

CHAPTER : 6

RELIGION AND BELIEF

The Rathwas have an interesting system of belief about the origin of the earth. They believe that in the beginning, there was only water all over the earth. God and Goddess 'Jogini' were alone. God created man to worship Him. He also created other living beings, and made seven layers of the earth, one of which is its dry part. God then created other gods and goddesses. He instructed Rama to make statues of human beings, and gave life to the statues. This in short is the story of the creation of the world according to the Rathwas. God continues to give birth to human beings even today. It was He who created sun, moon and stars too.

The Rathwas believe that the Rain god searches for water and sends rain for use on the earth and goddess 'Kan heri' takes care of wealth. God Inder Raj had dipped into the ocean of milk and discovered grain. Gods and goddesses are entrusted different activities and all these treasures to man. Man is divided into different groups. One of these is 'Baliyo Vaniya' who provides cloth and seeds. The farmer, called 'Abho', 'Abh Kanbi', took on the responsibility of the Abh. The Abh farmer and his wife represent the first couple in the myth of creation among the Rathwas. They believe that when the farmer became weak and old, his wife adopted a bull. The Abha farmer inserted seeds in the horns, which are then put into the earth to fertilize the soil. The 'Abhor' (cloud) brings rain for farming so that the earth becomes fertile and begins to feel a new soul coming to life in its womb. Abhi

(cloud) as farmer and 'Dharti' (earth) as the field make a compact, synthetic, cosmic image for the creation of the world of vegetation and human beings. Thus began the routine of worldly life. People were born and die scared of death, man started praying.

God created Brahmins and Ksytriyas to bring happiness and sorrow. He inspired the Brahmins to prepare 'Bajda' from the leaves of cacti to remove sorrow and to perform religious ceremonies using coconut called 'Havan' to bring happiness. God encouraged Ksytriyas to sacrifice cocks, goats and liquor to bring good fortune and happiness. One should not say that God kills man, they insist, but that god has created sorrow and happiness.

The Rathwas believe that Bhoj was the king of the earth. He had no problems about ruling over the earth. God then sent a subordinate god to find out what was happening on the earth and with him came the fortune-teller to explain to people on how to worship different gods, goddesses in order to solve worldly problems. This heralded the beginning of worship of various 'god and goddesses'.

In every walk of life, be it social, cultural or economic, the Rathwas tie themselves honestly to religion. If somebody were to fall ill, they believe that god is angry or that it is the doing of a witch or a ghost. In this connection they take the advice of the Priest to perform religious ceremony to overcome the evil. They also sacrifice hens, cocks, goats, etc. The sacrifice is performed in accordance with the

seriousness of the disease or the matter concerned. For instance, if a person were suffering from the plague or cholera, a goat is to be sacrificed, (Photo) whereas an earthen lighted lamp or coconut is to be offered for pimples, blisters etc. In case of a draught or scarcity of grains, hens or cocks are preferred for sacrifice. (Photo) The sacrifice is to be made in the name of god, and it is only then that a person would be cured of the diseases or would be freed from calamities.

In early days, there were very thick forests. The Rathwas selected such thick jungles to locate the residences of gods and goddesses. Under the large bushy trees, earthen and wooden images of gods and goddesses, earthen horses, elephants, camels, tigers, oxen, etc. are kept for worship. This place is known as 'Malun' or 'Malon' or 'Malava'. Maluns are found in every village. A Malun is a lonely, awesome place for a person to approach it even in day time. People do not go often to it due to fear and, therefore, it remains clear of all life. At such places, gods move freely and are easily accessible to the Priest. In some places, a Malun extends over an area of 0.40 to 0.80 hectares.

Wooden stacks are made of teakwood by a carpenter and fixed in the Malun. In return for his services, the carpenter receives a cock as fee. The village potter makes the images for a fee in the range of Rupees 100 to 150. The potter has to obey certain rules while making these images. For example he has to abstain from having sex with his wife. He can not abuse. Once these are over, the Priest, the village headman and others play musical instruments, sing religious songs, and install these

Religious and beliefs :



Goat sacrificed at the Plague or Cholera



Hen or Cocks sacrificed at the draught

images in the Malun. Milk is sprayed on the earthen toys and incense sticks are lighted in the Malun, which is a holy place for the Rathwas, as they believe that, if they make mistakes, god will get angry and punish them. They go to a sacred place to the trees for their Malun, because these trees belong to gods.

They live and dance freely. Barren areas are not convenient to Rathwas Gods. They believe that if someone cuts the tree, then gods will punish the person concerned. They contribute religiously to the preservation of the forests. The tribals are scared of the forces of nature. To escape danger from these natural forces, they offer sacrifices to gods. Their gods are awe-inspiring. Though they consider themselves to be Hindus, they worship their own gods and goddesses and fear various aspects of nature.

The Rathwas believe that the benevolence of Indra Raj brings rain for agriculture. He is therefore, considered to be the Rain God. They grow coarse grain and offer this to Indra Dev. He is also known as 'Babo Ind'. During the Veghela dynasty, the worship of 'Indra Dev' was carried out in summer but it takes place a couple of months earlier now, that is in the latter part of the winter. The Rathwas worship god Indra Raj continuously for nine days. They mix various grains and grow these in small bamboo baskets. The off-shoots of grains are known as 'Jowara'. (Photo) In the morning, between seven and eight, they prepare a loaf 'Adad' Dal (phaseolus mungo). Jowara, Adad dal, loaf, liquor, goats and hens offered to 'Babo Ind'. (Photo) Having performed the rituals, they sacrifice goats and hens. (Photo) The



‘Jowara’ - grains



Offered to Babo Inds



Sacrifice goats and hens



The whole event performed in the river

whole event is then performed in the river. (Photo) The worship of Indra Dev, it is believed, would help bring rain and prosperity for their crop in agriculture.

Pithoro :

Pithoro is the great god of the Rathwas. He is also known as Baba-Pithoro. Baba or Babo is a word used to show reverence to god. The ceremonies for Pithoro are the same as those in the worship of god Indra Raj. The worship of Pithoro helps in the betterment of their life from social, cultural and economic angles and brings them health. The Rathwas take a vow to help them whenever difficulties, such as failure of agricultural crops, or young girls not keeping good health, or the spread of diseases among them or among their cattle. In case of the fulfillment of their desire, the Pithoro ritual is performed. This also happens when their economic condition is better in particular and also when they are at leisure¹.

Pictures of the gods are drawn on the main wall of the Verandah, which separates the rest of the place from the kitchen, and is considered to be sacred. (Photo) The painting covers three walls of the verandah. Such a big panel of painting is not to be seen among the aboriginals in other parts of Gujarat. Worship of gods is meant for prosperity. This mass worship is known as 'Pangu'. This ceremony is considered to be one of the biggest religious occasions. Some of the Rathwas take a

1. Tadvī. Shankarbhai. Somabhai., Palna Rathwa, p. 138, 1977, Pustak Bhandar – Ahmedbad.

vow to perform half of the Pithoro ceremony. It is called 'Adhdu Pangu' or 'Chalavani'. This ritual is performed once in five years. Sometimes, it is performed in two installments or parts due to their poor economic condition. Half of the rituals are performed and the remaining halves are completed after five years. The Pithoro paintings express the total body of the myths and rituals collectively inherited by the Rathwas and passed down from generation to generation. These religious paintings are sketched by the Rathwas of Chhotaudepur, (Photo) Baria, Halol, Jabugam and Bhilala of Alirajpur of Mahdya Pradesh. There are some six families who are engaged in the Pithoro painting in Sursi village of Chhotaudepur. The ritual of painting is quite elaborate and interesting.

The walls are made of split bamboo. The plaster on both the sides of the wall is made of a mixture of cow dung and mud. The plastering work is done once a day for the seven days by virgin girls only. It is known as 'Pandudha Lavu'. On the eighth day, the artists apply several layers of white clay to the wall. On the ninth day, the drum is played for the whole of the night in the lobby. An offering of nine pictures, each covered with the leaves of 'Billy' tree, and on the top of each of these leaves are kept three leaves prepared from 'Adad dal' (pulse), butter earthen lamps, heaps of rice or wheat in order to invite divine spirits to the heap, where the earthen lamps are lighted. (Photo)

Nine plates and these items are kept near the wall at the beginning of the ritual a painting. The Priest then takes a bath. He, along with two or three painters, starts

preparation for the Pithoro painting (Photo) On the wall, where the painters starts preparation for the Pithoro painting on the wall, where the painting has to be made the Priest sprays liquor twice or thrice The Priest is called 'Badvo'. He often takes liquor while painting The Rathwas drink liquor as freely as water

White, green, blue, red, black, orange, etc. colors are used Gums, milk, kerosene, and liquor are added to these colors. Vegetable colors were used in earlier times, but with the easy availability of the colors in the market now, they use ready made colors Tender stems of trees are used as brush. (Photo) The end of stem is made flat and given to shape of a brush. The tin stencils of horses, elephant, camels, etc. are used for drawing outlines. The Priest (Badvo) is in the lead, guiding the other artists. The whole Pithoro painting has to be completed within twelve hours. Therefore, stencils are used. (Photo)

The Pithoro paintings narrate mythological stories. It is the legend of the God Indra Raj. He had seven sisters. One of them was Kalikoyal. She had illicit relations with King Kunjul (Kundu Rano) and delivered an illegitimate baby boy. She was afraid of her brother Indra Raj and so she threw the child into the River. The child was found by her sister named Kajal, who brought up the child until he grew up to be an adult, ready for marriage. Kajal and her relatives were then in search of his real parents. God Indra Raj called a meeting of the other gods and fortune-tellers, and then asked youngman to find out his father. The boy held the nose of King Kunju. This boy was Pithoro. Once the identity of his parents was established, it was found

that he was the nephew of God Indra Raj. God Indra Raj then decided to celebrate the marriage of his nephew with great pomp. He invited all gods and goddesses to the marriage. This is one of the marriages, the scenes of which the Rathwas paint on the wall. God Indra Raj then abdicated in favour of Pithoro. Pithoro is the ill legitimate child called 'Chhinalu'. Illegitimacy is not looked down upon in the Rathwas society. They narrate the legend, which represents the mythology and cosmography of the Rathwas, with great praise. They believe that the presence of this painting in the house has a deep spiritual effect. (Photo)

The Pithoro wall-painting is divided into two parts. One is the main painting and second is a common one. The main painting is done on the wall having entrance to the kitchen. The wall does not have a door in the centre, but it is to the right near the wall. The painting covers the whole wall. It is roughly 2.5X3 meters (8' x 9' feet) in size.

A line making a perpendicular square boundary is drawn on the whitewashed wall. The four corners are considered to be the four edges of the earth. The sun is on the left and moon on the right. Wavy lines are drawn in geometrical pattern. This looks like a festoon. Various gods of the world, heavenly bodies, and mythological stories are depicted here in pictorial form. Below the line, there is shown a marriage procession of Pithoro.

Lord Ganesh is the first drawn for good omen, and is depicted as riding on a horse, and the figure is drawn in a square pattern in blue colour. Ganesh is the anthropomorphic deity of the Rathwas. Child Hodhal distributes invitations to gods and goddesses during Pithoro's marriage. Hodhal is shown riding on a blue horse in the painting. The village god is shown riding a red horse. The village god keeps the people of the village prosperous. The other gods are shown riding red horses. The horses of Pithoro and Pitho Rani also have white dots. This painting is done on the main wall. Indra Raj's sisters, Chani, Kajal and Queen Mekhal are seen riding red horses. The other painting is that of god Indra Raj, the great deity of agriculture and god Warun. These deities are depicted riding green horses. The god of cattle is shown sitting on a camel-back, and a cow-elephant is shown sowing seed in the farm. Two merchants of the Bania community are shown riding on two horses, and bringing provisions in a two-wheeled cart. The god Kaman hunting is depicted with bow and arrow.

The act of extra martial sex between King Kanju and Kalikoyal, which had led to the birth of Pithoro is depicted on the wall. Horses and scenes of a horse having intercourse with woman are among the common figures painted on the wall. The significance of these images is very complex, with the scene of intercourse representing the divine and human act of evolution in the form of children. There are many headless horses known as 'Muvadio'. These represent the belief of the Rathwas about the slaughtering the animals as an essential part of sacrifice. They take vows to sacrifice animals and birds and eat mutton, chicken, etc. and so these are sacrificed.

during the Pithoro rituals. (Photo) In the other row, a hen, a cock, a buffalo, a bull, a cow, a man climbing a palm tree etc. are depicted. The other painting represents the scene of the fortune-teller named Jitiyo Joshi; Rawan, with twelve heads; King Kasado; and King Bhoj and his Queen. The king Bhoj is considered to be the king of all gods (Deras), and painted riding an elephant. The other paintings show a black cuckoo, an umbrella, a steep-well, a farm, a plough, vessels with drawing on them of other gods, goddesses etc. for storing. The other drawings are a guard with a gun, some drawings of horse-faces, honeybees, monkey, pigs, webs, policeman, guns, snake, bear, tiger, wasp, etc. which signify the dangerous path. Animals destroying grains are also painted if the space is available.

On the other wall, is shown a marriage procession with instruments, with drum, horses and donkey, queen 'Simani' as well as gods and goddesses. The space in the inner side of wall depicts rituals, and a world view of the symbol of universe. Indeed, it explains the iconographic and pictorial concept of mythological belief, and the fact that the Rathwas draw on the wall pictures of whatever material they find and use from their surroundings. After completing the painting, the priest performs the rituals on the painting the next day. He presumes that the deities have possessed him and invites the attention of the devotees. He closes his eyes and places the edge of a sword he holds on each picture. He repeats this twice or thrice. In case, some important picture is left out or something escapes his notice, he then instructs the painter to do so. Animals and birds are brought close to the painting as per vows taken by believers before these are offered in sacrifice.

The first sacrifice performed by Badvo is that of the house owner's goat. The goat must be beheaded with one stroke of the sword, (Photo) or else, it is considered to be a bad omen. The blood is sprinkled on Pithoro. (Photo) Others goats and cocks are sacrificed in the same manner thereafter. It is said that some two dozen goats and about a dozen cocks are sacrificed on such occasions. As a part of a ceremonial worship (Puja), a coconut is kept for the Bhagat (Priest) and an egg for the snake. (Photo) The flesh of the animals and fowls is utilized in the feast. The Adad Dal loaves are used the Rathwas are very happy. The Priest initiates the dance dressed like a woman and soon the youngsters and others join in. The sacrifice ceremony and dance go on throughout the night. (Photo) The next day, they enjoy the feast.

The worship of Indra Raj is conducted simultaneously on the outskirts of the village along with that of Pithoro in the painting rituals. The stems of the tree known as Sodhal are used for rituals. A week before the ceremony, the Priest selects the stems and ties thread on the stems to be cut. The devotees observe fast. People play drums and musical instruments and move close to the tree. The Badvo cuts the selected stems with neat jerk of the knife or sword but does not let them fall to the ground. Otherwise this is thought to be a bad omen. These stems are inserted in the place where ritual is to be performed. The devotees bring offerings for Indra Raj, and the Bhagat performs the rituals and it is then that everyone joins in the dance. The Rathwas have full faith in their Badvo. They believe that the Bhagat helps them to figure out remedies to their problems. He gets his inspiration from gods to help cure people of their illness and whatever rituals and sacrifice etc. are necessary. His song

and dance is due to the inspiration of spiritual power and is done because it is believed he can do anything as a result of this inspiration. Gods can keep man happy in sorrow. One has to make offering and perform her religious rituals in consultation with the Priest in order to please the gods. If somebody is ill, then it is necessary to seek the advice of the Bhagat. The Priest performs rituals before the images of gods and requests them to cure the disease or illness in return for the sacrifice of a goat or a fowl. The Priest gives up his family and devotes himself to a pious life. He is very much sought after for overcoming the evil influence of ghosts and spirits.

The religion of the Rathwas is animistic. They believe in superstitions, magic, evil eye, ghosts and witches and offer sacrifices to the spirits with a variety of fantastic names and invoke by intervention. The animal they hold in utmost veneration is the horse. The Rathwas respect their ancestors and worship various gods for different purposes. One of the gods is Khetar Pada, the brother of god Indra Raj, who looks after agriculture. He is the provider of grains, and they worship him for the protection of the crops in their fields. After a good harvest, different types of grains, coconut, fowl and wine are offered of Khetar Pada. (Photo)

The female deities worshipped by the Rathwas are known as Mata or Deves. One of the goddesses of grain is Kanheri Mata. They believed that there will be no scarcity of grain if they worship her. The place of this goddess is near the barn in the house. The Devi, they believe, would be angry if they did not worship her, and would leave the house with grains as a result. They seek to propitiate her with the assistance

of the Bhagat by worshipping and offering her goat, fowl, hotchpotch, millet, coconut, liquor and vegetable bread called 'Dhebra'.

The whole village performs a religious ceremony known as 'Melo-Ramadevo'. The villagers and their Badvo bathe the gods and goddeesses of their village such as 'Gamdev', 'Kedmata', 'Simdev', 'Bhut', 'Vadhdev', etc. They invite all these Devs, deves to the village 'Malun'. The ritual continues for eight or nine days. The devotees visit each of the gods, and sing songs of praise, to them playing on their drums and other musical instruments in front of their images or paintings. The Priest sacrifices goats and cocks on their behalf. (Photo) The offerings, consisting of liquor, hotchpotch, Dhebra etc. are placed before the gods. The gods, it is believed, would be pleased and bring prosperity to the village if a ritual known as 'Jatar Dev' and 'Gam Bhdha' is performed, and this ceremony is performed every five years.

They worship Bhathiji Maharaj, when poisonous animals, snakes and insects bite someone, or when a person is found suffering from illness. The Priest ties the thread in case of snake bite and gives the victim Neem leaves to chew. If the leaves taste sweet, then it means that there is poison in the body. The Bhagat also gives Neem leaves to the patient to touch his body. The ritual continues for ten to twenty days and they offer a coconut and lighted earthen lamps. Bhathiji Maharaj is the god of cure. They worship him day during the Diwali festival, when he is placed on somebody's body. The abode of the dev is made up of mud and no cement is used.

The Hind god Hanuman is also worshipped by the Rathwas. His abode is near the village tank. The images of other gods and goddesses are also found there. The offerings consist of the paste of Sindur (Lead-Oxide), coconut and incense sticks. No liquor or sacrifice of animal is allowed. The worship is for peace and happiness. He is offered edible oil at the time of a wedding.

The 'Gowal Dev' is responsible for the growth of cattle and worshipped their illness and for to cure them of protection. Goat, fowl, liquor and rice cooked in milk are offered to the dev through the Badvo. The temple of Gowal Dev is situated at Chickwada.

'Babo-Bhevo' is worshipped in order to increase the fertility and progress of cattle. The offerings made to him consist of rice cooked in milk, wine, goat and fowl. An earthen house is also offered Milk is sprayed on the house. Married couples perform religious ceremonies under the supervision of the 'Badvo'.

'Salkya Dev' is worshipped to ensure the growth of goats and increase the yield of milk. A small earthen pitcher filled with milk is offered to propitiate him. Goats are also offered. This is done during the Diwali festival.

'Sadarni' or 'Hadrjo' is a god worshipped for prosperity in agriculture and increase in the number of cattle. An image of his is kept in Malun. (Photo) The

'Badvo' is informed to worship a particular god on the basis of the desire one wishes to be fulfilled.

The temple of 'Simdev' is located on the outskirts of the village. (Photo)

'Sim' means boundary and Simdev protects the village boundary. He is worshipped to protect the cattle against attacks of ferocious animals and also for protection when a marriage procession goes to another village. They worship this dev for their betterment, by offering animals and fowl in sacrifice. They offer earthen horse with the image of the dev, grains, earthen cow, ox, horse with red flag, an earthen lamp and milk. The villagers ask the Badvo to perform the rituals.

The worship 'Nadariya Dev' to ensure the good health of their cattle and for the protection grains from insects. 'Nadariyu' means the first sprout of the monsoon. The Rathwas pray to the dev so that (a) the grass does not prove harmful to the cattle, (b) the cattle is saved from diseases, and (c) to protect them from the effect of evil spirits. The Priest keeps earthen horses under the tree 'Kadhai', performs mystic rituals by reciting prayers blows air from his mouth on the grains, and encourages the cattle to eat these. The Rathwas then prepare Debras from millet and maize for offering these to the Dev and only then do they cook for themselves.

Before taking up any new undertaking, the Rathwas worship Ganesh or Babo Ganesh. The god is believed to be helpful in many respects and so he is offered edible oil at the time of a wedding.

Whenever epidemics like the plague, cholera etc. spread in the village, the person afflicted by it is taken to the Bhuvo for treatment. The Priest blows air in the name of the goddess concerned and ushers to cure diseases. A mass of individual worship is performed. A goat or a fowl, and a coconut are offered to Mata by way of sacrifice. If the rituals are not undertaken promptly, then the Mata, it is believed would be angry and diseases would spread again.

Apart from devs and devees, the Rathwas believe in ghosts and evil spirits. It is believed that if a man dies without fulfilling his desire, he is sure to become a ghost (Bhut). This is one of the oldest beliefs of the Rathwas. The ghosts, usually found in a naked condition, spread various diseases. Different ghots such as 'Simalayo Bhut', 'Masaniyo Bhut' and 'Vechi' are believed to exist. While the 'Simalayo Bhut' is believed to exercise influence extending only to the boundaries of the village concerned, the influence of the 'Masaniyo Bhut' remains confined to the cremation ground, and the 'Vechi' or 'Ventary Bhut' moves around freely and is thought to create an atmosphere of fear, dread and disease. A ritual called 'Ventary' is performed to arrest the influence of 'Vechi'. If a woman does without fulfilling her desire, she is thought surely to become a witch. The Rathwas believe that these evils spirits are not useful to them. On the contrary, they spread diseases and harass people, for that they go to 'Bhuvo'. (quack doctor). (Photo)



Colours and Brush



Stencil for Sketch



Sketch for Painting



Priest Painting Pithors



Priest and Other Painters



Spiritual effect in Painting



Goat beheaded with one stroke



The blood Sprinkled on Pithoro



Hens and goats sacrifice in front of Painting



Coconut keep in Puja (Ceremonial)



Breaking coconut with axe



Dance go on throught the night



Devotee Sprinkling liquar on cockhead before sacrifice





Devotee take goat to Baba Ind.



Painting on Wall of Kitchen or Kitchen



Images in Malun

‘Simdev’





'Bhuvo' Quack-doctor



‘Khetar Pada’