Toponymy or the Geography of Place-Names in the Aravalli Hills and Semi-Arid Plains of Rajasthan

Abstract

Settlements are manifestations of cultural landscape and depict human adjustment to, and impact on, the natural setting of a region. The place-names or toponyms, therefore, reflect either the natural elements or the cultural characteristics. This study is related to the place-names in the Aravalli hills of Rajsamand and semi-arid plains of Pali districts in Rajasthan. The aim is to classify the village-names and create a typology of toponyms in the study area.

Keywords: Place-Names / Toponyms, Rajsamand, Pali, Rajasthan, Aravalli, Semi-Arid Plains

Introduction

'Onomastics' or 'Onomatology' as a field of study focuses on the origin, history, and use of proper names, whereas *Toponymy* or *Toponomastics* is one of the principal branches of Onomastics, and refers to the study of place-names (toponyms), their origins, meanings, use, and typology. Within geography, the term toponym is now replacing "place-name" in professional expositions. Place-names are not paid particular attention by the people, and are commonly used according to their routine utility (Deroy, 1992). The importance of place-names as symbols of particularity, thus, is largely overlooked, not only by the masses but also by the scholars.

Review of Literature

Although geographers, psychologists, philosophers and architects deal with places and the sense of place, not much work has been done in this field (Relph, 2016). The traditional approach of toponymists has been to explore into etymology, archives and local histories to unveil what the place-names mean (Rose-Redwood *et al.*, 2010; Lippard, 2015).

As Brunhes opined, the place-names as 'fossils of human geography' are an accumulation from the past. Ecological diversity, cultural perceptions and dialectical wealth have, in fact, interacted to produce a variety of place-names (Singh, 1994). Place-names have been classified variously. One of the schemes included following categories of place-names: (a) Commendatory (b) Descriptive (c) Possessive (d) Associative (e) Related to Incident / Activity (f) Manufactured (g) Folk-Etymological, and (h) Political (Randall, 2001).

Today, toponymy has moved away from mere etymological and taxonomic study towards unravelling the politics involved in naming of places (Rose-Redwood *et al.*, 2010). This takes toponymy, or the geography of place-names, as we may call it, towards understanding the process behind the naming of places. Though studies on historical and socio-cultural aspects of settlements are widespread in India, toponymic studies have largely been a neglected lot (Idem, 1962; Padhye, 1967; Singh, 1965; Singh, 1977). The work on more emerging themes like politics of place-naming, thus, is all the more lacking in India.

The Study Area

The areas included in the present study fall in Rajsamand and Pali districts of Rajasthan. The western half of the Rajsamand district lies in the Aravalli hills, while Aravalli outcrops dot the eastern parts of Pali. The western portion of Pali is a semi-arid plain, a transitional zone to the more arid Thar Desert to the west. Therefore, the study encompasses the three tehsils each of Rajsamand (*viz.*, Kumbhalgarh, Nathdwara and Rajsamand) and Pali (*viz.*, Jaitaran, Pali and Rohat) districts, lying in Aravalli ranges and semi-arid plains, respectively, of Rajasthan (Map 1).

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Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to analyse the nature of place-names, or toponyms, in the Aravalli hills of Rajsamand district, and the semi-arid plains of Pali district of Rajasthan.

Methodology

In order to find out the types and frequencies of place-names in the study area, all the villages from three selected tehsils each of Pali and Rajsamand districts (As per: Census of India, 2001) were taken. A sample of 25 per cent of the total villages of the chosen tehsils of each district was, then, randomly obtained. This yielded a sample of 127 villages (out of total 489) in the hilly area of Rajsamand district, and of 73 villages (out of 287) in the semi-arid plains of Pali district.
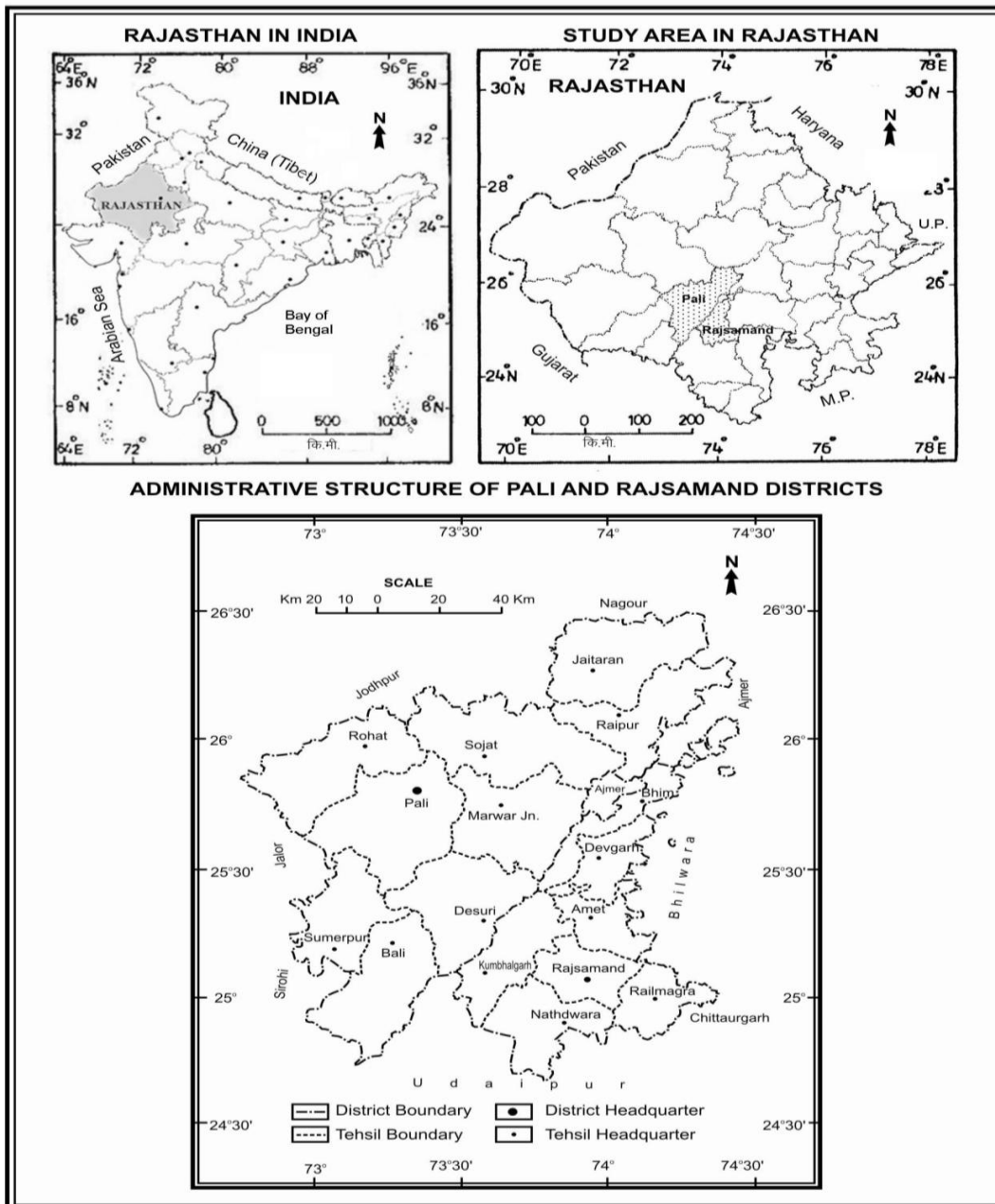
These sample villages were analysed, and classified, into different types according to their names (toponyms). The scheme of classification, as used in Singh (1994), was utilised for this purpose.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of the place-names in the study area led to the place-name typological frequencies and proportions, as shown in Table-1. The table indicates that *Cultural Place-names* form the largest category of place-names, or toponyms, overall (79 per cent).

Map 1 : Location of Study Area

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Table No. 1 : Proportion of Place Name Types in Sample Villages of Pali and Rajsamand Districts

S.No.	Place Name Types	Pali District	Rajsamand District	Total
A	**Natural Place Names**	**18 (25)**	**23 (18)**	**41 (21)**
	Geological	-	02	02
	Topographical	02	01	03
	Hydrological	06	02	08
	Floral/Faunal	10	18	28
B	**Cultural Place Names**	**55 (75)**	**104 (82)**	**159 (79)**
	Caste/Ethnic	05	24	29
	Personality /Deity	06	10	16
	Cultural Landscape/ History	12	11	23
	Settlement Process	08	17	25
	Miscellaneous	24	42	66
	Total Sample	**73**	**127**	**200**

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages

The table reveals that *cultural place-names* form nearly four-fifth of the total village names in Rajsamand. The major independent sub-categories here are formed by Caste/Ethnic names and those associated with Settlement Process. Cultural place-names are, again, the leaders in place-name type frequency table in Pali district, being three-fourth of the total. The proportion of miscellaneous cultural place-names, however, is the foremost one amongst cultural toponyms in both the districts. The share of the *natural place-names* is greater in Pali than in case of Rajsamand. In the hill-dominated, more humid areas of Rajsamand, the Floral/Faunal toponyms form major sub-categories of natural place-names. In comparatively more arid Pali district, Floral/Faunal place-names, followed by Hydrological names, are major sub-types (Table No. 2 and 3).

Detailed discussion of place-names has been done according to two broad categories.
* Place names associated with natural environments, and
* Place names associated with cultural elements.

Place Names Associated with Natural Environments

The settlements which have place names epitomizing various natural origins may further be grouped into: Geological, Topographical, Hydrological and Floral/Faunal. Examples of villages named after different local natural features are -

Geological Names

Evidences of geological place-names were hard to found in the study area. Village name Atatiya Magra Kandoi (Nathdwara tehsil), for e.g., shows natural influence of *Magra* (Hill/Rock).

Topographical Names

Place-names after various relief features, including varied landforms, are included in this category. In the study area, for instance, Bhakriwala (Rohat tehsil) and Falka (Jaitaran tehsil) indicate presence of a hill, and a lowland place, respectively.

The toponym Khara Asan (Kumbhalgarh tehsil) shows location of village at or near a steep sloping site.

Hydrological Names

Along with landforms, water features and place names are found to be directly correlated. Availability of water sources is a pre-requisite for human settlement, be it semi-arid Pali or sub-humid Rajsamand of Rajasthan. A place-name like Tasol (Rajsamand tehsil) indicates scarcity of water. Place names having epithets *Tal*, *Talai*, or *Lai* such as Taladari (Kumbhalgarh tehsil), Asarlai, Beekarlai (Jaitaran tehsil), Sukarlai (Rohat tehsil) and Bhambolai (Pali tehsil) are indicative of this category. In Rajasthan *Sar; Sir; Tal, Talai* or simply *Lai* (the last two meaning large or small tanks) suffixes reflect hydrological place names.

Floral/Faunal Place Names

Place-names after flora and fauna form a major portion of the natural place-names in both Pali and Rajsamand districts of Rajasthan. Villages in semi-arid plains of Pali, or hills of Rajsamand, are often named after trees, flowers and crops etc., and they inform about the type of endemic vegetation during the process of occupation. Gugleta (Rajsamand tehsil) (Guggal flower); Kerla (Pali tehsil) (after a vegetable); Akeli and Akrawas (Pali tehsil), Akodiya (Jaitaran tehsil), Bansa (Kumbhalgarh tehsil) (after plants and trees like Aak or *Calotropis procera*, and Bamboo); Jawariya, Jawaliya, Joi (Kumbhalgarh tehsil) (after crops like jowar); Ber Khurd (Jaitaran tehsil) (after berry bush) are such examples. Other places may be named after birds and animals like Koyal (Cuckoo), Saras ka Gurha (after Crane), Reechher (after bear, all in Kumbhalgarh tehsil) and Gorela (after horse, Nathdwara tehsil).

Place Names Associated with Cultural Environments

Many cultural elements, separately or combinedly, are reflected through place names. These may be grouped as below:

Caste/Ethnic Groups

Frequently, the place-names indicate caste and ethnic elements, that predominated in the concerned villages in the past, or do so at present. Some examples from the study area being Thakurla (Pali tehsil), Manawaton Ka Gurha and Madrehon Ka Gurha (Kumbhalgarh tehsil), Shishoda Khurd (Nathdwara tehsil), Deoron Ka Khera (Rajsamand tehsil) (Rajput clan settlement); Baniyawas (Pali tehsil) (Baniya clan settlement); Ramawaton Ki Bhagal (Kumbhalgarh tehsil) (Vaishnav clan settlement); Khati Khera (Rajsamand tehsil) (Khati clan settlement); Dhani Rebariyan (Nathdwara tehsil) (Rebaris- the Camel rearers' clan settlement) etc.

Personality/Deity Based Names

Religion-based toponyms, representing human belief, are to be found in both districts of the study area. Gods and deities, thus, lend their names to many villages like Raghunathpura (Rajsamand tehsil), Ramasiya (Pali tehsil) (God Sriram) and Kelwara (Kumbhalgarh tehsil). Some villages borrow their names from important persons, saints etc. like Prithvipura (Jaitaran tehsil), Sonailaka (Rohat tehsil),

Nathaji Ka Gurha, Bhop ji ki Bhagal (Kumbhalgarh tehsil), and Padampura (Rajsamand tehsil.).

Cultural Landscape/Cultural History Based Names

The generic terms like *was, kalan, khurd, pura* and *gurha* etc. suggest the size of settlements forming the cultural landscape.Names ending with *was*, *khurd*, *pura* etc. represent smaller villages, while those ending with kalan, for e.g., show larger ones. Kheendawas (Jaitaran tehsil), Mandawas (Rohat tehsil), Endlawas (Pali tehsil), Unwas (Nathdwara tehsil) and Rajyawas (Rajsamand tehsil); Hunawas Kalan (Jaitaran tehsil), Sanwalta Kalan (Rohat tehsil), Parasla Kalan (Pali tehsil), and Bhagwanda Kalan (Rajsamand tehsil); Ramawas Khurd (Jaitaran tehsil), Sangaat Khurd (Kumbhalgarh tehsil) and Bhagwanda Khurd (Rajsamand tehsil); Rampura (Rohat tehsil), Dayalpura (Pali tehsil), Baghpura and Jodhpura (Rajsamand tehsil); Bankon Ka Gurha and Manda Ka Gurha (Nathdwara tehsil) etc. may be cited as examples. Rural settlements with the word *Bhagal*, that often occur in Rajsamand district, indicate group of a few houses, or hamlets, that lie scattered in the hills and forests of the Aravalli hills.

Names Revealing Settlement Process

Place names can be used to unravel the process of settlement by various cultural groups in an area. *Pur, Kheri, Garh* and *Nagar* occur as suffixes in Aryan settlements. Jaitpur (Rohat tehsil); Khera Ramgarh (Jaitaran tehsil), Karni Khera (Kumbhalgarh tehsil), Baroliyon Ka Khera (Nathdwara tehsil) and Roopa Khera (Rajsamand tehsil); Chhapar Kheri (Rajsamand tehsil) and Kheri Veeran (Nathdwara tehsil); Budhwara (Pali tehsil), Bawada (Kumbhalgarh tehsil); Padawali (Rajsamand tehsil); Bheevgarh, Ramgarh and Mohangarh (Jaitaran tehsil); Doongar Nagar (Jaitaran tehsil) are examples of the settlement of Aryan tribes in this area. Fateh Nagar (Rajsamand tehsil) village shows a probable Muslim influence, in the form of a temporary or permanent settlement, sometime in the past.

Miscellaneous Names

There are many settlements which could not be put under any of the groups identified earlier. These place names of multifarious origin are grouped under 'Miscellaneous' category, for e.g., Changwa (after Harp) (Pali tehsil); Chenda (after pleaser) (Rohat tehsil); Agewa (after headlong) (Jaitaran tehsil); Lor (after wind) (Kumbhalgarh tehsil); Nenpuriya (after eyes), Chainpuriya (after Abode of Peace) (Nathdwara tehsil); Poothol (after back) and Kheton ki Bhagal (or Hamlet of Farms) (Rajsamand tehsil).

Table 2
Detailed Classification of Sample Villages into Various Place Name Categories: Pali District

Tehsil	Geological	Topographical	Hydrological	Floral/ Faunal
Jaitaran	-	Falka	Asarlai, Beekarlai	Akodiya, Ber Khurd, Hinganiya,
Rohat	-	Bhakriwala	Sukarlai, Chate-laoo	Undra
Pali	-	-	Bhambolai, Sundelao	Akeli, Akrawas, Kerla, Busi, Sapooni, Utvan

Tehsil	Caste/Ethnic Groups	Personality/ Deity	Cultural landscape/ Cultural history	Settlement process
Jaitaran	Kane Charanawatan	Prithvi pura	Hunawas Kalan, Kheendawas, Kheramolawas, Paliyawas, Ramawas Khurd	Bheevgarh, Doongar Nagar, Ghorawar Khera Ramgarh, Khinawari Mohangarh
Rohat	Kalali	Sonailakha, Malwa, Bala	Khundawas, Mandawas, Rampura, Sanwalta Kalan	Jaitpur
Pali	Baniyawas, Thakurla, Nadana Bhatan	Gura Narkha, Ramasiya	Dayalpura, Endlawas, Parasla Kalan	Budhwara

Tehsil	Miscellaneous
Jaitaran	Agewa, Deoriya, Dhaneriya, Gangaliya, Kekindara, Kharadi, Lakhasani, Litariya, Ras, Sinla, Toonkara
Rohat	Chenda, Garwaliya, Khandi, Lalki, Lambra, Madpuriya, Umkali
Pali	Balelao, Giradra Khalsa, Manihari, Changwa, Sedariya, Mandal

Table 3
Detailed Classification of Sample Villages into Various Place Name Categories - Rajsamand District

Tehsil	Geological	Topographical	Hydrological	Floral/Faunal
Kumbhalgarh	-	Khara Asan	Taladari	Bansa, Jardaya, Jawaliya, Jawariya, Joi, Kaleenjar, Koyal, Reechher, Saras Ku Gurha, Thoriya, Kherliya, Morchana, Borda Ki Bhagal
Nathdwara	Atatiya Magra Kandoi	-	-	Gorela, Munjela, Sogri Ki Bhagal
Rajsamand	Lawana	-	Tasol	Gugleta, Piplantri Khurd

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Tehsil	Caste/Ethnic groups	Personality/ Deity	Cultural landscape/ Cultural history	Settlement process
Kumbhalgarh	Baniya Tukara, Chechiyon Ka Gurha, Dholakior, Garhbor, Lakhmawaton Ka Gurha, Madecon ka Gurha, Manawaton Ka Gurha, Ramawaton Ki Bhagal, Tadawara Solankiyan	Bhopji Ki Bhagal, Hataji Ka Gurha, Jetaran, Kelwara, Mamadeo Ki Bhagal, Nathaji Ka Gurha	Sangaat Khurd	Karni Khera, Bawada
Nathdwara	Baman Hera, Chaliya, Charnon Ki Madar, Gamethon Ka Nohara, Joshiyon Ki Madri, Madrecho Ka Gurha, Sarsuniya, Shishoda Khurd, Siliyonka Gurha, Sirohi Ki Bhagal, Dhani Rebariyan	Sanga Ka Khera, Rampuriya	Bankon Ka Gurha, Joonu Gurha, Mandal Ka Gurha, Unwas, Usarwas	Baroliyon Ka Khera, Dadwal, Depur, Kala Kheri Veeran, Khera Ki Bhagal, Kheri Veeran
Rajsamand	Bamantukra, Deoron Ka Khera, Khatikhera, Rawon Ka Khera	Padampura, Raghunathpura	Baghpura, Bhagwanda Kalan, Bhagwanda Khurd, Jodhpura, Rajyawas	Arwara, Chhapar Kheri, Fateh Nagar, Lalpur, Mandawada, Mandawar, Morwar, Podawali, Roopa Khera

Tehsil	Miscellaneous
Kumbhalgarh	Amartiya, Gitoriya, Gudliya, Atdoomba, Borar, Jhitriya, Ayatri, Banokra, Kardon Ka Gurha, Kharnota, Lor, Morcha, Nathela, Pansun, Sameecha, Rod Ka Gurha, Uthron Ki Bhagal
Nathdwara	Bagol, Bapra, Chainpuriya, Dadmi, Gopa Kuda, Gunjol, Khedana, Majera, Nenpuriya, Rabcha, Tatol, Ushan, Uthnol, Warni Ki Bhagal, Bhainsa Kamed
Rajsamand	Atma, Bagota, Barliya, Bhana, Binol, Duliyana, Karera, Kheton Ki Bhagal, Poothol, Tarot

Conclusion

Analysis of toponyms or place-names in the Aravalli hills of Rajsamand and semi-arid plains of Pali districts of Rajasthan reveals a preponderance of cultural toponyms over the natural toponyms. This fact emphasizes the role of human agency in creating the cultural landscape through the means of settlements. The names of rural settlements in these regions not only reflect the environmental conditions but, even more, commemorate the human efforts, beliefs, memories and the process of settlement of the population.

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