after striking his wife on the head twice with his shoe” (29). The confident and dauntless princess resolves to marry the prince and also assures her father who is worried about the future of her daughter and tries to dissuade her for this marriage. She says, “if I have even a spark of intelligence in me, I will not submit to his stupidity for a single day” (29). The princess not only saves her dignity but also transforms her cynical husband into a responsible person.

A Man is Known by the Company He Keeps is another tale that illustrates the wisdom and chivalry of Rajasthani women. Lakhi Banjara and his wife encounter a shepherd who is drinking from the brook like an animal. Banjari expresses her view that, “it is merely a manifestation of a habit acquired in the company of animals” (21). According to her, better opportunities and improved working conditions can completely transform the shepherd. Banjara leaves his wife in the jungle, stating, “let me see how you transform him into a distinguished worthy through your company” (22). After some time, the shepherd becomes the tax collector of the city due to the guidance provided by Banjari. At the end of the story, Banjara must acknowledge the same person he once referred to as an animal. The tale conveys the message that good company can change a person’s character and destiny. The folklores are a storehouse of knowledge as they highlight the importance of intelligence and resourcefulness in navigating life’s challenges.

Folklore in Indigenous and Tribal societies are storehouses of knowledge. Origin myths, stories about nature, flora, fauna, narratives about ancestors, and histories about moments in time and places – they all coalesce to provide a people with a sense of place in this world, conferring identities and inculcating customs relating to their community and world. (Keditsu 1)

The *Folklore of Rajasthan* is a treasure trove of themes that reflect the region's vibrant culture, traditions, and history. Stories depicting social customs, rituals, and festivals illustrate the unique cultural practices of Rajasthan, emphasizing the significance of traditions surrounding vibrant festivals like *Teej* and *Gangaur*. These are two culturally rich festivals celebrated with great enthusiasm in Rajasthan, showcasing the state's deep-rooted customs and devotion. *Teej* is celebrated during the monsoon season, primarily in the months of *Sawan* and *Bhadrapad* (July to September). It is dedicated to Goddess Parvati, and her union with Lord Shiva symbolizes marital bliss and the onset of the rainy season. Married women pray for their husbands' well-being, while unmarried girls seek a good match. Women dress in vibrant attire, adorn themselves with jewellery, and apply henna. Swings are hung from trees, and traditional songs are sung.

In the tale of *The Eccentric Prince*, the prince says to the princess, "Let me go for the moment. I shall come back to take you on the forthcoming *Teej*" (9). Portraying these festivals in this manner emphasizes the importance that Rajasthani people impart to their cultural heritage. *Gangaur* is celebrated in the month of *Chaitra* (March- April), and is dedicated to Goddess *Gauri* (Parvati) and Lord Shiva. It represents marital fidelity, prosperity, and the harvest season. Women worship clay or wooden idols of *Gauri* and *Isar* (Shiva), offering flowers, grass, and milk. Married women pray for their husbands' long lives, while unmarried girls seek blessings for a good husband. The festival concludes with grand processions, especially in Jaipur, featuring folk dances, music, and decorated palanquins. The tale, *The World Resounds with the Refrain: This is Jagmal's Sword*, also references the Gangaur festival of Rajasthan. "The 'Gangor' coming out of the fort was being followed by a band of women led by Gidoli in a palanquin, amidst the beat of drums, song, and music" (37). A traditional *Gangaur* doha is often sung during this festival:

गणगौर माता की पालकी आई, भक्तों ने आरती गाई
सभी को सौभाग्य मिले, गणगौर माता की कृपा से।

*“The palanquin of Gangaur Mata arrives, devotees sing her aarti.
May everyone be blessed with fortune through her grace.”*

Both the *Teej* and the *Gangaur* festivals are a testament to Rajasthan’s cultural richness and the significance of traditions in everyday life.

Rajasthani folk show their sincere respect to the country’s holy places, especially the River Ganges. *The Impostor’s Head* is a tale about a Patel and his wife. The Patel’s wife suggests her husband to “take a dip in the holy Ganges” (43). The Patel asks the village barber to accompany him on the pilgrimage. The barber agrees on the condition that if he sees something strange along the way, he will ask the Patel for an explanation. If the explanation is unsatisfactory, he will turn back without going any further. The next day, the Patel departs for the pilgrimage on his horse, with the barber beside him. After traveling twenty miles, they rest at *Dharamsala*. The barber is sent to the city to fetch provisions, where he encounters something peculiar. A goat’s head lies on a platform that every passerby must strike with their shoe. The barber also strikes the head and wants to know the story behind this strange ritual. Patel then narrates the story of a Nat.

Rajasthan’s cultural richness greatly depends on its traditional communities like the *Bhopa* and *Nat*, who have preserved oral storytelling, music, and performance arts for centuries. The mention of these communities in Rajasthani literature highlights their invaluable contribution to preserving Rajasthani culture. The *Nat* community is traditionally associated with folk culture in India, known for its contributions to performing arts, particularly acrobatics, comic acts, and storytelling. Their performances often include elements of drama, music, and dance, making them an integral part of folk traditions in regions like Rajasthan. Their art forms, such as *Nautanki*, are vibrant and interactive, often performed in informal settings like village squares or marketplaces. These performances blend emotional conflicts, universal themes, and improvisation, creating a unique cultural experience. In the story, *The Impostor’s Head*, Patel tells the barber that the *Nat* displays his feats before the king. One after another, he performs wonderful acts. He throws a coil of thin cotton string into the sky and

begins to climb it, claiming that he is, “going to join a battle waged between the gods and devils” (45). He vanishes into the sky, and the *Nat*’s wife becomes *Sati*, expressing her last wish that the king should organize *Mosar*, a customary dinner after death. During the *Mosar*, the *Nat* descends from the sky and asks about his wife. The true love and faithful bond of the marital couple among simple folk can be seen when the *Nat* insists, “Even the very *Padmini* will not satisfy me, let alone the many wives. Good or bad, fat or thin, I want my poor wife restored to me” (47). The *Nat* searches for her in a room and comes out with her, making everyone surprised. Further in the same story, the *Nat* gives a mantra to the king, through which his soul can enter another’s body. The barber overhears the mantra and enters the king’s body, taking advantage of the situation when the real king’s soul enters the parrot’s body. The parrot king, with the help of the queen, eventually restores her own body while the barber king enters the goat’s body. The king immediately cuts off the head of the goat on the village platform, which is to be struck with a shoe by every passerby. Though the tale bears fictional elements but it also presents a moral lesson that evil ultimately suffers.

Devnarayan Bagadawat Mahagatha by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat is another important literary work documenting Rajasthan’s oral heritage. It explores the legend of *Devnarayan*, a revered folk deity in Rajasthan. The story of *Devnarayan* is widely celebrated in *Bhopa* performances, where traditional singers narrate his epic. The book is a historical and literary treasure of Rajasthan.

Rajasthani folk literature is a vibrant repository of moral wisdom. The story *Evil Begets Evil* from Chundawat’s *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* conveys a moral lesson where a prince becomes entangled in crucial circumstances due to his bad company. The prince repents when his friend deceives him. He realizes, “Having sown the wind, I am now reaping the whirlwind. Never again shall I disobey the command of my elders” (56). These folk tales with ethical lessons serve to reinforce societal norms and values. They provide insights into the moral compass guiding the community, teaching virtues such as honesty, loyalty, and kindness, which are integral to Rajasthani culture. Not only Rajasthani women but Rajasthani men also excel in their wisdom, as revealed in the tale of the *Four Wise Brothers*. Upon observing the footprints of a camel, they make astonishing comments. The first says, “these footprints seem to be that of a she-camel,” the second remarks, “who is blind in the left eye,” the third adds, “she carried

two people on her back, one male and the other female,” and the fourth notes, “the female rider on the camel is pregnant” (25). To verify their claims, they follow the she-camel’s footprints and are caught by the Kotwal, who brings them before the village ruler. As the story progresses, all the statements made by the four brothers prove to be true. The reasoning behind their statements demonstrates their exceptional wisdom. These witty tales illustrate the cleverness and wisdom of the Rajasthani people.

Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat has played a crucial role in reviving and reshaping modern Rajasthani folklore by bridging oral traditions with literary scholarship. Chundawat collected and documented folk tales, ballads, and songs that were previously passed down orally. Her work *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* has preserved endangered narratives and given them literary form. This work has become a cultural cornerstone for Rajasthan’s identity in post-independence India, reflecting the chivalry and sagacity of Rajasthani folk. Rajasthani folklore, as interpreted and preserved by Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat, has conveyed profound messages about valour, sacrifice, moral duty, and cultural identity. Chundawat’s heroines are not passive figures but active agents of change—brave, wise, and morally resolute. Women in folklore embody resilience, loyalty, and spiritual power. These themes are woven into the fabric of Rajasthani folktales, making it a rich and diverse collection of stories that continue to captivate audiences. *Ke Re Chakwa Vaat* demonstrates how oral traditions serve not just as entertainment but also as ethical and philosophical guides for society. These folklores are a living archive that connects generations through shared identity. The folklore of Rajasthan has not only conveyed moral lessons and ethical values but has also highlighted the region’s customs, rituals, and festivals, preserving Rajasthan’s cultural heritage.

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