



Reconstructing Cultural Memory through Rajasthani Folk Tales: A New Historicist Reading

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Abstract:

Rajasthani folk tales constitute a rich repository of cultural memory, preserving the historical consciousness, social values, and collective experiences of the communities from which they emerge. This study examines selected Rajasthani folk tales through the theoretical framework of New Historicism to explore the dynamic relationship between literary narratives and the socio-historical contexts that shape them. Rather than treating folk tales as isolated imaginative creations, the study interprets them as cultural texts that both reflect and construct historical realities. It investigates how themes of heroism, gender, caste, kingship, resistance, and regional identity are negotiated within these narratives, revealing the interplay of power, ideology, and memory. By reconstructing cultural memory through oral traditions, the paper highlights the role of Rajasthani folk literature in preserving marginalized voices and indigenous knowledge systems. The study demonstrates that folk tales remain vital cultural documents for understanding Rajasthan's evolving historical and cultural identity.

Keywords: Rajasthani folk tales; cultural memory; Qualitative research; heroism, gender, caste, kingship, resistance.

1.1 Introduction: Cultural Memory, Folk Narratives, and New Historicism

Culture is not merely inherited through written history but is continuously preserved, negotiated, and reconstructed through collective remembrance, oral traditions, rituals, and narrative practices. Among these, folk tales occupy a central position as repositories of cultural memory, transmitting the experiences, values, beliefs, and historical consciousness of communities across generations. Unlike official historical records, which often privilege political events and dominant voices, folk narratives preserve the lived experiences of ordinary people, reflecting their perceptions of justice, identity, morality, power, and resistance. Cultural memory, therefore, extends beyond the preservation of historical facts; it encompasses the symbolic, emotional, and ideological dimensions through which societies remember and reinterpret their past. Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory is sustained through symbolic forms, traditions, and



cultural texts that provide continuity between the past and the present, enabling communities to construct and reaffirm their collective identities (Assmann 36). Similarly, Aleida Assmann emphasizes that cultural memory is an evolving process in which societies selectively preserve, reinterpret, and transmit memories according to changing historical and cultural circumstances (Assmann, *Cultural Memory* 18). Within this framework, folk literature emerges as one of the most significant cultural archives, embodying historical consciousness in forms that remain dynamic, performative, and socially relevant.

The folk traditions of Rajasthan represent one of India's richest oral literary heritages. Developed over centuries within the diverse geographical and socio-political landscapes of the region, Rajasthani folk tales encapsulate the historical experiences of kingdoms, pastoral communities, desert settlements, tribal societies, and rural populations. These narratives preserve memories of heroism, sacrifice, honour, devotion, resistance, love, and social justice while simultaneously reflecting everyday customs, ecological knowledge, and community ethics. Stories of Pabuji, Gogaji, Tejaji, Devnarayan, Dhola-Maru, and numerous regional legends continue to shape the cultural imagination of Rajasthan through oral performances, storytelling traditions, folk theatre, and religious observances. Such narratives cannot be regarded merely as imaginative tales intended for entertainment; rather, they function as living cultural documents that preserve collective memory and encode historical experiences within symbolic and narrative structures. As A. K. Ramanujan observes, Indian oral traditions constantly recreate themselves through performance, allowing communities to negotiate continuity and change while preserving cultural values across generations (Ramanujan 24). Consequently, Rajasthani folk tales become important sources for understanding the social history, ethical systems, and cultural identities that may remain absent or marginalized within conventional historical documentation.

The relationship between folklore and history has increasingly attracted scholarly attention within cultural studies, anthropology, and literary criticism. Rather than considering history as a fixed record of objective events, contemporary theoretical approaches recognize that historical knowledge is mediated through language, narrative, ideology, and cultural representation. Oral narratives often preserve alternative versions of the past that challenge official historical accounts by foregrounding marginalized voices, regional experiences, and indigenous epistemologies. Folk tales thus operate as sites where memory and history intersect, revealing how communities interpret historical realities through symbolic expression. Pierre Nora's distinction between history and memory underscores this relationship by suggesting that memory remains rooted in lived experience, whereas history reconstructs the past through intellectual representation (Nora 8). In the context of Rajasthan, folk narratives preserve memories of local rulers, heroic resistance, caste negotiations, women's agency, ecological adaptation, and religious coexistence, thereby expanding historical understanding beyond archival sources. Their continued performance across generations demonstrates that cultural memory remains a living process rather than a static inheritance.

1.2 Rajasthani Folk Tales as Repositories of Cultural Memory



Rajasthani folk tales occupy a distinctive position within the cultural heritage of India because they preserve the collective memory of communities through oral transmission rather than written documentation. As products of an enduring oral tradition, these narratives have travelled across generations through storytellers, folk performers, bards, and community elders, adapting to changing historical circumstances while retaining their essential cultural meanings. Their continuity demonstrates that memory is not a passive archive of past events but an active social process through which communities interpret, reconstruct, and transmit their shared experiences. Oral traditions perform the crucial function of preserving histories that often remain absent from official chronicles, particularly those concerning rural communities, pastoral societies, women, tribal groups, and local heroes. Consequently, Rajasthani folk tales serve as living repositories of cultural memory where historical experiences, ethical values, and social ideals are encoded within symbolic narratives and performative practices. Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory is sustained through recurring acts of remembrance that connect successive generations with a shared cultural past, enabling societies to maintain continuity despite historical transformation (Assmann 37). Rajasthani folk narratives exemplify this process by preserving regional memories that remain culturally significant even in contemporary society. The oral character of Rajasthani folklore contributes significantly to its ability to preserve collective remembrance. Unlike written texts, which remain relatively fixed, oral narratives evolve with each performance while retaining their fundamental narrative structures. Every retelling reflects the social environment, historical consciousness, and cultural priorities of the community in which it is narrated. Storytellers often incorporate local references, contemporary concerns, and regional experiences without disrupting the continuity of the traditional narrative. This flexibility enables folk tales to remain culturally relevant across centuries while simultaneously preserving memories of earlier generations. Maurice Halbwachs maintains that collective memory exists within social frameworks where communities continuously reconstruct the past according to present circumstances (Halbwachs 38). The oral tradition of Rajasthan vividly illustrates this principle because each generation reinterprets inherited narratives in ways that reaffirm collective identity while responding to changing social realities. Memory, therefore, is not preserved through mechanical repetition but through meaningful cultural adaptation.

The institution of the *Bhopa* and *Bhopi*, the Charan and Bhatt bardic traditions, and village storytellers has played a central role in maintaining Rajasthan's oral heritage. Through performances of *phad* narratives, devotional songs, epic recitations, and seasonal storytelling sessions, these custodians of folklore have ensured the transmission of historical memory beyond the confines of literacy. Narratives concerning Pabuji, Devnarayan, Gogaji, and Tejaji are not simply heroic legends but cultural performances that reinforce communal values of courage, sacrifice, justice, and protection. Their repeated enactment transforms historical remembrance into a shared cultural experience, where memory becomes embedded within ritual performance and community participation. Performance thus becomes an act of historical preservation, demonstrating that oral narratives possess an authority comparable to written historical records



within local cultural contexts (Blackburn 19). The performative nature of Rajasthani folklore further reveals that cultural memory survives not only through texts but also through social practices that continuously renew communal bonds.

Historical consciousness constitutes another defining feature of Rajasthani folk tales. Although these narratives often blend historical events with imagination, symbolism, and supernatural elements, they nevertheless preserve authentic perceptions of historical realities. Rather than presenting chronology in the conventional sense, folk narratives communicate historical consciousness through cultural interpretation. They preserve memories of regional conflicts, political transformations, ecological challenges, migrations, and social relationships while embedding these experiences within narratives of heroism, morality, and divine intervention. New Historicism encourages scholars to view such narratives as cultural texts that reveal how societies construct historical meaning rather than merely recording factual events (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 6). Consequently, the historical significance of Rajasthani folk tales lies not in their literal accuracy but in their capacity to represent the beliefs, anxieties, aspirations, and ideological structures that shaped regional societies.

Many celebrated Rajasthani folk narratives preserve memories of resistance against oppression, loyalty to community, and the defence of honour. Heroes such as Pabuji and Tejaji embody ideals that extend beyond individual bravery to symbolize collective ethical principles deeply embedded within regional consciousness. Similarly, narratives surrounding Devnarayan integrate historical memory with religious devotion, illustrating how local communities transform historical personalities into sacred cultural symbols. These stories reveal the close relationship between history and mythology, where historical figures gradually acquire legendary dimensions without losing their cultural relevance. Pierre Nora observes that collective memory often survives through symbolic sites and narratives that embody the emotional relationship between communities and their past (Nora 8). In Rajasthan, folk tales themselves function as such symbolic sites, preserving memories that transcend documentary history while maintaining profound historical significance within community consciousness.

The ecological conditions of Rajasthan are also deeply embedded within its folk traditions. Desert landscapes, water scarcity, pastoral livelihoods, sacred groves, medicinal plants, and indigenous environmental practices appear consistently in folk narratives, demonstrating the close relationship between culture and ecology. Such representations preserve practical knowledge accumulated through centuries of human interaction with the natural environment. Indigenous knowledge concerning animal behaviour, agricultural cycles, water conservation, weather patterns, and herbal medicine survives within narrative traditions that communicate this information in culturally meaningful forms. Scholars of folklore increasingly recognize oral narratives as repositories of ecological knowledge that contribute significantly to environmental history and sustainable cultural practices (Dundes 58). Rajasthani folk tales therefore preserve not only cultural beliefs but also practical wisdom essential for the survival of communities inhabiting arid landscapes.



The representation of gender roles and social relationships within Rajasthani folk tales further illustrates their function as repositories of cultural memory. Female characters frequently embody ideals of courage, devotion, resilience, and moral authority while simultaneously reflecting the patriarchal structures within which they operate. Narratives such as *Dhola-Maru* portray women's emotional strength, determination, and agency, even as they reveal historical expectations concerning marriage, honour, and family. Similarly, the depiction of caste relations, occupational identities, and community interactions reflects the social organization of traditional Rajasthan. These representations provide valuable evidence of historical social structures while also revealing moments of negotiation, resistance, and transformation. From a New Historicist perspective, such narratives should be interpreted not merely as reflections of society but as cultural texts participating in the production and circulation of social values and ideological meanings (Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* 149).

Viewed through the framework of cultural memory and New Historicism, Rajasthani folk tales emerge as far more than imaginative stories or entertainment. They are dynamic cultural archives that preserve historical consciousness, transmit indigenous knowledge, sustain regional customs, and negotiate social identities across time. Their enduring vitality lies in their ability to connect memory with history, tradition with transformation, and local experience with broader cultural processes. By preserving voices that frequently remain absent from official historiography, these narratives continue to shape Rajasthan's cultural imagination and contribute significantly to understanding the historical and ideological foundations of regional identity.

1.3 A New Historicist Reading of Selected Rajasthani Folk Tales

New Historicism fundamentally reorients literary criticism by rejecting the notion of literature as an autonomous artistic creation detached from history. Instead, it understands literary texts as cultural artifacts embedded within the social, political, economic, and ideological conditions of their production. Stephen Greenblatt contends that literary works participate in the “circulation of social energy,” where texts both shape and are shaped by the cultural forces operating within a particular historical moment (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 1–12). Consequently, literature is neither a passive reflection of history nor an isolated imaginative construct; rather, it becomes an active site where competing ideologies, systems of power, and cultural memories intersect. This theoretical perspective is especially productive for the study of Rajasthani folk tales because these narratives emerge from oral traditions that continuously negotiate history, memory, and identity. They preserve collective experiences while simultaneously reinterpreting them through symbolic and performative forms. A New Historicist reading therefore shifts the focus from questions of historical authenticity to the cultural meanings that these narratives generate within specific historical contexts.

The relationship between text and context occupies the core of New Historicist methodology. Every folk tale originates within a network of historical experiences, social institutions, and cultural practices that shape both its composition and its subsequent reception. Rajasthani folk



narratives cannot be separated from the feudal polity, desert ecology, warrior ethics, religious traditions, and caste-based social organization that have historically characterized the region. Stories concerning local heroes, saints, rulers, and ordinary villagers preserve not merely fictional episodes but culturally significant interpretations of historical reality. As Michel Foucault argues, historical knowledge itself is produced through discourse, and every narrative reflects particular configurations of power and knowledge (Foucault 27). Accordingly, Rajasthani folk tales should be interpreted as discursive formations that reveal how communities have understood authority, justice, morality, and social order across generations.

The celebrated narrative of **Pabuji** illustrates the inseparable relationship between literary representation and historical context. Pabuji, revered both as a folk hero and a local deity, is remembered as a protector of cattle, defender of the oppressed, and embodiment of Rajput honour. Although historical evidence regarding his life remains limited, the narrative surrounding him has acquired immense cultural authority through oral performance, particularly in the *Phad* tradition. From a New Historicist perspective, the significance of the Pabuji narrative lies less in verifying historical facts than in examining how it constructs ideals of leadership, sacrifice, and communal responsibility. The tale reflects the socio-economic importance of pastoralism in western Rajasthan, where cattle represented both livelihood and social prestige. Pabuji's willingness to sacrifice his life for the protection of cattle symbolically reinforces community values concerning honour, obligation, and collective welfare. The narrative therefore functions as a cultural document preserving the ideological priorities of pastoral societies rather than merely recounting an individual heroic episode.

Similarly, the folk tradition surrounding **Devnarayan** demonstrates how oral narratives transform historical memory into cultural authority. Devnarayan is simultaneously remembered as a historical figure, a divine incarnation, and a symbol of justice for agrarian communities, particularly the Gurjars. His narrative incorporates miraculous events alongside references to local conflicts, kinship networks, and political struggles, illustrating the close relationship between history and mythology. New Historicism encourages readers to recognize that such mythic elements do not diminish historical significance; instead, they reveal the processes through which communities construct meaningful historical identities. The transformation of Devnarayan into a sacred cultural figure reflects the ideological needs of the communities that preserve his memory, demonstrating how folklore participates in the production of social legitimacy and communal cohesion (Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* 150). The tale therefore becomes a cultural archive through which historical experience is remembered, ritualized, and continually reinterpreted.

The story of **Tejaji** further demonstrates the negotiation of authority through ethical commitment rather than institutional power. Tejaji is remembered not as a monarch but as a community hero whose authority derives from personal integrity, courage, and fidelity to his word. His celebrated promise to return to a serpent after fulfilling his social obligations exemplifies an ethical model that transcends political authority. The narrative establishes moral responsibility as the true



foundation of leadership, suggesting that legitimate authority emerges through adherence to social ethics rather than hereditary privilege. Such representations challenge narrow definitions of power by locating authority within community values rather than political institutions. Foucault's conception of power as diffuse and relational rather than exclusively centralized provides an illuminating framework for understanding these narratives, where authority circulates through cultural practices, moral expectations, and collective memory rather than solely through state structures (Foucault 94).

The representation of women in Rajasthani folklore also reflects broader historical concerns regarding kinship, marriage alliances, inheritance, and community honour. Women's bodies often become symbolic sites upon which questions of political legitimacy, family prestige, and social morality are inscribed. Yet these narratives frequently attribute moral authority to female characters whose wisdom, perseverance, and ethical integrity influence the course of events. Such portrayals reveal the contradictions inherent within patriarchal societies, where women's agency operates within restrictive social structures without being entirely eliminated. New Historicism encourages attention to these contradictions by emphasizing that literary texts rarely express a single ideological position but instead contain multiple, competing voices that reflect the complexities of historical reality (Montrose 23).

Caste and social hierarchy likewise emerge as important themes within Rajasthani folk traditions. Traditional society in Rajasthan was characterized by intricate systems of occupational specialization, hereditary status, and community identity. Folk narratives preserve these structures while simultaneously revealing moments of negotiation and resistance. Stories involving pastoral communities, artisans, tribal groups, saints, and wandering ascetics frequently challenge rigid social boundaries by emphasizing personal virtue, devotion, courage, or spiritual authority over inherited status. The widespread reverence accorded to figures such as Gogaji and Ramdevji across caste communities illustrates how folk traditions create inclusive spaces that transcend conventional social divisions. Such narratives suggest that cultural legitimacy may derive from ethical action and public service rather than social hierarchy alone. From a New Historicist perspective, these stories expose the tensions between dominant social institutions and popular cultural practices, revealing the dynamic nature of ideological contestation.

The themes of resistance and heroism occupy a particularly important place within Rajasthani folk literature. Heroism in these narratives extends beyond military achievement to encompass moral courage, protection of the vulnerable, defence of communal values, and resistance against injustice. Local heroes frequently confront oppressive rulers, invading forces, or social inequities, transforming individual struggles into collective expressions of cultural identity. Such narratives preserve memories of resistance that are often marginalized within official historical accounts. Greenblatt's concept of the circulation of social energy is especially relevant here because heroic narratives mobilize shared cultural values that reinforce community solidarity while simultaneously questioning established structures of power (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 6).



Heroism therefore becomes a cultural practice through which historical memory is preserved and transmitted.

The intertextual relationship between folklore and history constitutes one of the defining characteristics of Rajasthani cultural memory. New Historicism rejects rigid distinctions between literary and non-literary texts, encouraging scholars to examine chronicles, inscriptions, religious texts, travel accounts, administrative documents, and folk narratives as interconnected cultural discourses. Rajasthani folk tales frequently correspond with historical events, regional traditions, and archaeological evidence while simultaneously transforming them through symbolic representation. The stories of Pabuji, Devnarayan, Tejaji, Gogaji, and Dhola-Maru exist alongside inscriptions, temple traditions, genealogical records, and local histories, creating a multilayered historical archive in which literary imagination and historical memory interact continuously. These intertextual relationships demonstrate that folklore does not merely supplement history but actively participates in its construction.

Viewed through the lens of New Historicism, selected Rajasthani folk tales emerge as powerful cultural texts that illuminate the reciprocal relationship between literature and history. They preserve collective memory while negotiating questions of power, authority, gender, caste, heroism, and identity within historically specific contexts. Their significance extends beyond their narrative appeal because they function as repositories of cultural consciousness where historical experiences are interpreted, contested, and transmitted across generations. Rather than occupying the margins of historical inquiry, these folk narratives deserve recognition as indispensable cultural documents that expand our understanding of Rajasthan's social history and demonstrate the enduring capacity of oral traditions to reconstruct cultural memory through narrative representation.

1.4 Reconstructing Cultural Memory: History, Identity, and Ideology

The reconstruction of cultural memory through Rajasthani folk tales illustrates the intricate relationship between history, identity, and ideology. Folk narratives do not merely preserve memories of the past; they actively reinterpret historical experiences in ways that respond to the changing social, political, and cultural needs of successive generations. Unlike conventional historiography, which often seeks chronological accuracy and documentary evidence, cultural memory emphasizes the meanings communities assign to the past through symbolic representation, collective remembrance, and narrative continuity. From the perspective of New Historicism, neither history nor literature possesses an absolute or objective status; both are discursive constructions shaped by power, ideology, and cultural circumstances (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 6). Consequently, Rajasthani folk tales emerge as dynamic cultural texts that negotiate historical realities while simultaneously preserving the emotional, ethical, and ideological dimensions of collective memory.

The relationship between memory and history has attracted considerable attention in cultural and historical studies because both concepts contribute to the formation of social consciousness while operating through different modes of representation. History traditionally aspires to



reconstruct the past through documentary evidence and critical interpretation, whereas memory survives through lived experience, oral traditions, rituals, and symbolic practices. Pierre Nora argues that memory is living, fluid, and constantly evolving, while history represents an intellectual reconstruction of what no longer exists (Nora 8). This distinction becomes particularly significant in the context of Rajasthani folk traditions, where oral narratives preserve cultural meanings that often remain beyond the reach of official historical documentation. Stories of Pabuji, Devnarayan, Gogaji, Tejaji, and Dhola-Maru continue to function as collective memories irrespective of debates concerning their historical authenticity because their cultural significance resides in the values, identities, and historical consciousness they embody.

Rather than existing in opposition, memory and history interact continuously within Rajasthani folklore. Folk narratives frequently transform historical events into symbolic narratives that communicate moral ideals, communal aspirations, and regional experiences. Historical conflicts become stories of courage and sacrifice; ecological challenges evolve into narratives of resilience and adaptation; local rulers acquire legendary dimensions that transcend chronological history without losing cultural relevance. Such transformations illustrate Jan Assmann's observation that cultural memory does not preserve the past in its original form but selectively reconstructs it according to the values and priorities of the present (Assmann 38). This process of selective remembrance enables communities to maintain continuity with their past while simultaneously adapting inherited traditions to contemporary circumstances. The historical significance of folk tales therefore lies not only in the events they recall but also in the meanings they continue to generate within collective consciousness.

The reconstruction of cultural memory through folklore also plays a decisive role in the formation of regional and cultural identity. Identity is neither static nor inherited unchanged across generations; it is continually produced through acts of remembrance, cultural representation, and shared historical experience. Rajasthani folk tales contribute significantly to this process by creating a common symbolic universe in which regional communities recognize their collective values, traditions, and historical heritage. The recurring themes of honour, hospitality, devotion, bravery, sacrifice, ecological resilience, and communal solidarity establish a shared ethical framework that distinguishes the cultural identity of Rajasthan while accommodating its internal diversity. Through repeated oral performances, festivals, religious observances, and educational transmission, these narratives strengthen a sense of belonging that connects individuals with broader regional traditions.

The geographical landscape of Rajasthan further reinforces the formation of cultural identity within folk narratives. Deserts, forts, villages, sacred lakes, grazing lands, temples, and pilgrimage routes appear repeatedly as culturally meaningful spaces rather than merely physical settings. These landscapes become repositories of memory where historical events, legendary heroes, and religious traditions converge. The intimate relationship between people and place transforms geography into an essential component of cultural identity. Aleida Assmann observes that cultural memory depends upon symbolic spaces that preserve collective remembrance across



generations (Assmann, *Cultural Memory* 119). Rajasthani folk traditions vividly illustrate this principle because specific landscapes continue to evoke historical memory through storytelling, ritual practices, and local commemorations. Regional identity therefore emerges not only through shared narratives but also through collective attachment to culturally significant places.

An equally significant contribution of Rajasthani folk tales lies in their preservation of marginalized histories that remain underrepresented within official historical narratives. Conventional historiography has frequently privileged political elites, dynastic achievements, military campaigns, and administrative institutions while overlooking the experiences of ordinary people, pastoral communities, tribal societies, artisans, women, and local religious traditions. Oral narratives compensate for these omissions by preserving alternative historical perspectives rooted in everyday life. The stories of village heroes, local saints, pastoral protectors, wandering ascetics, and courageous women reveal dimensions of social history that archival records rarely document. Through these narratives, communities remember not only rulers but also those whose contributions shaped regional society outside formal political institutions.

The voices of women within Rajasthani folk traditions further enrich these alternative historical perspectives. Female protagonists frequently preserve memories of emotional resilience, social negotiation, familial responsibility, and moral leadership that remain marginal within conventional historical accounts. Although many narratives originate within patriarchal social structures, they nevertheless acknowledge women's agency in sustaining family, community, and cultural continuity. Likewise, the inclusion of pastoral communities, artisans, travelling performers, and tribal groups broadens the historical archive by demonstrating that regional identity has always been shaped through cultural diversity rather than social uniformity. Such representations contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Rajasthan's historical development and reinforce the importance of folklore as a complementary source for historical inquiry.

In the contemporary era, Rajasthani folk traditions have acquired renewed relevance within cultural discourse because they address pressing concerns regarding heritage preservation, globalization, cultural diversity, and indigenous knowledge systems. Rapid urbanization, technological transformation, migration, and changing patterns of cultural consumption have altered the traditional environments in which oral narratives were historically transmitted. Yet rather than disappearing, many folk traditions have adapted to new cultural platforms including digital archives, documentary films, educational curricula, folk festivals, museum exhibitions, and social media. This adaptability confirms that cultural memory remains a dynamic process capable of responding creatively to historical change without abandoning its foundational values. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes folk traditions as valuable intellectual resources for interdisciplinary research in literature, history, anthropology, environmental humanities, and cultural studies. Rajasthani folk tales contribute significantly to debates concerning ecological sustainability, community ethics, gender studies, heritage conservation, and indigenous knowledge. Their representations of water conservation, pastoral coexistence,



biodiversity, and sacred landscapes resonate strongly with present-day environmental concerns, while their narratives of social harmony and communal responsibility continue to inspire discussions of cultural coexistence in a pluralistic society. UNESCO's emphasis on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage further reinforces the global significance of oral traditions as essential components of humanity's cultural diversity (UNESCO 7).

Viewed through the theoretical framework of New Historicism, the contemporary relevance of Rajasthani folk traditions extends beyond cultural preservation to encompass critical engagement with history itself. These narratives encourage readers to question the boundaries between historical documentation and cultural memory, revealing that the past survives through multiple forms of representation rather than archival evidence alone. They demonstrate that historical understanding becomes richer when official records are read alongside oral traditions, ritual performances, and community narratives. In doing so, Rajasthani folk tales continue to reconstruct cultural memory by preserving regional identities, recovering marginalized histories, and negotiating ideological meanings within changing historical contexts. Their enduring vitality confirms that folklore remains not an antiquated remnant of the past but an evolving cultural discourse that shapes collective identity, historical consciousness, and cultural imagination in the present.

1.5 Conclusion

The present study has examined selected Rajasthani folk tales through the theoretical framework of New Historicism to demonstrate that oral narratives function as dynamic repositories of cultural memory rather than merely as imaginative literary creations. By situating these narratives within their socio-historical and ideological contexts, the study has highlighted the reciprocal relationship between folklore and history, illustrating how collective memory is continuously preserved, negotiated, and reconstructed through storytelling traditions. The analysis has shown that Rajasthani folk tales encode historical consciousness by preserving memories of regional heroes, local communities, religious practices, ecological knowledge, and social values that often remain marginalized within conventional historiography. Consequently, these narratives emerge as valuable cultural texts that contribute significantly to understanding Rajasthan's historical experiences and evolving cultural identity.

One of the major findings of this study is that the distinction between history and folklore is far less rigid than traditional scholarship has often assumed. Although folk tales frequently incorporate mythic, symbolic, and supernatural elements, they preserve historically meaningful representations of social institutions, political authority, ethical values, and community life. Rather than seeking factual accuracy alone, these narratives communicate cultural truths that reveal how communities remember, interpret, and assign meaning to the past. Stories associated with figures such as Pabuji, Devnarayan, Tejaji, Gogaji, and Dhola-Maru illustrate how historical memory survives through oral performance, ritual practice, and collective remembrance. These narratives demonstrate that folklore preserves not only events but also the emotions, beliefs, and ideological structures that shape regional historical consciousness. In this respect, cultural



memory emerges as an active process of interpretation rather than a passive preservation of historical facts (Assmann 36).

The application of New Historicism has made a significant contribution to the interpretation of Rajasthani folk literature by challenging the conventional separation between literary texts and historical realities. Stephen Greenblatt's concept of the "circulation of social energy" provides an effective analytical framework for understanding how folk narratives participate in the production, negotiation, and transmission of cultural meanings rather than simply reflecting historical circumstances (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 6). Similarly, the New Historicist emphasis on the historicity of texts and the textuality of history enables a more nuanced understanding of oral traditions as cultural documents that reveal the interaction of power, ideology, discourse, and memory. Instead of treating folklore as peripheral to historical inquiry, this perspective recognizes oral narratives as legitimate historical sources that illuminate dimensions of everyday life often absent from official archives. By integrating literary criticism with cultural history, the study demonstrates that New Historicism expands the methodological possibilities of folklore studies and encourages interdisciplinary engagement with regional literary traditions.

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