CHAPTER SIX

RELIGION, BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Religion is a system of belief, practice and organisation which shapes an ethnic manifest in the behaviour of its adherents. It means the religious persuasion of its followers and sacredness to worship-system related with the gods and goddesses of the religion. The Rauts are the Hindus. So, undoubtedly, they follow the Hindu ethics of religion and likewise, worship the Hindu gods and goddesses. There are some standardised practices by which the believers enact in symbolic form their relationship to the supernatural and it is known as ritual. Ritual may include adoration, supplication and attempts to control the supernatural. Belief in the supernatural entities is the faith of the people in the supernatural powers and they believe that these powers are existing above them which have indirect control over the man-power.

The Rauts believe in re-birth and 'karma' (act). They advocate that to get the life of a human being is very tiresome and it totally depends upon the good act of the creature in its past life and they further ascertain that he will seek birth again in different species according to his acts in the present life. The notion of 'paap' (sin) and 'punya' (merit) is quite effective in their life. They always keep it in their mind and try to avoid the acts of sin which may throw them in hell after their death. Therefore, they think about the concept of hell and heaven. Those who do the acts of sin go to hell and those who do the acts of merit go to heaven. Hell is the place where a person has to go through the ordeals and a number of tortures are inflicted on him, whereas in heaven, he is facilitated with best comforts. So, these thoughts of sin and merit, hell and heaven have controlling effect on the Raut population. Atleast, they are feared of
God and before committing any sinful act, they ponder over the matter for several times and if possible for them, they try to save themselves by not involving in these cases. The Rauts are religious-minded, so they observe a number of rituals on different festive occasions and worship the local deities.

The festival Calendar is being given below in a tabular form. These festivals have special significance in their life and the Rauts observe them with gaily, piousness and sincerity.

Table - 5
Festival Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chaitra (March-April) (9th day of the Month)</td>
<td>Ram Navami</td>
<td>It is commemorated as the birth-day of Lord Ram. This day is thought auspicious for sending the married girls to their husband's houses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Baisakh (April-May) (3rd day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Baisakh Akti</td>
<td>It is the day of Parashuram's incarnation on the earth. It is an auspicious day for marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jethh (May-June) (15th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>Barsaet</td>
<td>Women celebrate it for their perpetuity of marriage. They worship Satyawan and Savitri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. -DO- (11th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Bheemaseni Ekadasi</td>
<td>Fast is observed for gaining merits. It is equivalent to all the fasts of Ekadasi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Aasharh (June-July) (2nd day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Rathajutiya</td>
<td>Worship of Lord Ram and gathering of the ardent and devout people at the place of temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Festival</td>
<td>Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savan (July-August)</td>
<td>Worship of Lord Shiva</td>
<td>Half-day fast on every Monday of this month and worship of Lord Shiva.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Janmashtami</td>
<td>Religious observance to celebrate the birthday of Lord Krishna and fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Hareli</td>
<td>It is an agricultural festival. Raits worship the agricultural implements and Godraiyya, the deity of cattle-shed on this occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Nag Panchami</td>
<td>They worship the cobra for protection from the snakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Bhojali</td>
<td>They worship the goddess and present 'Bhojali' to others to make new friendship relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Raksha Bandhan</td>
<td>Charm tying. Assurance of protection by the brother to his sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Bahura Chauth</td>
<td>It shows the religious importance of the cow. They worship the cow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Khamar Chhat</td>
<td>Women worship Parvati, wife of Lord Shiva to protect their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Magha-Nakshatra</td>
<td>Worship is done on this day, to save their children from heavy rains, clouds and thunder-storms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do-</td>
<td>Garjana</td>
<td>Religious observance for the welfare of the children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Festival Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>16. Bhadon (August-September)</strong>&lt;br&gt; (15th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>Fora or Pola</td>
<td>Agricultural festival. Worship of bullocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. -do-&lt;br&gt; (3rd day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Teeja</td>
<td>Fast and hearing of the Katha (Mythological stories) by both married and unmarried women for the welfare of their husbands, and to get good husband, respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. -do-&lt;br&gt; (4th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Ganesh Chaturthi</td>
<td>Installation of the image of God Ganesh and ritual worship with fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Kvar (September-October)&lt;br&gt; (From 1st to 15th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>Ancestor fortnight</td>
<td>Ritual observance for the salvation of their dead forefathers and for the welfare of themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. -do-&lt;br&gt; (8th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>Beta Jutiya</td>
<td>Mothers keep fast for the welfare of their son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. -do-&lt;br&gt; (8th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>God-fortnight</td>
<td>Awakening of the Gods. Sisters offer a thread-necklace to the goddess and wear that for the welfare of their brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. -do-&lt;br&gt; (8th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Bhai-Jutiya</td>
<td>Worship of Shakti' (power) and burning of the image of Ravana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. -do-&lt;br&gt; (10th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Dashahara</td>
<td>Worship of Laxmi, the Goddess of Wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Kartika (October-November)&lt;br&gt; (15th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>Diwali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Kartika (October- November) (2nd day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Bhai-dooj Brothers take meal from the hands of their sisters. This meal served by the sister is supposed to contain nectar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Jethhouni (11th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>The completion of meditation of the Rauts in the Akhara place. They tie 'Suhai' around the neck of the cows. Raut-nach begins from this day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Kartika bath</td>
<td>Women take bath in this month to gain merits, and virgin girls take bath to get a husband of their choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Raut-nach</td>
<td>This is the great function of the Rauts. They dance and enjoy the most on this occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Aghan (November- December)</td>
<td>Laxmi worship Rauts stop lending of money on Thursdays in this month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Push (December- January) (15th day of the 2nd fortnight)</td>
<td>Chherchhera Distribution or charity of paddy, so that no one in the community should remain hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Magha (January- February) (14th January)</td>
<td>Til-Sankranti Eating, anointing and charity of sesame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Sakat-fast (15th January)</td>
<td>Observance of fast by the mother for good health of his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Shivaratri (14th day of the dark fortnight)</td>
<td>People keep fast and worship Lord Shiva on this day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Festival Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phalguna (February-March) (15th day of the 2nd Fortnight)</td>
<td>Holi</td>
<td>They make a bonfire in remembrance of Holika and Prahlad on this occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaitra (March-April) (1st day of the month)</td>
<td>Colour-throwing ceremony</td>
<td>They worship the home-deities and then play with colours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-do- (5th day of the month)</td>
<td>Dhool-Panchami</td>
<td>Play with dust in the morning, and with colour in the evening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(This is the Festival Calendar of the peasants of Chhattisgarh)

Following are the important rituals observed by the Raute:

**Janmashtami (Kanhaiya Natha):**

This is celebrated on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Savan. It is the birth-day of Lord Krishna. Men and women keep fast on this day and after sunset, propitiate Lord Krishna.

In the next morning, 'Hadoyaa' or 'Tiraiyya-Pacharanga' is celebrated. Children go to the houses of other villagers with the boughs of 'tiranga' (a seasonal plant with variegated flowers) and dance there. They are given rice and money according to the practice. This is done to celebrate Lord Krishna's birth. Children of all castes see this festival with gaiety, except the untouchables. Some decades ago, people gathered at a certain place and rejoiced by playing drums, manjeers, etc. on this occasion. This festival is also known as 'Dahikando'.

**Hareli:**

Hareli is celebrated on the 15th day of the dark fortnigh
of Savan. The festival appears to be an agricultural one. Fuchs (1960:470) describes Hareli as "something of a spring festival. After the dry months of the hot season the monsoon sets in, every tree and bush is reviving; all vegetation begins to bloom and blossom. The peasants have ploughed their fields and sown the seeds. Now the brown nakedness of the fields assumes a green hue and soon the young plants will sprout."

The Rauts bring a red darrta from the field and spread it in the cattle-shed and keep a part of it in the courtyard. They wash all agricultural implements and put them on the darrta. An idol of the twin images of Gauri-Ganapati (Lord Shiva-and-Pawati) is made of cow dung, and a ritual worship is performed by the women. The women make 'hatha' (palm-print) on that idol and other implements, such as, plough, wheels of the cart, iron-blade, digging-stick, etc. which are kept there. The men break coconut and offer it to the deity. 'Bel-patti' is also offered. The servants are given food on this day, and those who do not take the meals, are given cereals. 'Nagar-roti' (plough-tortillas) is prepared and kept on the plough-share and then milk is sprinkled on it. This roti is eaten only by the male members of the family, because they plough the land. There is restriction for women to plough the land according to Hindu ideology. On this day, Godraiyya, the deity of cattle-shed is ritually worshipped.

In the evening, the children bring out their bamboo stilts and play on stilts for a month or so and then immerse them in the tank.

Nag Pangham!

It is celebrated on the 5th day of the second fortnight of Savan. On this day, the Rauts put some roasted paddy and
milk in leaf-containers locally known as 'dona' and keep these in the field, grain-bin and cattle-shed, etc. On the wall of the grain-bin (Kothhi), a figure of snake is sketched which is ritually worshipped by the women of the house. They worship the cobra for protection from the snakes.

**Bhura-Chauth:**

This festival is celebrated on the 4th day of the darker half of the moon of the Hindu month of Bhadon (August-September). On this day, women worship the cow. The priest narrates the 'katha' i.e. legendary story, and womenfolk of the village assemble there to listen. After listening the 'katha', they go to their houses and worship the cow by sandal paste, gulal, rice, flowers, etc. and thereafter, take fruits and other sweets prepared for that day.

There is a myth related with this ritual that there was a man named Dwij Sharma in Mathurapuri in Sat-yuga (the first aeon of the cosmological time according to the Hindu scriptures). He possessed a cow named Bahula. Gohil, the cow-gosher grazed her near the Yamuna river everyday. One day he forgot to keep eye on the cow and the cow reached a cave where a wild tiger was sitting. She trembled with fear and began to return, but, at the same time, the tiger addressed her in human language saying "Stop, after so many days, I have got a delicious meat. Where do you go?" The cow promised the tiger to come back after feeding her calf. She went to her shed, fed the calf and returned back. To see her truth, the tiger prostrated and worshipped her. He told that he was a Gandharva in his preceding life. Due to the curse of Brahma, he got his present form. But, to see her, he got salvation from the sinful life. At the same time, the flowers were showered on the cow by the gods from the sky. Gohil saw that incident and was amazed with pleasure. He returned back to his master and told him about the event.
From that day, this Chaturthi is named after Bahula, as Bahura-chauth or Bahula-chaturthi. At noon, women perform this ritual and 'prasad' of roasted wheat flour is distributed. The cow is assumed very pious and is venerated by all castes of the Hindus.

Dashahara:

This is the main festival of the Rauts and it is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Kwar. This is the day on which Ravana, Kans and other tyrants had been killed. So the Rauts think that to end the bad forces of human life, and to retain the good forces, this festival is celebrated by them. They worship the goddess of power.

They wake up early in the morning, offer salutations to the Mother Earth, go to the patron's houses and milk the cows. They collect the cattle of the village and drive them to the pasture. They engage their children to look after the cattle and bring them back home.

They take bath and propitiate their family deity. On this day, they bring a sheaf of new crops and prepare 'tasmal', i.e. a porridge with jaggery and milk. At the time of propitiation, they remember Lord Krishna and his Narayani Sena, Mathura, Vrindavan, Dwarkapur and mother cow. They offer food to these deities. They bring a fruit of kohana with flower and make its four legs with sticks, and assume it to be a goat, and then sacrifice it to Goddess Durga. They also hang up the weapons at that spot. Flower-part of the fruit is assumed to be the head and the stem-part of it to be the tail. Bandan is offered to this sacrificial fruit, which is kept in a pot with grass, flower and washed rice. The legs of the sacrificial fruit are washed with water. The other preparations are also kept there. They close the door for some time, so that the Goddess Durga may take these offerings in
seclusion. After a minute or two, the door is opened and the sacrificial fruit is cut by a knife or a sword and after that water is sprinkled on it. This system of worship is called the 'shvet-pooja'. Khooni pooja (animal sacrifice) is not frequent now.

One of my informants, Makunda Raut from Baloda narrated an interesting myth of the 'shvet-pooja' which is as follows:

"It is a tale of the Dwapar-yuga (third aeon). King Drupada arranged a 'Swayamber' of his daughter Draupadi, which was attended by all the contemporaneous kings and princes. The Pandavas were also present there in disguise of Brahmins, because of their promise to the Kauravas of remaining in exile for thirteen years. Arjun could only hit the target of the revolving fish over a needle and won Draupati. When the Pandavas came out from the 'Swayamber', they found themselves surrounded by the forces of the Kauravas and other kings. A great battle was fought there, and after victory, the Pandavas started for their residence. They knocked the door. Kunti asked them, "Who are you"? They replied, "We are five Pandavas and we have brought a unique prize with us". Not even seeing what it was, Kunti told them to distribute that among themselves and then opened the door. She was surprised to see Draupadi. She was full of agony and began to repent for her mistake. At the same time, Lord Krishna reached there and told that that was the expected thing. He told further that in her previous life Draupadi had laughed at a cow followed by five humped bulls. So, she was cursed by the cow that in her later life, she will have five husbands.

In this way, Draupadi became the wife of five Pandavas. She was serving everyone of them for a fixed period. She was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu's wife. According to Lord
Krishna’s saying, she has been localised in a verse “She was named Draupadi in Dwapar, who was the wife of five Pandavas. She made victim of war the hundred brothers of Kauravas and remained separate from the war. She was named ‘Sati’ in Sat-yuga, the wife of King Harishchandra, who was firm in her oaths and separate from the war.”

To know the actual origin of Draupadi, Yudhishtir, the eldest brother of the Pandavas began to serve her and in the mid-time Bheem, the younger brother of him reached there and laughed at him. Bheem was proud of his power. Lord Krishna sent Bheem near the Sami tree and instructed him to worship the goddess. He was told that he can experience the power of Draupadi there. At the time of sunrise, Draupadi appeared there in her ‘ashtangi form’. Bheem who was hidden behind a hedge became afraid to see her. His pride was subdued and he prostrated before her. He propitiated her ceremonially. She became pleased with him and told him to ask for a boon. He asked for the protection of the five Pandavas and Lord Krishna in the war. She assured him of all these. She asked him, “What she will be given in return of this boon”? Bheem told that on the day of Dashahara, she would be propitiated by ‘shvet-pooja’ and from that day, this tradition is continuing among the Rauts, and it has become a customary worship.

After shvet-pooja, the fruit is peeled off and the endocarp is cooked with vegetable and in this way, they get the ‘prasad’. They wash all their weapons and worship them. After the ritual worship, they take their meal and go to graze the cattle, which are left in charge of the children, and bring these back before the sun-set. They take a light food and go to ‘akhara’ (gymnasium).

Akhara:

In the evening, the Rauts usually go to the akhara.
At Baloda, a village in Bilaspur district, the Kansujia and Jheria Rauts have separate akharas in different places. This place of akhara is decorated with flowers, green leaves, and buntins. At first, they light an earthen lamp there. Five images of Shyam-Balram, Ganap and Lord Shiva, Guru Daital, Veerbhadra and sixty-four Jogna are propitiated. They prostrate before these images and receive new power to celebrate their prominent festival of 'Raut-nach'. It is their faith that the God himself comes to these akharas and instructing them about the war-techniques disappears.

At first, they run palhar (run-sit-stand and run), do pranam to their main deity and start to learn the war-techniques of lathi- an essential weapon ever seen in their hands. They break every part of their body by exercise and lead a celibate life upto Jethhouni. They sleep on the earth. This period is counted from Dashahara to Jethhouni (Dashahara to Diwali = 20 days, and Diwali to Jethhouni = 11 days i.e. total 31 days).

In akhara, a long stake of parasa tree is fixed into the ground and a red flag is hoisted on it. The informant, Makunda Raut told the myth of the parasa tree, which is as follows:-

"It was an episode of Treta-yuga (second aeon). In the 'Swayamber' (to choose spouse by a girl herself) of Sita, the bow of Lord Shiva was kept in the court of King Janaka, for lifting and stringing it up. Ram, the hero of Epic Ramayana lifted this bow, at ease and broke it into two pieces by twisting. Parasuram came there and was enraged to see the broken bow. He condemned Ram. But when he saw the glimpse of Lord Vishnu in him, his anger cooled down. Ram cursed him to be a parasa tree in the mortal world, i.e. on the earth. He assured to live for five days with him". So the Rauts keep the parasa-stick and think that from Jethhouni to Purnima, the
god himself dances with them. They recite the following hymn at the place of akhara:

"Jai Godraiyya sadara ke, akhara ke guru Baital
Chousat Jogan purakha ke, sub bhuja ma raiha sahay".
(Godraiyya – a deity of cattle-shed; Guru Baital of the
akhara, sixty four Jogans of the tradition come into my
shoulders). In this way, they pray for having power, which
is continued upto Jethhouni.

Diwali:

This festival is celebrated on the 15th day of the
dark-fortnight of the month of Kartika (October-November).
It starts from Dhanteras (13th day of the dark-fortnight).
Houses are cleaned and white-washed. An earthen lamp is
lighted continuously for three days. It is kept on a metal
pot over mango leaves. On this day, thirteen earthen lamps
are lighted over a flour-chauk facing the east, on the door-
way. On the next day of Naraka-chaudas (hell-fourteenth),
fourteen earthen lamps are lighted facing the south. The
third day is the day of Diwali. The following belief is conne-
ceted with the celebration of Diwali Festival and is prevalent
among the Rautes – "When, King Bali occupied King Indra's
throne, all the gods fled away with Indra, but the god-daughters
continued to come at the palace for merriment. Seeing this
the wife of Bali, who was a Sati, protested and requested him
to bring instead Laxmi (the Goddess of Wealth) to his court, to
perpetuate his fortune. She told that without Laxmi to rule
over the domain of the gods was difficult. She advised him to
meet God Vishnu. Bali went to meet God Vishnu and asked him
to send Laxmi with him. Vishnu told him to take Laxmi with him,
but she denied to go with him. When Lord Vishnu assured her
about his coming, she went with him. At that time, when Laxmi
reached their realm, the wife of Bali welcomed her and recited –
"Ghar-ghar baraso Laxmi Mata", (0, Mother Laxmi! dwell in
every house). From that day, Diwali started and people expressed
their joy by lighting the lamps in their houses.
On the day of Diwali in every house rice and vegetable are prepared and given to the cattle. They worship Govardhan (a mountain). This is prepared by cowdung, and on that the images of Lord Krishna, and Gope-Gwal are carved. Then a ritual worship of these deities is made. They wash the legs of the cattle, worship them by making a 'teeka' mark on their forehead and feed them rice and vegetables.

In the evening, at the places of deities, temples, tanks, banayan trees (residence of Brahma – the Creator God), peepal (Vasudeo), nim (Mata), saawa (Amalrjun – the son of Kuber), etc., an earthen lamp is lighted. Besides, lamps are also lighted in the granary, manger, latrine, etc. In this way, they worship all the gods and natural powers.

The Thethhwar Rauts of Mahimarg celebrate the festival of Diwali – Surutti. When they decide to celebrate it, they inform every household of their caste in the village and collect grains from them. They invite some respectable persons who are in intimacy, by sending a seer of milk and betel-nuts. In every house, new cloths are purchased. On the day of pariva (first day of the second fortnight) the caste people gather at the Daihan (the village pasture) in the evening and cook the milk-khichari. At this time, all the invitees remain present. They worship the Khodahar (the deity of Daihan) and thereafter, take the cooked food. From pariva to teej (first day to third day), they live in the Daihan. On the third day, at sunrise, they tie 'suhai' on the neck of the cows and in the evening, the Diwali-dance is held. Music-party is an essential part of their dancing and without it, they do not dance. First of all, they propitiate the home-deities, such as, Dulha Deo, Thakurain, Godraiyya, Maerchuk, etc. and thereafter, go to dance with their caste people. The music-party, after performance, comes out from the house of the Gaertiya and then, it goes to every house of their relation. In this way, all the people gather, and go to dance in the houses of the invited people of other castes. The invitees welcome them and bid farewell by giving
Jathaboni:

This festival is celebrated on the 11th day of the 2nd fortnight of the month of Kartika. On this day, their meditation and exercise in the akhara end. They milk their cows and take the milk to the akhara and offer it to akhara deities. Once again, they repeat their exercise and the var-techniques and from the next day, they start to dance in the houses of the farmers (Jheria Rauts) and, in return, they are given grains and money.

At night, they go to the houses of the farmers and tie 'suhai' on the neck of the cows. The 'suhai' is made of the bark of the parasa root. At the time of 'suhai tying', they recite the hymns which are known as 'Aashish'.

1) "Aagan lipai chak-chandan sur hariar gobar beenai, Gaay-gaay ka kothh bharai, baradi ho sou teene". (Courtyard should be besmeared as bright as sandal paste and they should collect green cowdung. The cattle-shed should be full of cows and the herd of cattle should be of three hundred heads).

2) "Nanda mahar ki kuwar kanhai, phir ke diye aashish, Annadhan se ghar bharai aur jug-jug jiye lakh barees". (The son of King Nanda has blessed that your house would be filled with grains and wealth and you will live as long as a million years).

3) "Tame Ke tamohurawa, bhare ganjajal pani. Khushi rahai tumhar poot-pariwar, nishi din dai charu bhar pani". (The water container of copper is full of Ganga water. May your children and family members be happy. and give you a charu of water).

4) "Chanda sohai chandaini, divana sohai bati. Suhai sohai Laxmi Rupi-Mungi gaiyya la, chanda-suraj hai sakhi". (The moon-light charms the moon, the lamp-wick charms the divana - a kind of insect, and 'suhai' charms the Rupi-Mungi
Raut in their ceremonial dress at the festival of Raut-dance
In this way, this day has much significance in their life. Their meditation is over and in pleasure, they dance for five days or a week in village markets, at 'madai' places and in the houses of their relatives on the day of Jethoumi and on the day of Purnima, they dance in the village. 'Suhai-tying' is done on both the days of Ekadasi and Purnima. This is the season of paddy harvest. When they go to bathe, they offer bel-patti to Lord Shiva and the women float lighted lamps in a leaf-made 'dona' in the tank.

Raut-Nach:

In the month of October, a little before the festival of Diwali, the Rauts hold a dance known as 'Raut-nach'. On this occasion they put on their traditional dress, the gaudy 'jacket', tied by belts of cowrie, and beset with jingle-rings and peacock-feathers. They wear a turban with peacock-feathers and paper-flowers, known as 'gasara'. They also tie jingle-rings around their feet. Holding a stick or kubari lath (bent stick) in the hand, then they go about in a group with 'ganda-baja' (local band party played by the Ganda caste people). The dance is nothing but a haphazard and un rhythmic jumping to and fro to the accompaniment of music. The dance is interrupted when somebody raises his stick with an echoing sound and recites a 'doha' (couplet) and after the 'doha' is finished, the entire group shout aloud 'Ho' simultaneously, and the dance is started again.

The couplet may or may not signify anything, and some of the expert Rauts compose these couplets extempore. Some of these couplets with their English rendering have been incorporated in the 'Appendix-B'.

Rituals connected with agriculture:

There are some other rituals which are connected with agriculture.
At the time of seed-sowing, people ask the priest to suggest an auspicious day and they throw a handful of paddy in their fields on that day. They prepare a 'dhaba' (grain-container) of cowdung in their courtyard and ritually propitiate it. After that, it depends upon their convenience as to when they should sow the crops.

Nave-Khana is also an agricultural festival. The Rauts celebrate it very simply. They bring a sheaf of paddy and put it in the rice which is being cooked. In this way, they start the eating of the new crop on an auspicious day, so that, they may eat the new rice on any day in the month of Kwar.

The same measure is also adopted in harvest. They cut five sheaves of paddy crops on Monday or Thursday and continue it later on, according to their convenience. After threshing operation, they collect the grains near the threshing-peg and place these in a half-radius which is known as 'raas'. They keep a mound of cowdung in both the corners and propitiate these ritually. They offer a coconut and burn incense. Women and children from the Raut, Kewat and Mahara castes come there for exchanging gifts. The Raut women with milk, the Kewat women with chana-murra (parched gram and rice) and the Mahara women with vegetables, come there and keep them beside the 'raas'. These materials are received by the owner and in return of that he gives them paddy.

Village deities:

As we have discussed, the Rauts have largely accepted the Hindu norms of life. So, they also worship the village deities propitiated by the Hindu caste people. Following are the important village deities of which ceremonial worship is done in the Chhattisgarh villages:
Mata Chaura or Maraki Mata:

This deity is also known as 'Hinglangi Devi'. At Mahimarih, she has been established outside the village in a field. There is a hut and inside it some crude stones are kept as the symbol of this deity. Vermilion and bandan are rubbed on those stones. A trident has been fixed, and a red flag has been hoisted in front of the hut. The Mata is propitiated every year, or in every three years, by the village people collectively. A she-goat of black or catechu colour is sacrificed to her, and the persons who wish to have a particular prayer fulfilled, propitiate her separately. In the month of Chaitra and Kvar, a perpetual light (Akhand jyoti) is burnt at the place of this deity for nine days, and on the ninth day a ceremony is held.

At Baloda, her place has been taken by Kankalin and Koagai Devi. At both divine places 'Jawara' is sown and Nevrat-procession is ceremonially taken out on the ninth day.

Kankalin Devi:

A myth is prevalent at Baloda about the establishment of Kankalin Devi there. It is said that a cow used to stand there, and milk automatically dropped down from her teats at the place where the Devi is now enshrined. One day a grazier (Raut) dreamt that she is staying there as Kankalin Devi, and wanted that the village people should propitiate her. When that place was dug, an idol of the deity was found and it was enshrined in a hut. Ever since she is ritually propitiated.

Rauts think that she is the child-giver goddess. People who want to get rid of troubles take a vow to put a perpetual light there for nine days and sacrifice a black goat.
She was installed after Kosgai Devi and her period of coming may be at about 400 years ago, i.e. around 1600 A.D. The charge of protection of the place of this deity has been entrusted to Kahara (a fishing caste) people. So they take care of this deity and perform the rituals and worship regularly.

Kosgai Devi:

There is a ruined temple on the ridge at Baloda, which is the place of this deity. People say that it was broken by the army of Aurangzeb, a Mughal Emperor. The Kanhujia Rauts inhabited around this ridge. They told that their ancestor Amoli Das Baba sat there, burning a perpetual fire, in his life-time. Some people say it to be Mataki or Marali Mata which is seen at Mahimarh. She is also named as Koushiki Maiyya. According to the prevalent myth, the symbolic stone of the Devi fell down many times, and it was installed at her old place after such happenings. One day, the Malgusar and the Saiga (priest of the village deities) dreamt that the goddess does not want to live on the ridge, and wished that she should be established on a place below the ridge. So she has been enshrined in a brick-made room.

She has got an important place in the village religious life. The Rauts offer her milk and ghee. Before marriage, virgin girls take blessings from her and also the newly wedded bride and the groom visit the place and take blessings for their happy married life. At the time of marriage, a coconut is broken in this shrine. The charge of protection of this deity has been assigned to Gond-Kanwar tribe people, who constitute a fairly high percentage among the peasantry of Chhattisgarh.

Navrat (Jawara):

Dubey (1964) writes that "Jawaras are sown in the name of the Devi in the Navratra". Head of the household keeps
fast for the day and takes only fruit in the evening, which has been also observed by the author. He found that Baiga (who officiates in the divine places of Kankalin and Kosgai Devi), and the headman who propitiates, keep fast and take meals except rice once in the day. Akhand jyoti is burnt at the Jawara in the name of Devi.

Wheat, gram, urad, paddy, rahar, masoor, jav and til are sown in a pot full of earth and over this a lighted lamp is kept. Every night, songs are sung in praise of the Devi. On the eighth day, the priest performs the Hom ceremony. On the ninth day, sacrifice of a goat is made, and only the family members take the meat. If anyone wants to give the meat to others, he sacrifices another goat and the meat of this goat is then distributed. After that, the pot is carried by a married woman to the accompaniment of music to the tank for immersion.

Some people show some erratic signs of spirit possession on this occasion, which is known as 'Devi Chadarna'. They start beating their bodies or piercing their tongues: it is said that 'Sakti' (power) enters their body.

There are some other important aspects of this festival which have not been mentioned by Russell (1916) and Dubey (1964), which the author has observed and states below:

The perpetual light, which burns for nine days and nights, is lighted by the fire produced by the friction of two wood-sticks or fire stones (Chakmak Patthar). Besides the divine places, the light is also burnt in the houses of the persons making vow to do this. The whole night 'Akhand kirtan' (continuous devotional songs) are sung by the neighbours and family members. The Baiga watches the place of the village deity and the head of the family who initiates this ceremony keeps eye on the house-light. They believe that the Devi haunts that place, so a person must not lie keeping his legs towards the door and he must take care of the light.
If the light is extinguished, the Devi slaps him and makes him conscious. Many people have given evidence of this. These persons also sacrifice a goat on the ninth day.

The Hom ceremony of the two months differ. In the month of Chaitra, sankala (rice, sesame, jav, jaggery, honey, ghee) are thrown into the sacred fire, while in the month of Kwar, kohana (a seasonal fruit) and a lemon are thrown into the sacred fire. A coconut fruit filled with ghee and wrapped by a red cloth, is thrown into the fire. On the first day, kalaash (hollow-dough over which lighted wick-lampe are kept during religious worship) is ceremonially initiated by the priest, and on the eighth day, Hom-ceremony is done by him. In this Navratri period, the priest reads the Durga anecdotes.

On the ninth day, a procession is taken out with music and the married women carry the holy Kalash on their heads. Over the Jawara a metal pot is placed which is filled with seven kinds of seeds (wheat, gram, moong, urad, jav, paddy and sesame), and over that the Kalash is placed. The Jawara in the front of the ember is taken out, so that it may not burn. The significance of this extracted Jawara is prominent in the peasant beliefs and it is held that it saves a man from small-pox during the epidemic and causes conception, if taken in a small quantity.

The women bearing Jawara on their heads gather at one place and go to the tank with the accompaniment of music in a grand show of tongue-piercing persons whining out a loud shout while drawing the long-needle known as 'bana' up and down, and some are possessed by the Devi, after taking a few strokes of the whip during the ceremonial observance. The Baliga and other devotees take care of the burning light and the women bear the Kalash.
When they reach the tank, they put down the Kalash (earthen vessel). A ritual worship takes place and a coconut is broken there. Its kernel is distributed among the participants. The Kalash is then separated from the Jawara. The Jawara is then washed and the grain-stalks are picked up and taken home. On the next day they distribute the Jawara to their friends and relatives.

Danteshwari Devi:

There is a temple of Danteshwari Devi near the Khokho tank in Purani Basti at Raipur. Here, the idol of Danteshwari Devi has been installed since 1500 A.D. by a Raut devotee who found it under the earth there. This is the main deity of Jheria and Kosariya Rautes. Presently, a Kosariya Raut named Ram Ratan Ahir is the priest of this temple. He is sixty years old. The temple has 2 acres of land for cultivation and the income from this is invested for its maintenance and worship.

In the months of Chaitra and Kwar, Jawara is installed and it is propitiated by sacrificing a black or khaira goat.

Mauli Dai:

This deity protects the village from all types of danger. The Baiga lights an earthen lamp in her shrine every day in the evening. In the months of Kwar and Chaitra, the Jawara is planted there and on the ninth day, the Baiga lights a Kalash for whole day and night. A black goat is sacrificed to her and the kalash is propitiated by sacrificing a black-she-goat. Its shrine is found in a village named Bhelai near Baloda.

At Bhelai Mauli Dai, Kalika Devi, Raut Rayg, Thakur Deo and Kalash are the five village deities. It is said that the goddesses are twenty-one in number, and there is only one
brother of them who is Thakur Deo. Mauli Dai, Chandi, Kosgai, Kankalin, Kalika, Maraki Mata, Mahamaya, Maha Kali, Durga, Sarai-Singar, etc. are the goddesses who are worshipped in the months of Kvar and Chaitra and a perpetual light is burnt in their shrine.

**Sati-shauna:**

This is a place of worship at Baloda set up in commemoration of a Sati (woman who had immolated herself on the burning pyre of her husband). The newly wedded bride and groom are taken there for taking her blessings.

**Sheetala Devi:**

She is propitiated at the time of epidemics like smallpox. She resides in the nim tree. Those who are suffering from smallpox are fanned by a bough of nim-leaves. She is offered for propitiation gram-pulse, rice and sugar which cool the system and cure when taken as 'prasad'.

Women keep fast on the eighth day of the month known as 'Sheetala aathe'. This day falls on the second fortnight of the month of Chaitra, Baisakh, Jeth and Assarh.

**Laxmi Devi:**

She resides in the aawla tree. In the month of Kartika, people take their meals beneath the aawla tree. The day of her worship is more appropriate on the tenth or twelfth day of the month. They cook their meals in the shade of the aawla tree and propitiate her and then take the 'prasad'.

**Thakur Deo:**

Thakur Deo is a protector god of the village. At many places he has been symbolised by an egg-shaped unhewn stone which absorbs milk when poured on it. He rides on a white
horse and a white goat is sacrificed to him. Fuchs (1960: 383-384) states that the name Thakur Deo" is very common in Bengal and as far west as the Bilaspur District, probably the original home of the Bhumia". Fuchs further says that the abode of Thakur Deo is in a tree. "A large stone slab is brought and laid on the ground at the base of the tree. On this slab another stone slab is placed in a vertical position and made to lean against the trunk of the sacred tree".

Dubey (1974) writes that "Thakur Deo is worshipped when there is an illness in the family or when any celebration like marriage or child-birth takes place or when any desire has been fulfilled and any vow or promise has been made to the Thakur Deo. The worship consists of offering flowers, coconut and small flag, or, if economic condition permits, sacrifice of a goat. Ramdhun is also sung near the Thakur Deo. Recitation of the name of 'Ram' near the image of Thakur Deo speaks of the Hinduisation of the worship rites".

It is said by the villagers that Thakur Deo makes round of the village at night and the sound of his horse's hooves are heard by the villagers. He warns the Gatiya or the Baiga of the village about the coming danger in dreams. These persons adopt preventive measures then. Some decades ago, only the Malgusar was entitled to propitiate this deity, but now, anyone can propitiate him. Many families of the Rauts and other caste people sacrifice a goat in every three years in his name, which is known as 'teersala'.

Deshaha Rauts of Khisora say that three goddesses accompany Thakur Deo to protect the village. They are as follows:
1) Baghara Devi:

She is propitiated by sacrificing a black pig. She is a leading messenger of Thakur Deo.

2) Khandai Dai:

She looks after the whole village. She is propitiated by sacrificing a black or catechu-coloured she-goat and when they can not do this, they offer a coconut or a lemon fruit once a year.

3) Maraki Mata:

She is also propitiated by sacrificing a shef-goat. She checks the contagion of epidemics like small-pox.

When cholera or plague enters the village and victimise some persons, 'Kudwara juday' is done. People keep milk in a small earthen pot and water or salt in a 'desya' (earthen lamp), and promise to Mata to propitiate her by offering milk-porridge and pudding. At the time of small-pox, people keep awake for the whole night on the bed of the patient, burn incense and read something loudly, so that there should not be silence. Otherwise, malevolent spirits may come and attack the patient.

Dau Sahab:

He is propitiated by sacrificing a goat every year during the festival of Dashahara and bel-patti is offered to him. It is assumed by the village-folk that Thakur Deo is the King, and Dau Sahab is his minister. The sacrifice is done by the Kaser (artisan caste who work on metals) caste people.

Barru Bawa:

His real name is Branh Deo. People think that he is a Brahman who appears in the form of 'fire' after his death.
He causes fire at the heap of crops, hays, and in buildings.
So the people of the village accepted him as a village
deity and established him in the root of a peepal tree by
keeping a stone slab against the trunk of the tree. He is
propitiated by offering curd, jaggery, beaten rice and
initiatory threads known as 'janey' every year in the summer
season on Saturday or Tuesday. Those families where marriages
take place, offer tel-haldi on the first day to him.

Lakhana Deo:

He is the guard of Kosgai Devi and has been installed
in her proximity. On the day of Dautela in marriage ceremony,
he is offered tel-haldi and thereafter, the rest of it is
applied on the body of the bride or the groom.

Home deities: There are some home-deities which also possess
unique importance in their life, as stated below:

Dulaha Deo:

Dulaha Deo is the family deity of many castes of the
peasantry in Chhattisgarh. In the Raipur District Gazetteer
(1909:198), Dulaha Deo is described as the deity of the Rauts
only, but apart from the Rauts, other castes also believe it.
Dubey (1964) writes that "sacrifice to Dulaha Deo is made
after marriage. The first thing that the bride-groom's
father or guardian does after returning home is to sacrifice
a goat or a cock in the name of Dulaha Deo and similar sacrifice
is made on the birth of the first child, but not on subsequent
births. It is said that the Brahmans also pay homage to
Dulaha Deo, but instead of sacrifices they break coconut. The
image of Dulaha Deo is described as a rider on horseback made
of clay".

Rauts offer coconut for this deity or sacrifice a
catechu-coloured goat on Saturday or Sunday in the dark-fortnight
of the month of Aasharh (June-July). He is regarded as the
oldest member of the family who conducts all the activities.
Sarangarhahin Thakuraien:

It is the belief of Deshaha Raouts that this deity lives with Dalaha Deo. She is worshipped by offering a coconut, betel-nut or lemon fruit.

Thakuraien Devi:

Her worship is done in every family of the Raouts. She is propitiated in the month of Aasharh (Hareli) or Falguna (Holi), on Saturday or Sunday by offering a coconut or sacrificing a black or catechu coloured goat in the alternate year. If anyone of the family falls sick, a vow is made to propitiate her, after the cure of the patient.

Harhaha Kuwar:

She is also known as 'Ratmay'. Ancestor-worship is done by the Raouts to appease this deity. If a son of the eldest son has taken birth, this goddess is propitiated. They bring a big earthen pot from the potter’s house with a lid. The lid is filled with oil and a cotton wick is lighted on that. A married woman of the family bears that pot and they go to the tank to bring water with the accompaniment of music. Water is brought in three earthen pots, one by the woman and the other two by a man in 'Kawar-sinka' (string hooked on a bamboo stick borne on the shoulder). This deity is offered a black goat which is cooked with water brought from the tank, which is also used for drinking. A pit is dug there in which the leavings and the pataries (leaf-plates) are thrown. In that feast, only those families are invited who worship this deity.

After one year, a coconut is broken there and an earthen lamp is lighted. This worship is done in the dark-fortnight of the month of Aasharh on Saturday or Sunday. Kahara (fisherman) and Koshta (weaver) caste people also propitiate this deity.
Turaki Kuwar :
In the month of Falguna-Aghan, the house is cleaned on a Saturday or Sunday. A new hearth is made. In this propitiation, a Pathan is called, who comes wearing a 'phata' (unsewn cloth) and sacrifices a cock or a khaira goat by 'halal'. In return of his services, he is given a dhoti of three meter length, and the head of the goat or cock which he takes home on a dish.

When these two goddesses are propitiated all the relatives and caste people (endogamous section) are invited.

Godraiyya :
He is the deity of cattle-shed. During the festival of Hareli or Pora or Dashahara, he is worshipped and a pig or a sheep is sacrificed to him. He is also offered a coconut. Those Rauts who possess buffaloes sacrifice a pig to him, and the head is buried under the earth. The other portion is offered to the Dewar. This deity protects the cattle.

Kachhan :
It is the deity of phari (a weapon of wood-stick). It is worshipped by chandan-bandan, burning incense and sacrificing a black cock at the time of Diwali festival. The Rauts hang up that stick on the door of the house.

Kharikha Deo :
Kharikha in Chhattisgarhi dialect means an assembly of cattle. Kharikha Deo is the deity who protects the cattle from diseases. This deity is propitiated in the Raut predominant villages of Chhattisgarh. This is also known as 'Khodahar ka devata'. It is enshrined at the place of cattle-grazing and propitiated at the time of Diwali festival.

Supernatural Spirits :
People believe in supernatural spirits. One such common spirit, according to them is Raksh which haunts cre-
cremation and burial grounds and is seen in the form of burning lights. It is said that sometimes the Raksa obstructs the path in the night and in such cases, it is not safe to cross it. The Rauts think that if anyone dies unmarried, he becomes 'Raksa'. It rides on the buffalo-back and seeing a man begins to throw the ember of fire. The saliva of this malevolent spirit produces fire reacting with air. If a bonfire is burnt, it retreats and can be controlled by Mantras.

Other supernatural spirits which the Rauts believe in are - Saitham, Bhoot and Prat and among the female spirits, Churelin and Pratin. It is vaguely believed that males dying unnatural death as a result of burning, drowning, etc. become Prat. A woman dying untimely death become Pratin whereas a woman dying during child-birth becomes Churelin.

Nasan is also named as Teli-Masan. They believe that a man of Teli (oil-presser) caste who dies is converted into Nasan. It burns as the 'masal' (stick-fire) about 8 feet above the earth in open places outside the village. It makes terror among women and children. Aeorchuk is also a malevolent spirit of the same type. Jinnad Bhoot is a very stubborn spirit which releases its victim after subjecting to great tortures. It is controlled by Mantras which are known to Muslim Ojhas only.

Those girls who are stupid and of weak mind are transformed into Hikehin after death. Whomsoever they could catch or victimise, they start to laugh at, weep and show teeth and look absent-minded at him. If she is threatened with shoe-beating or fire, she releases the victim. Pratin or Paratin makes its prey in subconscious condition and troubles the victim for a whole year, or releases him within two days.

Matiya is also a malevolent spirit. The Rauts believe that if small children die, they become Matiya. Its presence
has been noticed by the villagers. They say that it caught the son of Jharu Mahara at Baloda. Many a time, it happened that the son was hidden by the Matiya beneath the cot or the grain-bin. On hearing its cry, they came to know about its presence. It also makes scratches on the body of the children. Purgihih Sonarin from Baloda was very much pestered by it. In Ramadhin Sonar's house it used to defecate. It steals food too. The only way to get relief from this spirit is to neutralise it by Mantras. Roni Bhoot is another kind of spirit which makes the children its victim. In this condition, they weep throughout the day.

People also believe in black art or Tonahi and in the past there used to live a large number of Tonahis in the Chhattisgarh villages. Tonahis are dangerous women who take revenge on their enemies. So, the mothers daub soot on their children and pregnant women are very cautiously guarded. They are taken to other places, avoiding this type of woman. Makunda Raut (48) of Baloda described the activities of the Tonahis, and how they harry the families, which is quoted below:

"There was a woman who made prey of her nephew to complete her meditation. The boy died and on the third day, when all the members of the family were engaged in household works, she went to the grave-yard. She dug the grave and made him alive. She put off all her clothes, scattered her hair and began to dance, because it is the way to achieve the power of the black-art. When she wanted to make sacrifice of the boy, she searched for the knife, which she had left inadvertently in the house. Without caring for the boy who was alive, she went to the house and returned back. In the meantime, the boy reached the house and told about all the details, which were very much amazing to them. When she returned home, she was beaten and buried in the same place where the boy was buried. After the death of his aunt, the boy survived his full age, and the Tonahi could not succeed in her mission."
Persons who are disturbed by tona do not lead a peaceful life. Deaths are rare happenings of black-art. People who are disturbed by evil spirits are cured by jhar-phunk. The Guniyas and Ojhas play an important role in protecting the persons who are disturbed by supernatural and malevolent spirits.

Omens and superstitions:

Omens and superstitions are commonly believed and the common superstitions in the Raut caste are as follows:

1) If there is a hiccup at the time of taking meal, it is believed that somebody is remembering the man.
2) While walking, if one stumbles on a stone, it is believed that somebody has abused him.
3) A sneeze at the time of setting out on a journey or starting a good work is taken to be inauspicious.
4) Sight of a full pitcher in front while setting on a journey or starting a work is thought very lucky.

Guru (Spiritual teacher):

Guru is highly venerated in the Raut caste. He is invited at the time of birth, marriage and death ceremonies. They are gifted a rupee or two on their visit to jajman's house and are seen off. When I took an interview of a Guru, I found that they are farmers and sources of their income are priestly performances and agriculture. The office of the Guru is hereditary and after his death, the son of the deceased officiates in all ritual performances of the families.

Guru officiates in the 'Deeksha ceremony' (spiritual preachings) and worship the gods. During the 'Deeksha' a cloth is put on the head of the subject and a coconut is placed on his hand. He offers pranam to the Guru. Guru goes on chanting sacred verses and the following preachings are conveyed to the newly initiated disciple:
1) Adopt the way of Dharma.
2) Do not engage in violence.
3) Be kind to all animals and human beings.
4) Be aware of Brahman.
5) All human beings of the world are the part of the same power. Treat them equally.
6) Follow the way instructed by the Guru. Do good acts and leave the bad ones. If you follow the good way, the God will give you a glimpse of Him and you may go to the heaven.

God's greatness and the faith:

Once upon a time, there was a poor man. He went for pilgrimage on foot, during the hot days of summer. He was not wearing shoes and also had no umbrella. When he reached beneath a tree to get shadow, all the leaves fell down. He became thirsty, and went to a stream to drink. But the water dried up. He felt hungry, and went to a tree laden with fruits. All the fruits become dry instantaneously. In this way he got disappointed. At the same moment, God himself appeared there in the disguise of a Brahman. He asked him about the purpose of his journey. The poor man told that he is very much unfortunate. Where should he take shelter? He vowed to end his life, if God did not appear before him. Then, God appeared there in His corporeal form and bade him to return back and also preach his name and worship God with devotion to attain peace, prosperity and happiness.

The poor man returned back to his village. He was surprised to see an edifice newly constructed very beautifully on his previous residence. His neighbours and wife greeted him and they led a happy life praying and invoking God with full devotion.

It shows the extreme faith of the Rauts in God which may be in the form of Ram (Hero of Epic poem Ramayan), or Krishna (Mahabharat), Shiva, Narayan or other gods, such as,
Hanuman, Jagannathji, etc. Mother goddesses have also got a prominent place in this caste.

Other village gods who are enshrined in the temples are Lord Shiva and Hanuman (Monkey God). They are frequently seen in the villages of Chhattisgarh on the embankment of the tanks. People worship Hanuman on Tuesday and Lord Shiva is offered an oblation of water after bath everyday by many Rautes.

Popular religious cults:

Some of the religious cults are popular in rural Chhattisgarh. They occupy important place in the village community. The devout may be of any caste. Rautes also worship and have got an immense faith on their conventional deities and fasts.

Sixteen Monday's Fast:

This fast is started on any Monday and continued till subsequent sixteen Mondays. Often, women keep this fast.

On the day when the devout is determined to keep this fast, she should take bath and wear clean clothes. She would prepare 'churama' (wheat flour roasted with sugar or jaggery) and divide that into three parts. Then she would offer a part of it to Lord Shiva, who is represented by an idol of clay. He is ritually propitiated. Then, the offered 'prasad' is given to a Raut boy or any other child and the idol of Lord Shiva is consigned into the water of the tank. She then eats the rest of the 'churama' and keeps fast for the whole day. The same process is repeated on subsequent Mondays. On the seventeenth Monday, the quantity of the 'prasad' is increased.

It is the belief of those people who observe this ritual that by keeping this fast, they get the desired things and get salvation. But, those persons who fight with others,
take alms, get angry, use intoxicants, tell a lie, eat the leavings of food of anyone, abuse others, and sleep without washing the mouth during this fast would not get the desired things and create troubles for themselves.

It is a myth that there was a saint in a Shiva temple. He cheated the pilgrims and was addicted to all types of intoxicants. He was cursed by Lord Shiva and he turned into a leper. Thereafter, he kept this fast, got cured of the disease and became happy.

Another myth is of a poor Brahman who performed this worship and got married to a princess. His sterile wife gave birth to a child. His son met a friend and ruled over a big domain happily. When his wife insulted Lord Shiva and did not pray to Him, she was exiled and miseries abounded her. Nobody was disposed to give her protection, because of the fear of their own ruin and at last when she worshipped Lord Shiva and completed the sixteen Mondays' fast, she was accepted by her husband and thereafter enjoyed a happy life.

The sterile women or women without children also keep this fast.

Another cult which is more popular is the worship of Santoshi Mata, whose popularity was spread by an enthusiastic devotee within a decade all over the Chattisgarh region. 

Santoshi Mata:

Process of worship: The devotees who worship this deity must keep jaggery and parched gram in their hand and listen her 'katha' i.e. about her incarnation and power, uttering in a loud tone 'Shri Santoshi Mata ki jai'. When the katha is finished, the gram and jaggery have to be fed to a cow and the rest of it kept on the 'kalash' are
distributed among the listeners and children. Before the katha, the kalash is filled with water and over that jaggery and parched gram are placed on a plate. After the completion of the katha, water is sprinkled around the house and on the persons sitting there. The rest of it is poured on the root of the basil plant.

Ceremonial ending of the fast:

Sweets weighing two kilograms-and-a half of wheat flour is prepared for this festival. Puri, Khir, vegetable mixed with gram and an earthen lamp lighted with shee are the requirements for this function. A coconut should also be offered. This is done on Friday, if one’s wishes are fulfilled, otherwise, the worship is continued usually. On the day of worship, tamarind and other sour preparations are not permitted to be eaten. Neither the devotee should eat nor she should give these to others. On the day of ceremonial ending of this fast, eight boys are feasted in the house. If they do not belong to their own family, eight Brahman boys should be invited and a glass is gifted to each of them. The devotees take meal only once on this day.

The following myth is connected with the above fast:

There was an old woman who had seven sons. She was taking much care of six sons by giving them good food and the leavings were given to the seventh son. When he knew the fact, he left for another city to earn his livelihood. He presented a ring to his wife for his remembrance, but his wife made a mud print of cowdung on his back, due to not having anything worth to present.

He sought a service in a shop in the city. After some time, he acquired good skill in business and seeing his honesty, the businessman made him a partner in his business. He became a renowned businessman of that city within ten or
eleven years and earned a good fame and fortune. He was given the whole charge of the business.

His wife was being tormented by his mother. She used to go to the jungle to collect firewoods and in return of that, she was provided with 'roti' of wheat-chaff. She had to drink water in a broken earthen vessel. One day, when she was going to forest she saw a group of women listening the katha of Santoshi Mata. She also stood there and learnt the method of propitiation. Those women who worship Santoshi Mata get child, peace and all the domestic tensions are dispelled.

She went forward and saw a temple of Santoshi Mata. She worshipped her. On the next Friday, she got a letter and on the 3rd Friday received some money sent by her husband. She went to the temple and prayed to the goddess to give her her husband, and not money, and returned home. Santoshi Mata blessed her for the same.

Santoshi Mata went to meet her devotee's husband and told him to visit his house. He worshipped her and finished the bargains within a few minutes on that day. He purchased jewellery and new clothes for his wife and set forth for his village. Seeing the wretched condition of his wife, he parted from his family. His wife prepared for the ceremonial ending of the worship and called her husband's brothers' children for the feast. They were all instructed to ask for sour-preparations by their mothers. They did so and any-how, got money from her to eat something more and ate sour-preparations by purchasing from the market. This eating vitiated the propitiation of the deity and she got angry at this. The police suddenly came and carried her husband on the pretext of stealing ornaments. His wife knew her own fault and begged her pardon for the mistake. She was excused and her husband came back. Again, she performed the ending ceremony and invited children of Brahmans.
Within the ninth month of her husband's coming, she gave birth to a son. She was accustomed to visit the Santoshi Mata's temple everyday. One day, Santoshi Mata visited her house to examine her austerity in a formidable appearance. But she was recognised by the devotee, named Sakala and was greeted with warm reception.

Localisation:

On every Friday this worship is done. A mound of cowdung is kept on a sarai-leaf to represent Gauri-Ganapati which is known as 'Gaur'. There, they keep a photo of Santoshi Mata and a coconut. After bath, the devotee burns a lamp fed by ghee and makes 'arti'. Jaggery and parched gram are offered to her which are distributed among the children. This worship can be done both by males and females. Meal is taken only once in a day. Sour preparations are neither eaten nor given to others. The wife of Makunda Raut (38) of Baloda who had no child did this worship for a couple of years and after twenty years of her marriage gave birth to a boy. She considers it to be the gift of Santoshi Mata.

Santoshi flower:

This is a new cult which has spread rapidly in the villages of Chhattisgarh. A myth related with this worship is as follows:

"There was a girl suffering from leprosy. She was not getting love and respect from her family. So she decided to commit suicide and one day went to the tank and drowned herself. At the same moment, she heard a voice, "Why are you sinking down"? and after hearing this echo thrice, she was bade to close her eyes and was provided with a flower which is named 'Santoshi Phool'. She worshipped this deity and got relief from the disease and regained love and affection of her family.

It is a meditation of continuous 40 days which is quite simple and easy. They bring the 'flower' in any pot
(dish, plate, etc.) from a devotee of this deity and start worshipping it on Friday and continue it for next five Fridays. In the morning, they take bath, wear clean clothes and moulder fire to prepare red tea (water, sugar and tea-leaf). They sprinkle water on the flower and propitiate her ritually. The red tea is offered to her by pouring it in the pot. She is invoked both in morning and evening. Before propitiating her in the evening the tea is taken out and drunk by the devotee. The tea offered in the evening is taken during the morning worship.

On the 40th day, they worship the flower, offer her red tea and burn incense. Thereafter, the 'prasad' is consigned into the tank with all the residues. As invocation of this deity provides bliss, happiness, so she has been named Santoshi Mata.

They consider it a miracle, seeing how the flower grows and increases in its size. In a week, it becomes doublefolded and attain full size. The second fold is either given to other aspiring devotees of thrown into the tank. Its colour is brown and every day there occurs a slight change in its colour with increased size.

The devotees are quite hopeful to get free from the troubles and diseases by worship of this flower.

Cattle and Religion:

Cow is worshipped as mother and her worship is held with immense faith and sanctity by the Raut Caste people. Cow-slaughter is believed to be the greatest and unpardonable sin. So, the people do not hurt the cow and serve her with love. When new cattle are purchased, they are ceremonially worshipped before entering the cattle-shed. Their feet are washed with water and a 'tilak' is marked on their forehead after making the 'arti'. On the occasion of Dashahara festival, food is prepared for them for feeding.
The gift of cow is always looked upon as the best gift. So, in marriage, the gift of cow is made to the bride, and in death, to the priest. Chaudhari (1973:199) writes that - "In epic literature the merit of giving cattle is eloquently set forth, and the inducement is also held out that those who give generously will be entertained in heaven after their death by plump-papped and fat-buttocked celestial courtesans".

The humped cattle of India (Bos indicus) which is locally known as 'Sarhawa' is assumed as the "wahan" of Lord Shiva. They believe that Lord Shiva rides on the Sarhawa-back. There is an ordinary process to make Sarhawa. A bullock is consecrated for this purpose. A trident is marked over its foreleg-region, and then it is set free. At a certain period, the humped portion is demarcated and this bullock is later on known as 'Sarhawa'. It is worshipped and not hurt by the people.

.............