

TRIBAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE

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FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS AMONG TRIBALS

In the State of Gujarat, a large portion of total tribal population (80.45 percent) of State reside on 14.31 percent of 1,95,984 sq.kmts of land of the State, known as Tribal sub plan area covering more than 18 tribal areas in 32 talukas of 8 districts of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Panchmahal, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, Valsad and Dangs, on a strip ranging from Ambaji to Umargam.

Out of these districts, Banaskantha the and Sabarkantha districts are on Rajasthan border. In Amirgadh and Virampur areas of Palanpur taluka and in Danta taluka of Banaskantha district and in Khedbrahma, Vijayanagar, Bhiloda and Meghraj talukas Sabarkantha district, the Garasiya tribal six communities reside and they are covered under the nomenclature of "Dungari Garasiya". The largest Bhil population is in Dahod district. In this district, Pateliya tribals have habitated in the talukas of Dahod, Limkheda, Lunawada and Santrampur. The Nayak-Nayakada tribes have settled in the talukas of Devgadhbhariya, Limkheda, Halol - Kalol and in some villages of Santrampur taluka. The Rathwa community is known for their beautiful wall pictures called "Pithora" which have both social and religious significance. Rathwas have settled in Halol-Jambughoda area of Panchmahal district as well as in Sagatala area of Panchmahal district as well as nearby areas of Vadodara, Pavi-Jetpur and Quant areas. Another tribal community, locally known as 'Dungari' or 'Dungari Bhil' in Chhota Udepur, Noswadi and hilly areas of Tilakwada. This tribal community is well known for their excellent dances of youth with a peacock feather on their head, ashes on their open body and ringing bells on their waist alongwith waistband made from small round figures made from paddy rice-flour.

The Primitive Groups are those tribes which are educationally and economically most backward. The Kathodi and Kotwaliya belong to Primitive Groups. They are found in dangs. Kathodi tribal groups are also settled in Vyara, Songadh, Uchhal and Mongrol talukas of Suart district; and also in Vijaynagar taluka and Abhapur are a of Sabarkantha district.

Mostly the tribal belt covering almost all tribal sub plan area is in east of Gujarat in a strip from Ambaji to Umargam. However, the scattered tribal population is also found in some districts of Saurashtra and Kutch region as well as in some towns and cities also. The animal keepers of Nes area of Gir, Barda and Alech forest areas - Rabari, Charan and Dharwad (i.e. all shepherds) are also covered in tribals.

However in terms of population, those having a population exceeding 50,000 are Bhil, Halpati, Dhodiya, Gamit, Chaudhari, Nayaka, Rathwa, Dhanka, Varsi, Vasava, Dungari-Garasiya and Pateliya. As per latest available census figures (2001), the total tribal population of the State is 74,81,160.

Most of the Tribal population of Gujarat are under influence of Hindu religion. However, conversion to Christianity is also found in tribal population, particularly in Garasiya tribes in Bhiloda, Vijaynagar and Meghraj talukas of Sabarkantha; among Bhil tribe in Jhalod taluka of Panchmahals and Dediypada of Bharuch district; among Gamit tribe in Surat and Dangs district etc. In earlier period of conversion, they were Protestants, but now more of the converts follow Roman Catholic sect. Besides, Siddis and some exceptional Vasava families follow Islam. There are also followers of traditional Tribal religion; as well in most exceptional cases of Parsis and Jains too. (Shah Vimal, 1966, 14)

Among many tribes - Dhodiya, Chaudhari, Rathwa, Bhil, Pateliya, Garasiya, Varli etc. they worship ancestors. As a part of Worship to ancestors, some tribal Communities used to prepare small images from stone or wood. However, gradually, possibly under the influence of education, this practice has been stopped. However, their attitude towards worshiping ancestors is present almost in all tribes. The form of worshiping ancestors, starting from a dead person/persons to Gotra, Surname, or the original one ancestor is extended.

The celebrations and festivals of tribals differ from those celebrated by hearing Hindu people and there fore they have their district features. We have tried to attempt about these festivals and celebrations among tribals in brief.

Most tribes traditionally believe or having faith in many Gods/Goddesses. They could be masculine or feminine. Among feminine, Goddesses, they perceive their Mother form.

Some festivals are celebrated all over Gujarat whereas some are restricted to certain areas or certain communities. e.g. the festivals of Holi and Diwali are celebrated by all tribes except perhaps by Siddis who follow Islam religion. The festival of “Diwaso” is celebrated among Rathwas, Halpati, Dhanka and Chaudharis i.e. in Central and South Gujarat areas. The tribal communities of North Gujarat do not celebrate festivals of Diwaso, Hirwa Dev, Nandarwa dev, Waghdev and Magardev.

Some of the festivals are restricted among certain tribes only, e.g. ‘Pithoro’ is celebrated only by Rathwa tribe. The hunting day for the total community / village known as ‘Unalapatno” is celebrated only by Garasiya tribe in Shamlaji taluka of Sabarkantha.

The Pateliya tribals of Panchmahal celebrate Bijpanthi festival. They invite their Guru, decorate Sathiya (Swatik) figure, have candle lights, sing religious songs whole night, take a combined lunch in the morning, usually in a big plate eating together from it and sometimes offer a goat. The Pateliya tribals, under the influence of Pranami sect (a section of Hinduism only); participate in Pranami festivals. The shepherd tribes of Gir, Barda and Alech forest worship Mamhai Mata (Goddess Mamhai).

Most of the tribals of Gujarat celebrate Holi and Diwali Festivals. However, the way of celebration among tribals could be different than one celebrated by mainstream Hindus. Even for deciding the dates / days for celebration of Diwali / Holi, they consult their village leaders / community leaders. Such dates / days are decided by them considering the conditions of crop, deaths in the community and their post-death formalities to be completed and other matters they deem fit. Thereafter, such celebrations take place in those days only. Tribals celebrate ‘Vaghbaras’ somewhere in middle of the second half of the Aswain month of Hindu calendar. It is celebrated customarily and traditionally.

They take their traditional lunch of Chana (gram) bhaji and bread. In the afternoon, they decide a place near by for celebration. Two groups are formed. The balls to play weigh about 1.5 kg. made from goat leather. At the sunset they throw all their traditional balls and bats in West. This is how, it is celebrated. In the evening, or at night they perform dances and sing songs before a village Goddess Gram Devi.

Likewise, celebration of kite festival is also different among mainstream Hindu and Garasiyas of Shamlaji. Same way, they do celebrate Diwali also; and that too on Diwali day only but it is celebrated differently. The 'merayu' - a symbolic wooden pices is cut in the evening; but in tribals, they cut it in the morning. The mainstream Hindu go to each other's place and meet them sharing they joy. The Garasiya of Shamlaji area, sing song and singing 'Navlo Gujarat no Halelo' more in the whole village.

Naran Dev :

Varlis consider Naran dev to be God for rains. If the rains do not fall or are delayed, the Kamthi Bhagats worship Narandev and women sing songs and all of them dance together. Besides, the early crop of vegetables after the rains is offered to Naran dev before being consumed by Varlis.

Tera :

Tera is a vegetable that grows in the forest. Usually all such vegetables form the part of food items for tribals. When 'Tera' grows up, first they are offered to God, before being consumed by others. The whole festival is also named as Tera. The day is celebrated as festival by local tribals. On that day, Tera is brought to the house in leaves of teak wood trees, cooked at home and then offered to God with great joy. The traditional Thakariya dance of the Dangi youth starts from that day.

Pachavo :

The 'Pachvo' celebration is done in the forest areas of Vansada, Dangs and Dharampur etc. especially to get protection from cobra. The house is decorated with a picture of 'Pachvi' on the wall. From the day of 'Pachvi' the fastefud item of "Alakhada Patro" can be initiated for consumption. The first lot is offered to God before consumption.

Pola :

Pola is a festival to worship the bullocks. Bullocks are used for agriculture purpose. Through 'Pola' a thank giving function to one's bullock is celebrated by keeping fast and worshiping Bullocks, first by washing their feet with water, applying a kumkum Tilak on its forehead and applying kumkum mark on its body with one's palm. After 'Pola' festival, bullocks are given total rest for the rest part of the year.

‘Diwaso’ :

Diwaso festival is celebrated by Halpatis, Rathwa and Bhils etc. The starting of Diwaso celebrated is announced in a village by a village watchman. On its previous day, rice is cooked at Babadev temple and distributed as ‘Prasad’ to all the followers contribution is collected from the village to buy a goat, which is offered to God. Group dances are performed. In Panchmahal and Dahod area, the day is celebrated with joy of eating Sweets. They, especially do not consume meat on this ‘clean’ festival. Diwaso, among Halpatis is a great festival.

Pitra / Sira Pooja :

This festival is more known among Bhils of Panchmahal and Dahod. ‘Sira’ means the ‘stones’ named after their ancestors. It is a festival to worship these Siras. This festival is celebrated usually on Diwali, or a fortnight thereafter. The Sira stones are painted and dance is performed.

Pitra is also a festival to remember ancestors. It is before Diwali. On that day a corner place in the house, known as ‘Khandaniya’ is especially decorated, and all household kits and agriculture instruments are kept there, and celebrated with a candle lamp. The cooking place is also cleansed. The housewife cooks the item, after she gets a holy bath. She worships kitchen place. The samples of each item cooked on the day are collected on leaves, and then offered in the cooking fire, remembering each of the ancestors by name or even otherwise-collectively in their names.

Vagh Baras :

This is celebrated by tribes of South Gujarat Phodiya, Chandari, Gamit, Konkana, Varli, Vasawa etc. It is a pre-Dipawai festival, celebrated on a day, suitable to all the villages before Diwali. The Dangri tribals try to forecast the next year. The herd of cows run on the street. If a chicken kept on street remains un-injured, the next year is considered to be good. If it dies, tribals feel that they will have difficult days in next year. The keeper of the cows keep a fast on this day.

Mavelidevi :

This festival is more celebrated by Kukhas. As such, Mavelidevi is a Goddess of Hills;

but can be placed in a house also. The days of celebration follow between Dashera and Diwali festivals. A Bhagat offers two goats and worships Mavli Devi in his typical style. The worship continues throughout the night, during which he talks about God also. In the morning, all the villagers, with songs and dance in Tarpu musical instrument go to the place of Mavli Devi. A bin Pandol is constructed; where they light a lamp; which is kept for seven days and night people also stay in Pandol for whole week and keep fast on Sunday.

New Year :

The day next to Diwali is a new year. All the agricultural equipments - plough, scythe, axe etc. ... worshiped, with sindoor powder. The animals are also worshiped. House is decorated.

Among Bhils of Panchmahal and among Pateliyas, this festival is known as 'Gay-Gohri': They give special significance to Cows. Early in the morning they wash cows etc. and paint them beautifully; light the lamps in the house. They string rings on the neck of their cows; and when the cows pass from the street, the Bhil / Pateliya youth simply lie down on the street and let the herd of cows pass on their bodies.

Dungar Dev :

Dungar means a hill. For tribals, the Dungar Dev is one of the important Gods. The celebration is not just restricted to a village or two. It is celebrated throughout the hilly strip occupied by tribals. Bhil, Kunkana, Varli, Gamit, Garasiya, Chaudhary, Dhodiya, Vasava, Kathodi, Kolgha, Kotvaliya all have great faith in Dungar Dev. It is considered to be giving prosperity and happiness. Usually hills are there in all forests and Dungardev is considered to be present on all hills, but locally Dangis believe that Mitha Marda hills is its great place.

When there are no better crops in the field, when there is an illness or epidemic in men and animals, people take a vow in the presence of a Bhagat and worship Dungar Dev, believing that he will cure everything. Such vows / worships are found to be in individual cases as well as for the entire community. When it is individual based, the expenses of vows/worship are born by the individual; but when it is a community vow, the entire village contributes towards respective expenses. In either case, celebration is for all.

The pooja of Dungar Dev last for 8 days. On first day there is 'Thob Thokula' procedure, in which a big bundle of peacock feathers is kept in front of the house. Some flower plants are planted around it. Some flowers are throw around. A lamp is lighted. Around the lamp, small rice - heaps are kept in name of different Gods/Goddesses.

During all these eight days Bhagat and his assistant are known as Shirbhoye and others participating are known as Bhoya. This is the only name to recognise them during all eight days. Their original names are in abeyance.

During all there days, Shir Bhayas and Bhayas take daily bath and only one meals a day. They get their food begging from around. During this begging, they wear a special cap known as "Tapra Topi". The custom has started since long, when somebody, while begging had put on this cap.

Each night, the story of Dungar Dev is told in public. This is done systematically by Shirbhaya with a special musical instrument resembling a dinner plate. People sit around and listen. 'Pawari' is also sounded. At the end of a topic, Shirbhaya loudly speaks 'Sood', and this has electronic effect on Bhayas.

On last day, after taking a bath, all start for the worship to Dungar Dev at a place resembling temple and known as 'Devno Gadh'. If such temple is located in a remote and deep place, one has to keep head down to entre. Shirbhaya performs Pooja there and offers a goat. It is offered alive and not killed. It is killed after they return to the village. A common kitchen is arranged for community lunch. Bhayas are served first and then other people take it. The food served is meat of a goat and rice. Then they return home. Bhayas are again served lunch. It is believed that if the food items are in properly cooked, Bhaya can realise it at the door step itself. Bhaya, in his family, takes lunch, only after confession is made by one, who has committed any kind of mistake or his conduct. All the people take lunch and then Bhaya winds up the function.

Kansara Devi Pooja :

This is a five days' function which is colloquial language of Panchmahal and Dahod Bhils is Gam-nu-Godarun- besadvun. The rationail behind this festival is to convey the feel-

ings of gratitude to the God/Goddess who take care of their crops, provide food and fodder to men and animals, protect them from illness and epidemic etc. During all these five days, Bhajan, and songs are sung at Goddess's temple and on last day, go en mass out of village to depart all evils out of village.

Kansara devi is Goddess of corns and crops. She is worshiped to get protection of crop and corn from any kind of ill effect and for prosperity of the family and village. She is worshiped more in Central and South Gujarat by Rathwa, Tadvi, Dhodiya, Chaudhari, Konkana, Kunbi, Vasawa, Gamit etc. Dangi tribals worship her after taking crops to one's house. The Goddess is kept in a basket, respectfully established over a grain Kothi. The image of Goddess is created on a metal strip carved with same white substance and some rice corn on it.

When the new crop is taken, the grains are collected in a heap and Bhagat is called. He draws a boundary line with ashes powder, would make specific gestures in Bhoova style, would make small heaps from paddy rice, spray sindoor powder on it and would also spray few drops of wine, would bring a hen, throw it on the heap of grains, would utter some Mantras; would cut its neck, would pull it around the heap of grains, cook it there and there and only thenafter the food grain crop would be taken to home and stored.

Chool :

Chool festival is celebrated among tribals of Central Gujarat, i.e. districts of Panchmahal and Vadodara among Bhil, Rathwa, Nayak, Dhanka etc. Among Rathwa tribe, next day of Holi festival, once again Holi fire is lighted and the Rathwa youth, after taking a bath, walk on burning fire, with necked legs with only a small new Langot on their body; reciting some Mantras of Badwa.

Gol-Gadheda :

Gol-Gadheda festival is celebrated on sixth day of Holi, in a fair organised in the village Jesawada of Dahod taluka. A big pole is installed on the ground; with some jaggery and coconut on the top. Around this big and tall pole, the tribal girls dance with a cane in their hand. Around this circle of girls, tribal male youth form another bigger circle and they also dance in a circle with drums and other instruments. Both the dances are in full swing with a lot

of sound in very high tune. Now, in such dances around, some prospective youth tries to climb upto top of the bamboo pole, to bring this jaggery and coconut. But the girls would try to stop him, beating him with the canes of their hands. The prospective tribal youth, despite heavy beating from girls, tries to climb over the bamboo pole. If however, any youth who succeeds in reaching on the top and becomes the hero. It is said that he is entitled to claim any of the girls in marriage. However, this is not true. Nevertheless some of the girls may prefer such bold youth to be their husband. Nevertheless, the Gol-Gadheda festival is very much famous and people come to see it from long distance.

Bhawada :

The festival of Bhawada is celebrated mainly in South Gujarat in Vansada, Dharampur and South Dangs among Kankana and Kunbi and Varli tribals. It is celebrated with people's support and public contribution. In South Dangs, it is celebrated continuously for three years; starting with 3 or 4 or 5 nights on first year and eight nights at the end of three years. Among Varlis of Vansada - Dharampur, every year they celebrate continuously for eight nights, wherein seventh day is celebrated as small Bhavada and eight night as Big Bhawada.

The dresses and dance style of each God image is distinct, and looking at dress and dance style, people would infer whose play (soguo) is to be staged on that night. The dance style greatly synchronise with appropriate music. There are hardly any songs. Besides, only male persons participate in dance, whereas women are the spectators.

In most of the tribes, there is appropriate wall painting, differing in style from tribe to tribe. The wall pictures represent their festivals and celebration.

The Dangi Kunbi, Varli and Bhils paint their walls with pictures of 'Panchvi' festival. The picture shows a cobra, tiger, sun, dance, group, a woman taking liftin to the farm, a farmer ploughing the land, a peacock etc. Curiously, such pictures on the walls are destroyed during 'Polo' festival; because of the prevailing belief that "Panchvi cannot be shown to Polo".

In Sabarkantha and Banaskantha district, among Garasiya tribe, the painting is done by a good talented painter. It is done on right side of the outer wall, near the place where most of the marriage - related customs are performed. The painting is called 'Gotrej'; wherein,

both the bride and bridegroom are shown in the middle with an arrow and sword. If the painting is made at the bride's place, she is shown in prominent position; and if it is made at the bridegroom's residence, he gets major, role. Besides this Gotrej, they also draw other paintings such as animals, trees, birds, flowers etc. painted by either a talented painter or even by members of the family including children, on walls of the house. Thus each one gets a chance to decorate a wall, especially on marriage occasion in the family.

The songs, music and dance widely used in tribals is a part of celebration of festivals; and such songs, music and dances differ from festival to festival and celebration to celebration e.g. among Garasiya tribals of Sabarkantha and Banaskantha, during Diwali festival, they sing 'Hadelo' song alongwith 'Dunsaku' musical instrument. These people, during Holi festival sing Holi songs called Gherna - Haleda with drum called Dholkudi with a small exception of Sidis, who follow Islam religion, all the tribal communities of Gujarat have their own songs and dances alongwith their own traditional instruments; and they all celebrate holi as a great festival.

With increasing cultural exposure with cultural events of main stream population, and with increasing means of communication, and inareasing occasions of direct dialogue, it seems, there is great change in their original traditional ways of celebrating festivals and celebrations, we can see some impact of nearby communities; but still we get their original traditional touch in all aspects of their celebration of festivals includings songs, music and dances.