

CHAPTER : 3

SOCIAL LIFE

The Rathwas follow a patriarchal family system. They live in either single or joint families. It is not uncommon to find their relatives, like uncles, sisters, widow daughters and children living together. Their family seems to foster a strong social and economic bond. The sons do not live separately after marriage. However, in some cases after having one or two children they are found to live separately from the main family. Some times parents do provide a room for the couple. The couple invariably prefers to live near their parents and relatives. Even after separation, they do not go very far from them, as they are used to seeking advice from their parents and feel it their duty to look after them. They discuss social and economic problems with their parents and relatives. For cultivation of crops, all the sons in the family help each other and seek the advice and counsel of their father. They get together sell and distribute the grains. They seek guidance from parents and elderly persons on all social occasions such as marriage of their children, religious ceremonies or vows and on problems issue divorce, adultery, dispute etc. They cooperate with each other in times of need by overlooking petty quarrels they might have had with them. Children respect the elders of the family and abide by their decisions.

Generally, the Rathwas do not believe in the difference of age between girls and boys for the purpose of marriage. In some cases, the girl is older than the boy and vice-versa. The land and property of the Rathwas are invariably under the possession

They look after cultivation, cattle, poultry, milk, selling of poultry produces and household chores. Money matters are handled by womenfolk. They carry on with all responsibilities with full freedom. Yet they have no share in their father's or husband's property. However, if a person has only a girl-child, it is she who gets her father's property. Her male cousins are not entitled to the property. Sometimes the father allows his son-in-law to live with him. A young widow having minor children can remarry and continue to live with her children on her first husband's house. In case she has children from her second husband, these children have no right to the property of the first husband. Similarly, the first husband's children have no right to the property of her second husband.

A girl at the time of marriage is gifted with goats, poultry and ornaments. In case of divorce or remarriage, she has to return ornaments given by her father and husband. But when she dies in her husband's house without taking a divorce or remarriage, her ornaments may be placed on the funeral pyre with her dead body. In case of husband's death, she is not supposed to wear ornaments until the completion of the rituals at the death ceremony. In Rathwa's, position of the man is dominating in the society. When wife dies a husband never sacrifices anything not even liquor which is equally bad for him.

Women has no right to perform any ceremony but she can take part in it as an observer it is not uncommon to find wife beating, divorce and remarriage or keeping

illegitimate relation with other women; such cases are very common among them. A mentally imbalanced woman is beaten up and treated as a witch.

Social Status:

The Rathwas are better off in comparison to other tribes in their food habits and social activities. Their method of cultivation and economic status is slightly better than that of the other tribes. When they come in contact with the other people, they learn fast and improve themselves in many respects. The Rathwas and Bhilalas are very close to each other. The Rathwas consider themselves superior to other Bhils, keep contact with them.

Dhanka and Harijan have a low status in their society. The Rathwas do not drink, eat with and marry with the lower tribes. A Harijan is considered untouchable by them. A Harijan priest is not supposed to touch the Rathwa for it is considered to be an offence. Such persons are punished or kept out of the society. To re-enter the society, they have to serve liquor to the entire Rathwa tribe or to pay a fine as per the rule of their community. Rathwas do not allow people from the lower tribes to enter their temple called 'Malun', and also their huts. They can come up to the verandah of the hut only. They do not entertain and contacts with the lower tribes. In Chhotaudepur and north Panchmahal districts, the Nayka tribes share space and live with Rathwas, who believe the Naykas are not good at cultivation⁴.

4. Lal. R.B., The Rathawa, Journal of Society Research, 1970, 13(3)

Rathwas Arbitrator:

The Rathwas organize a social defense tribal arbitration Committee. This includes an executive body of five persons. It is known as 'Panch'. The 'Panchas' include the president of the village Panchayat, headman, administrator, priest (Badvo) and respectable person of the village. Every five villages have a 'Panch'. The Panch solve the disputes and difficulties of the village people.

The executive body frames the laws. When theft robbery or such cases take place in the village, these are solved by the body and punishment is given. The Panchas plays a vital role in to solving the family disputes. The body helps the government by supplying information on their villages. Adultery, killing of cattle or their theft, elopement (run away) and marriage with another person etc. are considered to be a social crime. The Panch listens to the complaints of both the parties before delivering their judgment. The judgment is considered to be fair and impartial. The Rathwas always respect the judgment given by the Panch and abide by it.

Social Constitution:

Every village has its headman, priest and a quack doctor. They are the important persons of the village.

Certain disputes of the society are solved by the headman. Crimes like kidnapping or theft of cattle etc. are handled by him. He has the right to punish the offender and even excommunicate him or her. In earlier times, the headman used to sit for judgment for twelve villages. However, each village has its own headman at present. It may be because of increasing population. In some villages, there is no headman. In such village any respected person of the village solves such problems. He arranges marriages. Some serve in an honorary capacity but others charge a nominal fees of Rs. 5/- or 1.25. Such person is known as 'Dayo' or 'Dapo'.

The village Priest (Badvo) performs the rituals and provides religious guideline. His words are considered equal to that of God. He is the most powerful person in the society. The whole tribe respects him and is scared of him. He also works as a quack doctor. As he is illiterate and his knowledge regarding his profession is nil, he declares a person who has illness beyond his control as one being under the spell of a ghost or a witch and suggests rituals. In such case, the patient's family has to spend a lot of money so much so that they might be reduced to poverty and helplessness. The Priest receives two baskets of maize, clothing etc. at the time of ritual. Now a day, some awakening is seen among them due to the contact with the world outside. In many villages, some medical facilities have been made available and, therefore, they go to the doctor

'Pujaro' is another important person in the society. He performs marriage ceremony and, with his spiritual knowledge, he invokes gods or evil spirits. He also gets some remuneration for the service⁵.

Marriage:

The marriageable age among the Rathwas is between 15 and 20. There are no child marriages and late marriages are uncommon. Arranged marriages are common. There are more quarrels due to problems in married life.

A father, an uncle or the nearest relative, a headman and a priest are the main persons who arrange the marriage. Marriage proposal comes from the boy's side. If the girl's parents agree, then the boy goes to see her at her place accompanied by his brother or uncle. The girl dresses up and meets the group to see the boy. After seeing each other, if they give their consent, the girl's father fixes a day and invites the boy's family over to his house.

Before the marriage takes place, the boy's father will try to find a good omen known as 'Gidu Levu'. To find out a good omen, five to seven persons from boy's side keep copper or brass pots full with water and liquor and walk into an open space and if they see a couple of sparrows making noise on their right, they think of it as a good omen. At this point, they put the stem of a wild thorny berry, and on the top of

5. Bhatt Arvind., Social Structure of Rathawas, Swadhyay, 1977 a 14(2)

the stem, they put a stone and pour water from the pot. Then, they drink the liquor and decide on the day for marriage. The boy's father is accompanied by 10 to 20 persons and the group goes to the girl's house for betrothal. He invites the headman, the priest, some respectable people and nearest relatives for this ceremony. A goat is offered to the party on demand.

After reaching girl's place, both the parties decide on mutual give and take, dowry (Dahej) to be given to bride etc. The parents of the bridegroom give some amount to bride's parents for marriage. This is known as 'Dahej'. The amount of Dahej is roughly Rupees 501. Apart from it, a well-to-do family gives three silver sets to the bride. The bride's parents also receive maize. This is known as 'Bhur'⁶.

The bride's party lay a cot on an open space for guests. On one side of the space, there are five heaps of dry manure with earthen pots or pitchers full of liquor kept on each of these heaps. Jaggery in a liquefied form is also kept near the heaps in some vessels. Few coins are kept either in a copper or a brass pot. This ceremony is followed by another known as 'Danpa', that is the give-and-take business in the wedding. From both the parties two persons each sit on the cot. The bride's folk wash the hands and feet of the guests. The washing of feet is from knee up to thigh. Women sing hooting songs and tease the opposite party i.e.

6. Ibid.

So came the in-laws;

So came the in-laws;

When the bitch

Bore a litter of pups

Women describe in a song whatever things the in-laws might have brought. For instance, the women sing that the in-laws have brought a coconut, so and so receive the coconut that has been brought.

So brings sana sister a bag for coconut

So does the father-in-law;

Soni sister also brings a bag

So does the mother-in-law

And the sana sister bring a bag for it.

After the betrothals, there is waiting period of five or six months necessary for making preparations for the marriage. During this period, ornaments like Hansadi (coloured ring), Aatka (bracelet), 'Wala' (wrist ornaments like thick bangles), 'Kodra' or Khahadha, 'Baharu' or 'Wank' (anklets), etc. will be prepared⁷.

7. Shah P.G., Tribal life in Gujarat, Gujarat Society, Bombay, 1964.

Generally, the marriage is performed in the month of 'Chitra-Vaishakh' month. 'Chitra' is the sixth month and Vaishakh is the seven month of the Vikram Samvat. Any date during 'Wad' which refers to the dark half lunar month and 'sud' the bright half of the lunar month is considered as good. The Rathwas are more superstitious of the Scorpio sign of the Zodiac. All these days are good for marriage except Tuesdays and Saturdays. For good omen, five white pebbles, and rice colored in yellow with turmeric, stones are thrown on all sides of the village, and a few grains of yellow colored rice are given to invitees with a request to attend marriage.

On marriage, the day set for the bride and the bridegroom do not go out of their houses. Two boys give bath to the bridegroom and two girls to the bride. They are then carried to the open space near the hut. This bathing ceremony is known as 'Ughwalu'. Those who give bath are known as 'Luda'. The pot issued for storing water for the bath is earthen and a few coins are kept in the pot. Songs are sung during this time. After the bath, the brother-in-law carries the bride and bridegroom and makes them sit on a wooden plank known as 'Khal' or 'Khandiyu', on top of the pot, a piece of square cloth is tied. A wooden grinder is filled with paddy and kept by its side. The girl holds a wooden pestle and boy holds a bow and arrow and both grind the paddy in turns for five times. It shows they are cultivators and hunters. The relatives sing songs during this time. This ceremony is known as 'Ghon Bharo'. The parents of newly weds ask the couple to sit on the bed.

The village people and Priest are invited to this ceremony. Young boys apply oil to the head of bridegroom and young girls to that of the bride. Oil is also rubbed on the shoulders, thighs and legs. 'Pipal' and mango leaves, turmeric, liquor, an earthen lamp and rice known as 'Vadhamnu' are kept in a brass bowl during this period.

After oil is rubbed, turmeric paste is applied to the couple. It is called as 'Pithi'. During this ceremony songs are sung. The marriage ritual is performed on the outskirts of the village known as 'Simoldhan' or "Sibhodi". Ritual is performed around 7 or 8 p.m. in the presence of the Priest and the headman. Turmeric powder, five pieces of bread, liquor, tadi-ni-bhati, khakhra leaves, 'Nadachadi', etc. are brought for rituals. Apart from these, cooked rice or hotchpotch, bread load (Dhebra) or 'Wada' and water etc. are also taken along. The goddess of the outskirts is 'Simoi Mata'. Children, youngsters and elders dance, sing songs and reach the outskirts where the Simoi Mata Temple is situated.

After reaching the outskirts, five pieces of bread are kept in the 'Khakhra' leaves. Paddy is heaped at various points on the floor and liquor is kept in the small earthen pots on top of the heaps and other things are kept nearby. All this material is known as 'Wadhamanu', which means offering to goddess. Worship takes place under the tree. A stem is wrapped around with the Nadachadi. The Priest keeps the offering in the hands of bride and bridegroom to launch the ceremony. Women sing songs.

Pieces of bread or loaf are thrown at the back, the drummer and party remains at the back. They catch the pieces. Three pieces of breads are thrown at the back and the rest is distributed among the party who reach the outskirts singing and dancing. Once they return home, the mother of the bride or the bridegroom usually waits to welcome the party with the dry twigs of Ladies finger. These twigs are thrown at the party to welcome them. It is known as 'Vadhavu'. The party sings songs and asks the mother to serve food early. The party sings and dances a lot for supper and requests to be served early.

Another worship they perform is known 'Gotra Dev'. It starts about 3-4 p.m. Children, youngster and elders dance and sing near the well. A new, earthen pot is taken for the ritual. It is known as 'Gagar'. 'Wdhamnu' is also carried there for the ceremony. Water is drawn from the well to fill the new 'Gagar'. The earthen pit is kept on the head of the person who performs the 'Puja' or the ritual. Two men cover the person, who holding the pot from top with a 'dhoti'. The pot has to be brought home near first pillar of the house, where it is kept on top of a heap of paddy next to a liquor pot kept by its side. The marriage party continues to dance and sing songs. These ceremonial songs are known as 'Haleda'.

This ritual is performed according to the custom of the clan. The Rathwās prepare different dishes such as bread loaf (Dhebra) or hotchpotch (Khichadi) etc. for the purpose. Those who make bread loaf and hotchpotch are called 'Dhebariya' and 'Khichadiya' respectively. 'Dhabra', 'Khichadi' and millet are put on a plate made of

dry leaves known as 'Patralu'. They invoke the gods to perform the ceremony under the instruction of Priest. Having performed the 'Gotra' ceremony, they go for supper. While taking supper, the bride's mother and her son-in-law sit together. This is a symbolic gesture as they feel that signals the acceptance of the bridegroom into the bride's family and the bride's acceptance into the bridegroom's family. After the supper is over, the used 'Patralas' are to be carried away by the son-in-law ⁸.

Feast:

The whole village including relatives is invited to a feast and the food consisting of such as 'Kodri bhat', 'Thuli' or 'Kansar', liquid pulse etc. are served at evening. The feast is followed by a programme of dance. It is known as 'Dholki Ramadvi'. Men and women form a circle and dance with the drummer sitting in the centre. Once this is over, all depart and take rest.

Paghdi Bandhvi:

The next day, people of village and relatives go to bridegroom's house between 10 a.m. and 12 noon. They carry with them liquor or toddy. The drummer welcomes the guests by beating the drum. Guests throw some coins on the floor, which are picked up by mouth by the drummer. Rice, Dal (liquid pulse) and liquor

8. Ibid.

are served to the guests. Some Priests do not take liquor of toddy. They are served sugar or jaggery water. Around 12 noon, the Priest ties the turban presented by bridegroom's sister to the bridegroom. Taunting songs are sung. This ceremony is known as 'Paghdī Bandhavi'.

At the end of this ceremony, relatives and others present gifts to bridegroom. It is called as 'Chandlo' or 'Poh Bharvi'. Next to the bridegroom is his sister, who receives Chandlo. Liquor is served. Father gives Chandlo first. He keeps fifty paise on the thumb of his son or daughter. He gives Rupees 5 and only then it is accepted and not otherwise. During this time hooting songs are also sung. Father also sits near and presents a pair of dresses.

Bridegroom's Dress:

The bridegroom wears the traditional long coat known as 'Angarkho', which covers his body up to his knees, tight trousers (Chorno), a waist band. He also wears ornaments such as Hansadi, Bhario, Kadu in hands and waist band. The bridegroom places some money on the threshold of his house. He then goes for marriage.

Social Life - DOC:

Early in the morning around 3-4 o'clock singing and dancing take part in the marriage procession which starts with children, women and men.

At about, 9 a.m. the bride's sister puts a pitcher on her head and two people cover her from the top of the pitcher with Dhoti as she offers water to bridegroom. He gives Rupees 2 to her. Thereafter relatives apply turmeric paste to him. This ceremony is known as 'Rolo Ramadvo'.

Seven or eight persons from the boy's side take ornaments and put these in a cloth. Few coins are tied on one side of cloth. Ornaments are put near the Priest on the bride's side. He puts liquor near ornaments. The bridegroom's party also brings the amount to be paid to the girl's parents at the time of the marriage and puts it along side the liquor. This is known as 'Dagina Wadavaya'. The bridegroom's side holds the cloth with the ornaments on both the side and asks the consent of the bride's relatives. The bride's party agrees. Then the first person from boy's side hands over the ornaments to brother-in-law of the bride that is the bride's sister's husband. He then offers these to the bride to wear. Ladies sing hooting songs and describe what the in-laws have brought taunting that these are the old ornaments etc.

After the ceremony for handing over the ornaments, two women bring the marriage dress for the bride in a bamboo basket: sari, blouse, petticoat and comb.

The open square in the girl's house is covered with a fresh coat of cow dung by women and the Priest decorates it with rice. This is known as 'Chock Purvo'. Four boys on the bridegroom's side stand on four sides of the square. They do not allow anybody to enter the space till the bridegroom enters.

The bride's party then proceeds to welcome the bridegroom by playing drum. The bridegroom is lifted by the bride's brother and made to stand on a wooden plank. This plank is brought by his brother-in-law. This is known as 'Var tode Avyo' or 'Var tode Chadyo'. Brother-in-law gets Rs. 15 from bridegroom for this plank. When groom stands on the plank, the girl's sister comes with a basket full of Dhebra. First her would be mother-in-law washes the mouth, hands and legs of bride. She then rubs the turmeric paste on his face, hand legs. It is known as 'Pokhnu'. The sister-in-law brings water for the bridegroom and this is served by girl's paternal aunt. The mother-in-law gets Rs. 15, the sister-in-law Rs. 2 and aunt-in-law Rs. 2. These ceremonies are performed by Priest. He gets Rs. 5. Apart from it, boy's father gives money to the drummer as well as party of singers.

When the 'Chandla' ceremony is over, the bridegroom is allowed to enter the square for the marriage ceremony. He sits on a flat wooden plank. The bridegroom's relatives enter the bride's house to bring her near the Chori where bridegroom is sitting. She sits next to bridegroom on the wooden plank. The bridegroom's relatives take the girl to the house and bring her to the 'Chori' five times. This ceremony is known as 'Aana Fervva'. The bride's brother presents 'Dhoti' to the bridegroom. The bridegroom presents silver ornaments called 'Bhoriyo' to bride in return. A burning cow dung cake is placed in front of the new couple and their marriage vows in front of the holy smoke. This is known as 'Chori Dhumado'.

The bridegroom has to rest his legs on a stone (Nihatara). He has to offer a smoking pipe known as Hukko. The mother-in-law then offers sweets known as Kansar. A mixture of flour, jaggery and oil covered with a cloth is kept near the couple. They make sweet meat balls from the mixture and offer these to each other. This ceremony is known as 'Kansar Khavadavo'. The Priest then asks them to get up and offer money and rice. He pours water in their palms and tells them to throw it in the eastern direction. They have to take rounds and throw these things five times, and take rounds from left to right. The younger brother of the bridegroom gives coconut tied in handkerchief to the bride. It is known as 'Chodi Mukavi'. While giving coconut, she holds his hand tightly. He gives Rupee 1 to her and only then she does release his hand. The couple has to sit on men's shoulder and dance. This ceremony is known as 'Ghode Ramadvu' (Horse-play). After the dance, the visitors take supper and the procession goes to the bridegroom's house.

The bride's relatives offer her gifts before she goes to her in-law's house. The couple has their supper in the house. The hotchpotch (Khichadi) is served on leaf plates. This ceremony is known as 'Var Ne Natma'. This means that the bride's family has been given entry into the bridegroom's family. Once they finish taking their supper, they are taken outside the house and are seated on the men's shoulders for dance. The bride goes to her husband's house. Before she leaves, a day is fixed for her return to her parent's house. Women dance on their way to the groom's place.

As they reach near the groom's house, then not of their ends of cloth tied together. The mother-in-law stands near the gate of the house to welcome the couple and enter the house. Adad wada are served to them followed by the commencement of a dance programme which continues for some time and then the drummer leaves for home.

Here the groom's family performs the ceremony of 'Natma Levi' for bride. After this ceremony, the groom's family considers her as one of their family members. In this ceremony a doll made of stone or jaggery is kept in the laps of couple. A doll made of jaggery is put in the lap of the bride and the sister-in-law pours water on it drenching the bride.

The bride is then brought to the store room and asked whether the store room is full or empty. She replies shyly that it is 'full'.

The mother-in-law then takes her to introduce her to the elders of the family.

The bride touches their feet. This is the way to give respect to elders. It is known as 'Pag-Bandhwa'. The elders give her money. The parents-in-law give her money too.

She gets gradually acquainted with the daily household chores. She goes to fetch water for the first time and when she returns home with a pitcher full of water,

the groom helps her by taking it off her head. Both of them spread water round the 'Gotarda'. The couple then gives bath to each other.

Within a week, the girl's relatives come to take her away for the first time after marriage. It is known as 'Aanu Bolava Avya'. Dhebara, mutton or chicken, rice and thuli are served. Seven days after her return to her parental home, the groom's party goes to bring the bride back. If the bridegroom goes to fetch her, he takes gifts and money for his parents-in-law. This is known as 'Jamai-pag-Bandhwa'. The same type of food is also served to boy's party before the bride is taken away to her new home. The bride does not walk but the relatives carry her on their shoulders in turns upto the outskirts or near the groom's house. The second or the third time she goes only one or two persons come and take her away. It is called as 'Nanu Anu'. This is the last ceremony of the marriage.

The Rathwas do not consider marriage as a sacrament. They take divorce easily if the couple does not agree with each other or when there is some dispute between them. Also divorce is taken when they do not satisfy each other and lodges a plea for divorce, has to pay fine decided by the 'Panch'. The amount fixed at the time of the marriage as dowry is also returned. After separation, both can remarry a person of their choice. Such a remarriage is not considered bad by the Rathwa society is quite common. However, it is the boy's party who has to suffer economically⁹

9 Ibid.

Widow Remarriage:

Remarrying of widow is also permitted among the Rathwas. A widow can marry her brother-in-law or anyone in the Rathwa community after the death ceremony or what is called 'shardh' is over. A woman's children by her first husband are the responsibility of her new husband. He looks after them. Generally, a woman who has 4 to 5 children does not marry. Widows do not wear a particular type of dress as in the custom among the Hindus. Rathwas do not believe in good or bad omen with regard to a widow. She retains the ornaments given to her by her first husband. After her death, the ornaments remain on her body. In case she wants to marry out of their community, the Rathwas allow her to do so. If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant or runs away, in such a case the 'Punch' listen to both the parties and allow the marriage as per their desire.

Death Ceremony and Belief:

The Rathwas consider death to be very sad. If a person is ill and on death bed, or is bed ridden, he or she is immediately shifted to the floor. It may be due to the belief that if the deceased dies on the bed, he or she must be cremated along with the bed. Since their economic condition is poor, the deceased is shifted on the floor before he or she is dead. The Rathwas, like the other Hindus, cremate the dead body. A child under five or five years is buried. If a person dies of small-pox, he or she is also buried. Harijan or a Nayda is called to play mourning music on the drum as to inform the people of village about it. A person is also sent to inform relatives and the

rest of the villagers. The dead body is given a bath. A white shroud is offered to the male and a colored one to the female. Turmeric paste is rubbed on the dead body. The head of deceased is kept facing north. A funeral bier is made of bamboo, grass with spread over it, and only then is the dead body placed on it. The nearest relatives like father, son or uncle cover the dead body with a length of white cloth in case of male and relatives like mother, sister, daughter and aunts cover body of a nearest female relative with colored cloth. The paternal of the deceased places ten paisa near dead body. Few coins are tied to the edge of the shroud covering the deceased and the rest of the money is distributed among the Harijan and Naykda.

It the deceased is a male, three to five arrows and a plate is kept near it. Liquor and cooked rice and pulse are also kept near the funeral pyre. The nearest relatives of the deceased first hold the pyre, and preference is given to the first cousins, one of whom carries the fire in an earthen pot. The Harijan or Nayakda plays the mourning music on the drum, at the back funeral bier is lifted by the relatives, and the procession goes to cremation ground. The cremation ground is generally near the river bank. Pieces of wood are collected and arranged near the river bank and the funeral bier is placed it. Here too, the head of deceased is kept facing north. Ghee is rubbed on hands, legs and chest of the deceased. A silver coil is placed in the mouth. The cloth is removed before lighting the pyre and it is given to the Harijan. One of the relatives of the deceased takes four rounds of the dead body with the torch in his hand and lights the pyre on the fifth round. When the body is half burnt then they all go to the river for a bath. After bath, once again they assemble near the burning pyre

liquor and gram are served by the nearest relatives to all those who had joined the funeral procession.

The Rathwas do not wait till the dead body is completely burnt. One of the ornaments of the deceased in case of a male is allowed to burn with him. However, in case of a female, if relatives do not wish to burn her ornaments, they remove these after her death. No food is cooked in the house of the deceased and relatives bring food for the family.

Next day fish, Brinjal, five pieces of wheat bread, and fresh cow milk is kept in bamboo vessel, along with a small new pitcher full of water and these are carried to cremation ground. Bones of the deceased are collected and buried in the ground. A heap of ash is made, and pitcher is placed on top of the heap along with milk and pieces of bread. This ceremony is known as 'Bahukyu'. Once it is over, the male members take bath and female ones go home, clean the floor of the house with cow dung and then go to take a bath. They came home and cook rice and Dal.

Rice, dal and liquor are kept in the rear of the house. It is known as 'Bahyapiryua'. Three boys and two girls are invited for food. The Rathwas do not cut their moustache and hair after some one's death in the family. Also they do not celebrate any festivals or even take sweet, Dhebra etc. till the death ceremony is over. Relatives keep visiting the house of the deceased for 10 to 15 days. This way, they try to bring about a change in the mourning atmosphere.

Docheri (Death Ceremony):

There is no proper time 'Docheri' to perform. However, it should be completed within an year after a person's death. The scale of the ceremony is dependent upon the economic conditions of the family. It is almost on annual ritual. The ritual is almost common among many tribes, such as the Bhils and the Garasias of Banaskantha whereas the Dublas of Surat gather together and perform this ceremony for their forefathers. The Rathwas perform this ceremony individually though Monday night is selected preferably for 'Docheri'. A kilogram and a half of Dal is soaked. Hotchpotch and Mung Dal are prepared as the offering. One dozen pitchers, half of these with colored design red and half plain are purchased from the weekly market or from village potters. The plain ones are meant for the Rathwa family. These are given to people who help them in cultivation, labor, etc. They are generally from Dhanka and Nayakda tribes. They consider these people as half-relatives and, therefore, half the material is kept for them in the 'Docheri' ceremony. White thread is wrapped round the neck of the pitchers and these are kept in a row. The children in the family and a few people are invited from their nearest relatives for food. Dhebra and hotchpotch are served to the children. After food, they drink water from the dozen pitchers and then empty them. This ceremony is performed in the backyard of the house. The water from the pitchers is first sprinkled on the food prepared for offering. The offerings which are place in the backyard of the house are meant for the Harijan and for the Nayakda. Food is served to Harijan two boys and girls each. This ceremony is usually performed the nearest cousin.

In Docheri ceremony, the person from each of the relatives is generally invited. They are offered rice, Dal, Kodri, Udad Dal, maize preparation etc. The menu depends on their economic condition. The nearest relatives and son-in-law's bring a goat as offering but this depends upon their ability to spend. They do not mind if somebody does not bring anything, but one must be present in the ceremony. The brother-in-law and son-in-law present Dhoti to the head among the male members. The son-in-law brings sugar. He serves sugar when they take food. He also presents a turban to the most elderly of the male members. The pitchers which are used in this ceremony are given either to the daughters or the sisters in that family. In case of remaining extra pitchers, they are used for their own on festival days. Some food is offered to the crows in the name of the dead parents.

The ceremony for the dead ancestors among the Rathwas involves a carved wooden or stone slab. Such belief has inspired some people to use the opportunity to demonstrate their artistic talent and craftsmanship in carving even if these are not masterpieces. The simplest tools are used. They believe that the offering of a clay horse would make it easy for the dead person to continue with further journey and to complete. They believe in the existence of supernatural power, and have established the relationship between themselves and the supernatural powers. Magic is an integral part of their life. Their religion is considered to be animistic. The fear of animals caused them to worship these compication gap is the greatest hindrance in the rapid progress of their culture. (Photo)



Stone Paliyu

Problems:

The Rathwas generally live in central northern Gujarat that is Baroda and the Panchmahal districts. These areas are generally hilly ravines with uneven surface and forest land. In many places the land is not suitable for cultivation. There is shortage of rainfall for agriculture. The soil is sandy or rocky and has insufficient moisture. Such soil does not give a good yield. They, therefore, grow coarse grains like maize, Jowar, Bajri, Kodra, etc. Due to illiteracy and drinking habits, they have not been able to improve the soil and method of cultivation. This heads to poverty. They do not even have sufficient number of heads of cattle for their own survival. The general average land per family of five persons is roughly five acres or an acre head. The problem of food shortage remains forever.

The Pachmahal and Chhotaudepur areas are uneven and hilly. Small rivers pass through this region. But these rivers get dry during summer and therefore acute water shortage is a great problem in cultivation as well as drinking purpose. There is no facility for irrigations are in many places there are not enough wells to supply water

The Rathwas generally build their houses by themselves. Whatever material is available nearby is used for it. Now-a-days, the government protects jungle materials and does not allow them to cut trees. They are fined and punished if they violate these laws. The Rathwas are not able to pay fines. They are facing problems in building the houses because of these laws. In many places, jungles have been

cleared and they are unable to get forest material, they have to find other jobs in order to survive. They are now engaged in various labour jobs like agricultural labour, construction work in the nearby towns and cities. In slack season, they face a tough time. Some are engaged in forest work and some do break stones in quarries of Chhotaudepur. Some go to neighbouring towns and cities like Anand, Nadiad and Vadodara for labor work.

Health Problem:

The Rathwas live in places where they do not get good sanitation and water facilities. This affects their health. As they are poor, their food is not nutritious and lacks of vitamins. They fall a victim to diseases. In times of illness, one has to go to Chhotaudepur, or to health centre nearby. But a majority of them depend on forest herbs and quack doctors.

The Rathwas believe that both the illiterate and the literate to get food, the children have to shoulder responsibilities right from childhood. They look after the smaller children in the family, take cattle for grazing and collect fruits, flowers, etc. from the forest for food. Some go to the river to collect fish. If they go to school, then there would be no one to do all this work. This is one of the reasons why children avoid going to school. People who have left their villages and have gone out for jobs, have realized the value of education and send their children to school. In many villages, the government has started schools and boarding for tribal children. In many places, lunch is served to them. In some places schools are quite far and

therefore children unable to reach early and finally drop out. At present illiteracy rate among the Rathwas is very high¹⁰.

10. Shah P.G., Tribal life in Gujarat, Gujarat Society, Bombay, 1964.