



Analysis of Gram Mandirs of Rajasthan as Living Traditions of Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

Temples have historically served as archives of multidisciplinary knowledge in the context of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), including astronomy, ritual calendars, architecture, performing arts, philosophy, and social governance. This has helped to preserve and spread indigenous epistemologies. Gram Mandirs are a unique and seldom researched aspect of Indian village life, serving as social regulatory hubs, places of worship, and repositories of collective memory. Gram Mandirs, in contrast to formal temple establishments, are ingrained in regular community activities and are maintained by oral traditions, ritual cycles, and customs passed down through the generations. These mandirs function as vibrant social institutions where community life, the dissemination of indigenous knowledge, and cultural continuity come together in addition to being centres of religious devotion.

There are around 47500 villages in Rajasthan, bestowed with latest one Gram Devta/ Devi, such as Baba Ramdev, Gogaji, Bhairu Ji, Pabuji, Kaila Devi, Karni Mata etc. These Kul Devi/ Devta ensures strings of strong social bond and promotes harmony. The objective of this paper is to study the Gram Mandirs of Rajasthan and bring out its relevance for the contemporary era. Furthermore, the paper focuses on age-old shared wisdom, ethical teachings, social cohesion, fostering social values in present generation.

Keywords: Gram Mandir, Gram Devta, Kul Devi, Kul Devta, Indian Knowledge System.

1. Introduction

The gram mandir has ancient impact and established as multiphase knowledge source under Indian Knowledge system (IKS) specially for social governance systems, management skills, astronomy, architecture, performing art, ritual calendar, philosophy and many more subjects. According to Sontheimer (1989), unlike formal temple institutions, gram mandirs disseminate indigenous philosophies. The popularity of these religious places of worship are limited to their

rural borders, and hence they are not much explored, yet they play a crucial role in transmission of oral traditions, seasonal rituals, customs (Hooja, 2006).

2. Review of Literature

The literature available on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) can serve the purpose of understanding Gram Mandirs beyond their ceremonial purposes. B. Mahadevan's *Introduction to Indian Knowledge System* helps us in understanding that indigenous institutions as dynamic knowledge repositories rather than isolated religious spaces, which places IKS in a wider context of philosophy, oral traditions, community practices, and everyday ways of knowing. Based on this viewpoint, Avkash Jadhav and Shantidev Sisodia (2024) investigate how tradition and modernity interact and made the case that traditional institutions should be reinterpreted as dynamic, adaptable sociocultural systems. When considering Gram Mandirs as permanent cultural hubs integrated into community life, their analysis is especially relevant. Along the same lines, Dr. Manvinder Kaur (2024) in her book titled as, *Indian Knowledge System: Reimagining Contemporary Indian Education*, highlights the inclusion of IKS into current educational system, also emphasizing the role of community-based institutions as informal spaces of learning and value transmission. Village-level knowledge systems and participatory learning environments is highlighted in reports by Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA), while Ministry of Culture reports provide institutional documentation on rural temples and heritage conservation practices to complement these scholarly contributions.

In the broader context of Indian Knowledge Systems, the reports and works collectively support the understanding of Gram Mandirs as sociocultural, educational, and knowledge-bearing establishments.

3. Study Area

Rajasthan, the largest state in India, is the subject of the current study. The state's diverse ecological environments, which range from sub-humid areas in the south and east to arid and semi-arid zones in the west, have historically shaped its rural institutions and cultural customs. Rajasthan maintains prosperous village-level institutions, including Gram Mandirs, which serve as important socio-cultural and religious hubs, this can be attribute to its resilient rural population base. These establishments are tightly connected to regional belief systems, customs, and traditions. The state has been divided into five main cultural regions—Marwar, Mewar, Shekhawati, Hadoti, and Brij—for clear analysis and easy comparison. These areas

provide a standard framework for analysing spatial differences in the shape, purpose, and sociocultural significance of Gram Mandirs in various historical and ecological contexts.

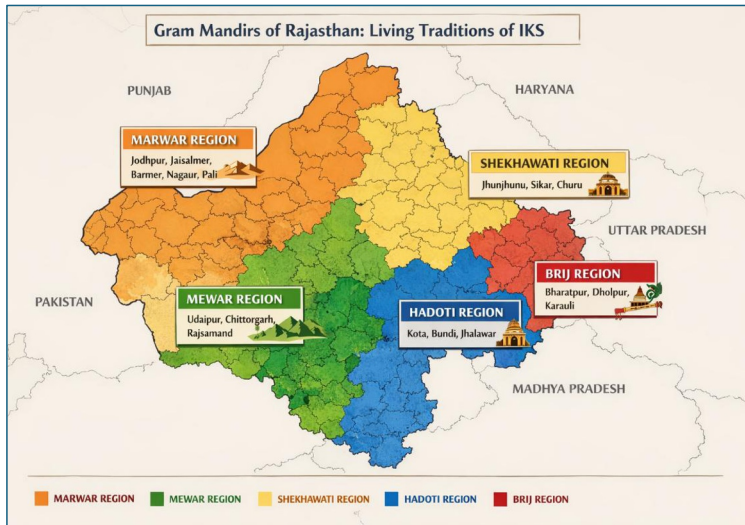


Figure 1: Map of Study Area- Rajasthan. (Map not to scale)

Source: Prepared by Authors

4. Objectives

- To identify and explore Rajasthan's Gram Mandirs and their regional distribution.
- To examine the role of Gran Mandirs in shaping the structure of village governance and sociocultural life.
- To analyse the importance of Gram Mandirs in the context of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and evaluate their applicability in advancing moral principles, social harmony, and sustainable community practices in the modern era.

5. Methodology

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources of data. Published books, peer-reviewed research papers, historical documents, ethnographic accounts, oral histories, and pertinent classical texts have been used to methodically gather information about Rajasthan's Gram Mandirs. For conceptual clarity and regional representation, these various sources have undergone critical analysis. In order to facilitate a comparative understanding of their spatial

and cultural variations, the documented Gram Mandirs have since been divided into regions, including Marwar, Mewar, Brij, Shekhawati, and Hadoti. Their functional role within the framework of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) has been further analyzed and interpreted, especially with regard to social organization, ecological ethics, ritual continuity, and community governance.

6. Gram Mandirs of Rajasthan and their Classification

Gram Mandir (Village Temple) is a socio-epistemological institution as well as a place of religious worship. These temples serve as the "Living Archives" of traditional knowledge, politics, and environmental ethics in Rajasthan. Significant differences influenced by ecology and history can be found when comparing regions. Kul Devta customs, Lok Devta hero cults, and Kshetrapal guardianship adjusted to dry conditions are all combined in Marwar's Gram Mandirs. Village religiosity carries moral-ecological character, shaped by warrior memory, pastoral livelihood, cattle protection, and drought resilience (Sontheimer, 1989; Hooja, 2006). In contrast, village shrines in Mewar connect to larger temple networks and ideas of divine kingship plus agrarian stability, showing a closer integration of royal patronage and Vaishnav devotion.

Sacred geography is shaped by festival schedules, Ras-lila performances, and emotional devotion in the Brij region, which has a Radha-Krishna-centric devotional core values drawn from Bhakti traditions. Brij's Gram Mandirs give priority to communal devotional expression and pastoral symbolism in contrast to Marwar's hero-centric worship. In Shekhawati, Rajput customs coexist with mercantile patronage and clan-based deities, displaying a combination of trading culture and martial tradition. Hadoti has more evident Shaiva-Shakti elements linked to fertility rites and agricultural cycles, which are shaped by riverine ecology and Malwa interfaces.

Collectively, these regional differences show how Gram Mandirs play the role of evolving centres within IKS, depicting regional expressions of devotion, politics, ecology, and community governance.

Rajasthan's Gram Mandirs shows a complex layered and naturally developed sacred geographical structure. According to scholars of Rajasthani folklore and history, rural religious structures of different division of Rajasthan often function as decentralized socio-cultural institutional hubs integrated into daily life. (Hooja, 2006; Upadhyaya, 1987). A layered structure of sacred protection is exhibited when Gram Mandirs are categorized into Kul

Devta/Devi Mandirs, Lok Devta Mandirs, and Kshetrapal/Gram Devta Mandirs using an IKS lens. The lineage (vansha) is at the core, encircled by the ecological and territorial boundary (kshetra) and the social collective (samaj). In rural Rajasthan, this triadic structure secures the sustainability of land-based life systems, the continuation of heritage, and the maintenance of ethical order.

S.No	Gram Mandir Category	Territorial Order	Key functions	Examples
1.	Kul Devta/ Devi	Vansha (Clan) & Gotra (Identity)	Genealogical Continuity, Ancestral Wisdom & Lifecycle Rituals	Kaila Devi (Karauli)
2.	Lok Devta	Samaj (Community) & Naitika (Ethics)	Social Harmony, Pastoral Duties & Preservation of Oral Epics	Ramdev Ji (Runicha)
3.	Kshetrapal/ Gram Devta	Gram Seema (Village Boundary) & Paryavaran (Environment)	Ecological Stewardship, Local Governance, Justice, Sacred Grove Management & protection from Calamities	Bhairav Ji Thaan

Table 1. Classification of Gram Mandirs

Source: Prepared by Authors

7. Kul Devta/Devi Mandirs: The Foundation of the Lineage

The deepest sacred layer of the Rajasthani village universe is composed of Kul Devta or Kul Devi Mandirs. These shrines serve as guardians of ancestral knowledge and genealogical continuity and are connected to particular clans (vansha) and gotras. The idea aligns with popular Hinduism's "divine hierarchy," as defined by Lawrence A. Babb (1975), in which localized deities regulate social and moral order within constrained kinship structures. The Kul Devta make sure that ritual codes and family ethics are passed down through the generations by embodying parampara (lineage transmission) and smriti (collective remembrance) within the IKS framework.

During life-cycle rituals (sanskaras) like birth ceremonies, initiation rites, and marriage, where ancestral invocation upholds clan solidarity, the role of Kul Devtas is especially apparent. According to Rima Hooja (2006), clan deities that represented both political legitimacy and protection have historically helped Rajput and other warrior lineages in Rajasthan

consolidating their identities. This synthesis of shakti worship and genealogical coherence is best demonstrated by the worship of Kaila Devi, who is worshipped by multiple clans as a lineage mother-protector. Oral genealogies are preserved and kinship ties are strengthened by yearly pilgrimages and clan gatherings at these shrines. Thus, the Kul Devta Mandir preserves the “seed” of heritage ensuring continuity of familial and ritual identity.

8. Lok Devta Mandirs: The Social Collective

The second concentric circle is represented by the Lok Devtas, and their temples are beyond the lineage and embody the moral conscience of the larger social collective (samaj). Unlike the Kul Devtas, the Lok Devtas are often derived from semi-historical characters whose righteous deeds (karma) have led them to attain divinity. This is reminiscent of the IKS concept, where moral deeds are the criteria for the sacralization of an individual.

In the ethnographic documentation of the oral traditions in Rajasthan, Kothari and Neuman (2007) show the sustenance of the Lok Devtas through performative traditions, such as the recitation of ‘phad’ and ‘epic ballads.’ Moreover, the work done by Ann Grodzins Gold (1992) shows the ways in which the oral traditions in Rajasthan transform the historical memory into sacred biography, infusing ethics into the performative traditions. For example, the place Ramdevra, associated with Baba Ramdev Ji, is now a place of pilgrimage that espouses the idea of equality and harmony among communities. Similarly, the tradition associated with Pabuji is that of the protector of cattle and pastoral traditions, as shown by Sontheimer (1989).

Lok Devta Mandirs also act as places for settling disputes, collective gatherings, and melas, or fairs, thus fostering social solidarity. As Upadhyaya (1987) points out, folk deities in Rajasthan act as moral regulators, and their authority is based on collective belief rather than any religious text. Thus, the Lok Devta Mandir continues to preserve the “culture” of the village, maintaining moral values, oral traditions, and social stability.

9. Kshetrapal/Gram Devta Mandirs: The Territorial Boundary

The outermost sacred layer consists of Kshetrapal or Gram Devta shrines, located at the physical and territorial boundaries of the village. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer (1989) argues that pastoral and agrarian societies in western India have been known to worship guardian deities associated with land, cattle, and seasonal cycles, thus linking religion with resource management.

Usually depicted in the form of a simple platform or *thaan*, stone, or sacred tree rather than an elaborate shrine. The shrine of Kshetrapal is located at the boundary of the village and is used to provide protection. Bhairav Ji *thaan* is considered to be the fierce protector of the land, and the shrine is invoked in times of crisis, epidemics, drought, or social disturbances. Agrarian shrines, like the Keshavrai Ji Temple, are linked to the cycles of nature and are used to represent the cosmic regulation of fertility.

Most of the Kshetrapal shrines are associated with sacred groves, also known as ‘*oran*.’ Sacred groves are areas designated for biodiversity conservation. Historical studies on the socio-religious scenario of Rajasthan suggest that such areas were essentially community-managed ecological reserves (Sharma, 1959; Hooja, 2006). Thus, the Kshetrapal Mandir safeguards the “land,” ensuring environmental stewardship and “territorial justice” or “*nyaya*” in terms of IKS philosophy.

10. Interconnectedness: The IKS Triad of Sustainability

The Kul, Lok, and Kshetra categories are not independent of one another but are, in fact, an interconnected triad of sustainability. Kul Devta ensures the sustainability of genealogical continuity, Lok Devta ensures the sustainability of cultural continuity, while Kshetrapal ensures the sustainability of ecological continuity. This, in effect, is an expression of the concept of decentralized governance, in which spiritual authority underwrites social discipline and ecological balance. As social scientists studying the folk and historical traditions of Rajasthan observe, religiosity in the rural landscape of Rajasthan has traditionally been a template for moral regulation, natural resource management, and identity formation (Hooja, 2006; Upadhyaya, 1987).

In the IKS paradigm, the Gram Mandirs are not merely ritualistic centers but the very foundational structures of civilizational sustainability, which unite the family, the society, and the ecology in a unified sacred whole.

11. Region wise description of Gram Mandirs.

11.1 Gram Mandirs of Marwar

The Chamunda Mata Temple is an example of the important tradition of Kul Devi worship, which is part of the Marwar region's heritage. Chamunda Mata is the Kul Devi of the Rathore kings, and she is the embodiment of Shakti as the guardian and protector of the throne and the royal lineage. According to Rima Hooja (2006), the Rajput kingdoms in Rajasthan developed

the tradition of Kul Devis, and the temples built in their honour symbolized the divine and the martial protection afforded to the clansmen. The local Chamunda Mata or Nagnechi Mata temples are the Kul Mandirs, and the locals perform rituals and seek the blessings of the goddess before marriages, journeys, and agricultural operations. The tradition is an example of the hierarchical localization of the divine power, as explained by Babb (1975).

Among the Lok Devta traditions, the temple at Ramdevra is an important one, especially for the people of Marwar. Dedicated to Baba Ramdev Ji, the temple embodies the principals of justice, equality and faith. Ann Grodzins Gold (1992) and Komal Kothari (Kothari & Neuman, 2007) discuss the moral values and performance traditions that are maintained through the epics and *bhajans* sung for Ramdev Ji, a saint revered for his teachings. The ideology of serving others, *Seva* is integral during the prayer meetings and fairs organised at the temple.

The Om Banna Temple, is a unique Kshetrapal temple, revered as a motorcycle riding folk deity. The shrine is dedicated to Om Singh Rathore, who is supposed to be protecting the travellers riding through the highway. It is a modern creation but can be seen to have continuity with ancient hero deities where sacrifice and protective powers can elevate human beings to godhead status (Hooja, 2006).

Pastoral identity is an important part of the sacred geography of Marwar, and the Pabuji Temple is an example of this. Pabuji, who is considered a protector of cattle and camels, is an important deity for desert communities that rely on cattle and camels for their livelihood. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer (1989) explains that the pastoral deities of western India reflect ecological values through the medium of religious symbols. The Gram Mandir, dedicated to Pabuji, is an example of a temple ensuring the survival and well-being of pastoral communities.

The Kshetrapal deity in Marwar is often represented through temples dedicated to Bhairav Ji or Gram Devatas placed at the peripheral border of the village. The Bhairav Ji Temple, Jodhpur, is an example of the tradition of guardian deities that protect the region from calamities, epidemics, and moral decay. Dasharatha Sharma (1959) observes that territorial deities in Rajasthan have historically functioned as symbolic custodians of the principles of justice, and very existence of the village. The tradition of worshiping Bhairav Ji is often part of the village cultural, especially before the beginning of the agricultural seasons. The sacred groves, called Orans, often developed in the vicinity of such shrines reflects a part of the tradition and bestow biodiversity reservoirs in the desert region, illustrating the indigenous practice of spiritual sanction over the desert ecosystem (Upadhyaya, 1987).

An important Lok-Kshetrapal phenomenon in the Nagaur-Bikaner region of Marwar is associated with the worship of Gogaji, who is commonly worshiped through village thaans and also through the pilgrimage site of Gogamedi Temple. He is honoured and worshiped as a warrior saint and a serpent hero, also known as Jahar Veer Gogaji, and plays a critical role in linking the two concepts of folk deity and territorial guardian. Small thaans dedicated to Gogaji are commonly located in rural Marwar, especially near the boundaries of villages and grazing fields, and are worshiped through offerings for protection from snakebites, epidemics, and animal diseases. Ballads and bhopa performances narrate stories related to the bravery and miraculous powers of Gogaji, and such a form of collective memory has been maintained through performative practices (Kothari and Neuman, 2007). The annual fair held at Gogamedi attracts visitors from different castes and religions, and such a devotional phenomenon represents a syncretic devotional ethos, moving beyond the boundaries of religion and caste (Hooja, 2006).

The cult of Karni Mata holds a special position in the landscape of Bikaner-Marwar, where she is revered as the Kul Devi of the Rathore rulers and Gram Kshetrapal goddess of the region. Her main shrine, i.e., the Karni Mata Temple at Deshnok, is considered one of the most revered Shakti temples of western Rajasthan. She stands for divine rule, protection, and ascetic power (Hooja, 2006; Sharma, 1959). In villages across western Rajasthan, small shrines of Karni Mata have been established at various places, where Gram Mandir is revered for blessings for fertility, progeny, and protection from calamities. The shrine has unusual population of rats who are believed to be the incarnations of her devotees (Upadhyaya, 1987). Devi Shakti Karni Mata presents a fine example of guardianship covering all the circles of Kul, Lok and Kshetra of protection.

S.No	Division	Gram Deity	Type of Gram Mandir	Deity Nature
1.	Marwar	Chamunda Mata	Kul Devi	Clan Deity
		Ramdevra	Gram Devta	Devotional Deity
		Om Banna	Kshetrapal	Protector Deity
		Pabuji Ji	Kshetrapal	Pastoral Deity
		Bhairav Ji	Kshetrapal	Protector Deity
		Gogaji	Kshetrapal	Pastoral Deity
		Karni Mata	Kul Devi	Clan Deity
2.	Mewar	Ambika Mata	Gram Devi	Fertility Deity
		Ekling Ji	Kul Devta	Clan Deity
		Ban Mata	Kul Devi	Clan Deity
		Bhomia Ji	Kshetrapal	Protector Deity
		Devnarayan Ji	Kshetrapal	Fertility Deity
3.	Shekhawati	Rani Sati	Kul Devi	Fertility Deity
		Jeen Mata	Kul Devi	Clan Deity
		Gogaji	Kshetrapal	Protector Deity
4.	Hadoti	Maa Basoti	Gram Devi	Fertility Deity
		Bhairavji	Kshetrapal	Protector Deity
		Sheetla Mata	Gram Devi	Protector Deity
		Teja Ji	Kshetrapal	Pastoral Deity
5.	Brij	Radha-Krishna	Gram Devta	Devotional Deity
		Banke Bihari Ji	Kshetrapal	Devotional Deity
		Kaila Devi	Kul Devi	Clan Deity
		Gopal Ji	Kshetrapal	Pastoral Deity

Table 2. Division Wise Gram Mandirs of Rajasthan

Source: Prepared by Author

11.2 Gram Mandirs of Mewar

The 10th century Ambika Mata temple is a protector deity of Mewar region, worshiped as the Gram Devi. Navratri fairs and festivals are organised in praise of Devi Ambika, and the blessings are invoked for fertility, agrarian prosperity, cattle and human welfare.

The Kul Devta of Mewar region is Ekling Mahadev, and the Ekling temple is revered as the saviour and protector deity of Sisodia Rajputs. According to the historical records, Lord Shiva is considered as the divine ruler of the region and guide the Kings/ Diwans of Mewar to protect their land from enemies (Sharma, 1959). This form of politico-spirituality embodies the

concept of localization of cosmic authority, as conceptualized by Babb (1975), for regionalized governance. Rima Hooja (2006) also points to the fact that Mewar's identity as a resistance movement and its political culture are inseparable from its reverence for Eklingji. The temple, within the context of IKS, embodies the concept of sacred governance through *dharmic* and *karmic rajneeti*.

Another significant Shakti site is the Ban Mata Temple, which is revered as a protective deity linked with the Sisodia dynasty and the Kumbhalgarh fort area. Historical records link the worship of Ban Mata with the protection of the hill forts of Mewar, thus emphasizing the association between the worship of the goddess and the protection of land (Sharma, 1959). In the villages the Ban Mata shrines are linked with the Kul and Gram Devi rituals of worship.

At the grassroots level, the most widespread Gram Devta is the Bhomia Ji thaana, found in the Mewar region. The Gram Devta is usually represented by a stone pedestal under a sacred tree at the border of the village, and its function is that of the Kshetrapal, the guardian of the fields, forests, and water sources. The Bhomia Ji thaana is worshipped before the sowing and reaping of crops, thus instilling ecological responsibility and social discipline. According to Upadhyaya (1987), the Gram Devta shrines represent the indigenous spatial mapping system, demarcating sacred boundaries and ecological zones. The sacred groves associated with the Gram Devta shrines are an example of the role of ritual belief in the conservation of the environment.

The southern Mewar regions, dominated by Bhil tribe worship Devnarayan Ji and regional mother goddesses as their local deities where the gram mandirs and oral epic traditions have been linked to territorial identity (Gold, 1992). These temples may be devoid of grand monumental buildings but have been at the core of seasonal fairs and oath-taking rituals. Their age-old traditions preserve and impart the knowledge about forests and local medicines, rainfall patterns and clan folklore.

The cult of Devnarayan has a significant position in the region of eastern, central and southern Rajasthan, especially among the Gurjar community, though the worship of Devnarayan is present among people of various castes. Devnarayan is believed to be the incarnation of the lord *Vishnu* and the embodiment of the values of bravery, the promotion of social harmony and pastoral values. His important shrines are located at Devnarayan Temple, Deomali, and Devnarayan Temple, Jodhpuriya, which are important Gram Mandirs of Devnarayan as a gram devta.

The tradition of invoking blessings of Devnarayan has been maintained through the tradition of *phad* recitation (sacred Scroll) by *Bhopas*, which contains elements of mythology, genealogy, and regional history. A commonly recited devotional verse during the tradition of *phad* performance by *Bhopas*, passed on through oral tradition, in praise of Devnarayan is:

“देव नारायण धणी, गोपालां री लाज राखजो;

श्रांरो नाम लेता दुख-दर्द सब भागजो।”

11.3 Gram Mandirs of Shekhawati Region

In the northeastern part of Rajasthan (India) is a collection of three district areas consisting of Jhunjhunu, Sikar, and Churu which make up the Shekhawati region. The Shekhawati area is part of an eco-region that experiences a semi-arid climate characterized by sandy soils, variable precipitation amounts, little vegetation, and high temperature changes.

The artistic style provided Shekhawati with the nickname of the "open art gallery of Rajasthan." There is diversity in design among Gram Mandirs throughout the region due to the varying patronage, affiliation to a sect, and historical period in which they were built.

The religious devotion found in Shekhawati is comprised of multiple layers; this is evident by the coexistence of clan deities (Kul Devta), village deities (Gram Devta), folk deities (Lok Devta) and common Hindu deities, such as Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti. The Jeen Mata Temple, which is mainly known as a pilgrimage destination for Goddess Durga, is the largest regional pilgrimage site for worshippers throughout Shekhawati. Even though Jeen Mata Temple is not considered one of the original *Shakti Peeth*, yet it is an important regional pilgrimage site for worshippers during the Navratri Festival when large fairs are held.

The temple of Rani Sati is an important religious institution in Shekhawati and has been built with the assistance of mercantile patronage. The temple of Devi Sati celebrates an identity of devotion, community development and harmony. The regional shrines of Gogaji are recognised as the protector deity of the and worshiped ardently through oral prayers and local customs.

These religious institutions safeguard the traditions of the land and people through celebrations of festivals, *Bhajan-kirtans* and storytelling, ensuring the passing on of their traditions to future generations.

11.4 Gram Mandirs of Hadoti Region

The Maa Bisoti Temple of Hadoti region is an example of the importance of Gram Devis for providing protection, fertility, and prosperity in village society. The Balaji and Bhairav shrines, often located in an ecologically protected grove, reflect the blending of religion with nature.

Other popular folk deities include Tejaji, who is revered for his protective power against snake bites, Bhairavji as a protector deity at entrance points to villages, and Sheetla Mata as a protector deity for protection against diseases. These are important gods for local festivities and functions, thereby strengthening social cohesion.

The presence of both large temples and Gram Mandirs in Hadoti points to the dynamics of cultural synthesis. The large temples point to the patronage of the kings and the religious system, whereas the Gram Mandirs point to the lived experience of religion in the everyday life of the people.

11.5 Gram Mandirs of Brij

The Radha-Krishna Gram Mandir, located in Kumher, is representative of Brij region's well-known Radha-centered worshiping practice. In Kumher's village, collective worship is an everyday function of the temple; it is organized and operated primarily by women. Rituals are frequently performed in conjunction with an agricultural calendar such as a festival is observed on a specific day which is tied to planting or harvest cycles or seasonal changes (Gold 1992). The temple promotes harmony and ethical cohesion through *seva* (selfless service).

The Banke Bihari Ji Gram Mandir, situated in Kaman, expresses devotion and promotes the Brij Vaishnava tradition. The temple is dedicated to Krishna in the form of Banke Bihari and is a centre of bhajan-kirtan assemblies especially during festivals such as Holi and Janmashtami. Through the performances of Raas-lila and through Brij Bhasha oral recitations, the intangible cultural heritage of Brij is being maintained through passing of knowledge from one generation to the next (Kothari & Neuman, 2007).

Kaila Devi Temple is the Kul Devi Shakti shrine in the Brij-Karauli region. Situated at the hills of Karauli, it is a large religious site for the annual Kaila Devi. Worship of Kaila Devi provides protection (*raksha*), fertility (*prasava-shakti*) and communal well-being emphasising deep links between the IKS, divine traditions and agrarian ways of living (Hooja, 2006). The research of Dasharatha Sharma (1959) reveals that historically goddess cults in Rajasthan have acted as protective sovereign authorities aligned with geographic-based identity. Kaila Devi is considered as the protector of spirituality and the local ecological system represented by the

hills of the region and surrounding sacred forests. The temple combines *Shakti* devotion with ecological awareness and seasonal agrarian cycles.

The Gopal Ji Gram Mandir in Deeg is dedicated to Krishna as pastoral deity and the custodian of cows as well as a supporter of the agricultural economy. The temple has a strong connection to the cow-herding community, revealing the agricultural basis of Brij culture. Annual commemorations such as Govardhan Puja and *Annakut seva* projects an appreciation for the abundance of agrarian food. Sontheimer (1989), in his book *Cattle and Grassland Farming in Gujarat*, contends that Western Indian pastoral gods embody the ecological symbiosis of man, cattle, and land; thus, the Gopal Ji tradition parallels this view in significant ways. The temple serves to further define *gau-sanskriti* or cow-centred cultural beliefs.

12. Conclusion

Gram Mandirs of Rajasthan reveals themselves to be vibrant institutions of Indian Knowledge system with considerable relevance to the modern world. While their religious importance cannot be overlooked, it is pertinent to note that Gram Mandirs serves as institutions that cultivate environmentalism and social harmony. Through the practice of sacred groves, agrarian ritualism, and social decision-making, Gram Mandirs contribute to the development of ecological sustainability in marginal landscapes. These institutions are also important sites for informal education, where traditional knowledge and social values are passed from one generation to the next. In an era characterized by rapid socio-economic changes, Gram Mandirs have much to contribute to the development of local identity, participatory governance, and sustainable statehood through social engagement. Therefore, Gram Mandirs can be seen as an embodiment of Indian knowledge Systems with considerable importance to the environment, education, and society.

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