

CHAPTER : 4

OCCUPATION

In earlier days, the tribes gathered wild fruits and forest produce. They were mainly hunters and engaged themselves in cultivation using primitive methods. These traits of their old nomadic life involving hunting, gathering of wild fruits, forest produce and shifting cultivation are still to be found among them. They engaged in fishing in the nearby water resources and catch fish with the help of fishing nets and baskets.(Photo) However, they are largely peasants, agricultural and forest laborers, watchmen etc They are wood cutters and charcoal burners. While all minor agricultural operations like weeding, harvesting etc. are performed by women, major operations like use of plough in the field, digging out shrubs and weeds etc. are left to their menfolk.

Like other tribals, Rathwas are found to be equally backward, illiterate and their knowledge regarding cultivation is very poor. Having learnt the basics of farming from their forefathers, they generally grow coarse grains. In regions where the soil is good and if there is sufficient rainfall or water is available through other sources, they grow rice, wheat and other crops, but their yield is low in such areas.

They use a wooden plough and a pair of bullocks for ploughing in their land. This primitive method is very valuable to them. The other implements in use in agriculture are weaver (Vavni), plough cart, spade, weeders, seeders, axes, sickles,

Karab, good round bowls for moving earth, crow bars (Parā), rakes (Dharias), etc. (Photo) Not all of them have all kinds of agricultural implements. Some borrow these from others. These implements are bought at the weekly markets held in Alrajpur, Chhotaudepur, Kawant and also from the nearest urban areas.

Work generally begins from 9.00 a.m. onwards with little rest for some time. They continue to work day and night if the work in land is important. All family members share in the work. However, the soil being poor, the peasants do not get enough returns out of it to support them. This has brought them to a state of poverty. While women and children take care of household chores, men folk are engaged either in agriculture or in some labor work. They sing songs about the harvest and keep themselves in a cheerful and energetic mood. Their rituals are connected with agricultural operations and festivals.

Depending on the economic condition of the family, they own and sustain a pair of bullocks, buffalo or cow, if they are well off. Rathwas own many heads of cattle, which are considered to be their wealth. Some have sheep, goats and number of fowls. On Diwali festival, they paint red horns of cattle in red to decorate their cows and bullocks and tie strings on their horns, necks, and foreheads and worship them. Goats are used for milk and meat. Goats are offered in sacrifice to their Gods and Goddesses. Generally their cattle are weak. Therefore, the yield of milk is low. The quality of grass freely available in forests is low but it has to be purchased elsewhere. The bullocks are used for agricultural purposes and also for transporting

home or to the market place timber and wood from the forest. When the cattle fall ill, they are not taken to the veterinary hospital but instead they take it to quack doctor called a 'Bhuva' (Photo) They offer a fowl in sacrifice and liquor there to propitiate the Goddess. However, some of them have now developed a sense of understanding and so they prefer to go to the veterinary doctor wherever one is available instead. The boys generally take care of the herds and look after other work on the farm. However, under many welfare programmes, the tribals have now started sending their children to schools. Some of them have gone for higher studies, diplomas and certificate courses such as carpentry, plumbing, electricity etc. Some take part in politics and contest parliamentary elections¹.

Tribals, who are forest gatherers, are engaged in wood-cutting specially in the Panchmahal and Chhotaudepur of Vadodara. They gather bamboo from forest and make mats, baskets, bamboo stands for keeping grains and water pitcher. (Photo) In recent times and in many places, they are prevented from cutting wood. Thus, their income from it is reduced. They collect other forest product like gum, honey, sealing wax, leaves of trees for 'Bidies'. They sell these things and make small earnings from these.

The other auxiliary occupation is known as 'Kabadu', which means felling the trees in the forest for contractors, shaping the logs and taking them to outlets like the

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

railways or other places from where these can be transported. Animals are their mainstay, and if a bullock dies in accident or due to sickness, the family suffers a great loss. If they do not have any other source of income, then they remain poor. In many places in Gujarat, they work in factories, mines, quarries or as assistants to carpenters (Photo) or blacksmiths, tailor (Photo) and others. They also engage in trading in the weekly markets

Food Habits:

In earlier days, the tribes depended on hunting and collecting wild fruits from jungles for food. A lot of improvement can be seen in their food habits in modern times. Rathwas are equally dependent on hunting and collecting forest materials for food. They have also changed their food habits like other tribes.

They normally eat food grains harvested on their own land, preferring these to any brought from outside. They exchange grains for other items of daily use. They eat rice or hotchpotch, soup prepared from wheat, Bajra and maize flour. It is known as 'Rab' or 'Rabdi'. Loaves of bread or 'Rotlo' are made from millet flour. Wafer cakes (Papad and Vad) are prepared from Udad pulse (*phaseolus mungo*). Pulse cooked with gravis, called 'Dal', is eaten with 'Rotlo' (bread) or rice.

Early in the morning, they clean their teeth with the tender stems of the neem tree. They then drink maize 'Rab' at breakfast. For lunch time, they have 'Rotlo' (loaf) and 'Dal' or bread and vegetable or a preparation made from wheat called as

'Thuli' and 'Dal'. In the afternoon, they eat whatever food is left from the earlier meals. At supper also, they take similar food. Rathwas work hard and, therefore, they take meals three times a day, whereas the Bhils do so twice a day. The mixture of different pulses ('Sangru') is used for making loaf. Some of them do not have enough supply of food and, when this is the case, most of them prefer to eat only a loaf of bread or have 'Rab' at night. They grow generally vegetables like pumpkin, lady finger, peas, beans, green tur etc. near their huts for their personal use. They also drink whey (Chhas). During mango season, corn flour porridge soured with dry and green mangoes are taken. Raw mango is used as vegetable.

On Holi festivals, they eat wafer cakes (Papad). Vermicelli ('Sev' or 'Susiya') made from wheat and rice is also taken at the time of festivals. Other dishes prepared on special occasions include 'Bajriya', 'Pumpkin', 'Khir' and 'Meat' and these are taken with liquor. Ghee is prepared for sale. An edible oil called 'Chopad' is prepared from Mahuda flowers. Liquor is prepared from Mahuda. Rathwas also eat Mahuda flowers and make many other items of food from it. Apart from it, they eat fish, mutton, the meat of other animals and birds, chicken, eggs, etc².

2. Ibid.



Fishing net and baskets

Bhuva - Quack doctor





Agricultural implements



Baskets



Carpenter



Tailor