

Chapter 4

Devipujak: Tradition, Belief and Culture

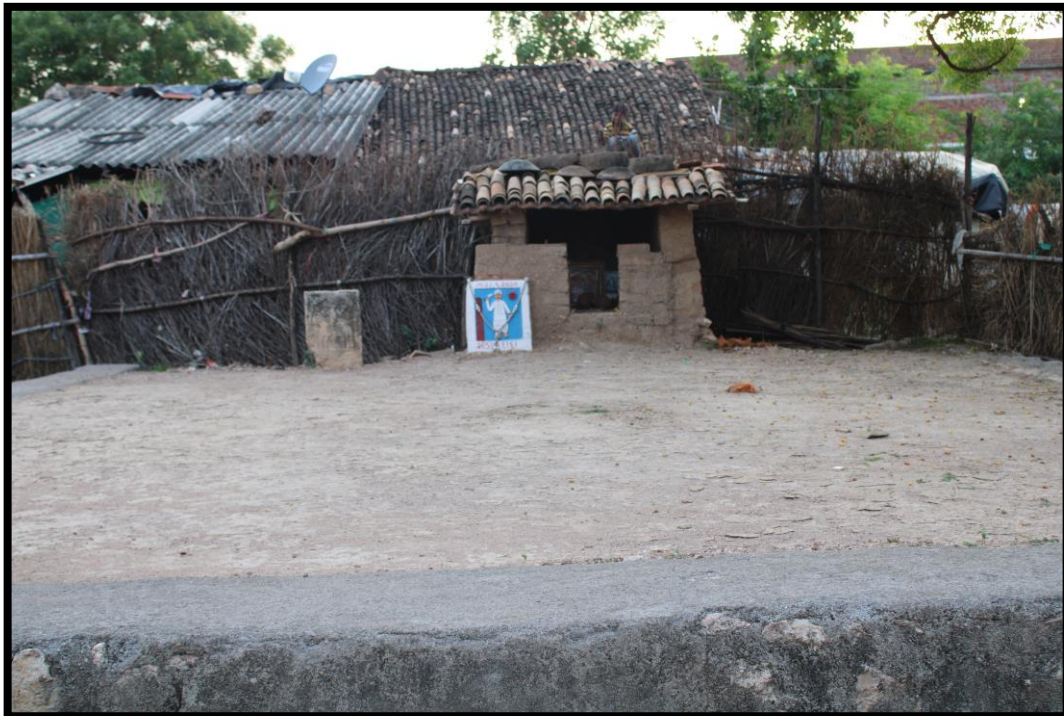
Religion is affecting various aspects of human life. It has been considered very important concept while studying human practices in social science fields. 'Bhils believe that their lives are ordered by various gods and goddesses. A man's wealth or poverty, health or sickness, prosperity or adversity, everything depends on the vagaries of these divinities' (Ahuja, 1965, p.24). Devipujaks are following Hindu religion. Goddess is having very sacred and central place in their life. One of the informants told me that they are very much committed to the religious practices of their community and hardly convert to another religion. Srinivas (1980) mentioned that people were following different deities and rituals as well as celebrating festivals during his study in village. Sometimes deities including gods and goddess demanded blood sacrifices also. Their festivals used to last for many days and observed practices of miracles in which the body of priests was possessed by deity and questions of participants were answered by deity. Emile Durkheim, a pioneer sociologist defined 'religions as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community' (1915, p.47). The religion has great impact on lives of individuals. It sometimes becomes important to study religious practices of community while doing study on them. Their life is influenced largely by the rituals and customs of particular religion. There are many authors who had studied religion of tribes while conducting study on them such as Emile Durkheim described totemic religion of Australian tribes and religious practices of Trobriand Islanders was studied by Malinowski.

Devipujak community is one such who have profound faith in their religious and cultural practices. It has a central position in life of the community. They always perform certain rituals before initiating any task. Whether it is their social or economic life, they consider goddess first in all sphere of their life.

4.1 Belief in God and Goddess

The word Devipujak itself means worshipers of goddess and religious rituals of deities are called *Dharam* by them. The Kumarkhaniya Devipujak worship *Bechari Maa* as their *Kuldevi*. They also worship other goddesses such as Meldi Maa, Khodiyar Maa, Dagai Maa, Shitala Maa, Jogni Maa and so on. They believe that they have to follow all rituals of goddess even they do not have enough money. They will borrow it from local moneylenders and perform all rituals of goddess. They deeply believe in goddesses and said that '*Ame Nabada pan Amari Devi Balvan*' (We are weak and our goddess is very powerful).

4.1 Juno Bechari Maa Madh (Old Goddess Bechari Temple)



Source: Field Work

4.1.1 Rakhadada

The place of Rakhadada is very auspicious among the Devipujak community. They worship Rakhadada believing that he will protect them from all difficulties. He is known as protector god among them. They also offer *Bali* to Rakhadada. There was also one small temple of Rakhadada in community. They worship there by lightening *dhoop* and *agarbatti* (incense

stick) in morning and evening every day. On the eight day of Navratri festival, they offer animal sacrifice to Rakhadada temple every year.

4.2 Rakhadada Temple



Source: Field Work

4.1.2 Hadak Maa

They worship goddess Hadak Maa whose vehicle is dog. There was small temple of Hadak Maa in village. They pray goddess when they are beaten by dog and believing that goddess will save them from rabies.

4.1.3 Jogni Maa

This goddess is also known as Charbai Maa among Devipujak community (Talpada, 2020). There was small *Madh* of Jogni Maa in community. They have separate *Bhuvo* of Jogni Maa. They offer animal sacrifice to goddess. A separate *Mandavo* of Jogni Maa is also performed by them.

4.3 Jogni Maa Temple



Source: Field Work

4.1.4 Shitala Maa

Devipujak community worship goddess Shitala Maa. They believe that a goddess will protect them from disease chickenpox.

4.1.5 Motijardada, Nimoniadada, Kal Bhairav and Baliya Dev

Devipujaks worship Motijardada and Nimoniadada when a child gets fever. They will ask the god whether fever is given by them. They will pray and keep vow to distribute *chavanu* (salty eatable food) of Rs. 5.25/- to children when a child gets cured. They will not take child to hospital for treatment if God says that fever is due to him. They will need to take permission from god if they want to take medical treatment. If fever is not cured, they will ask Kal Bhairav and then Baliya Dev whether fever is because of their anger.

4.1.6 Charmadia Dada

They worship snake as God. They do special prayer and offer coconut to Charmadia Dada on occasion of Nag Panchami²¹. Devipujaks are generally working in farm land and roam in jungle areas so they believe that Charmadia Dada will protect them from snake bite. They still visit Maharaj when beaten by snake rather than taking a medical help. They believe that Maharaj will remove snake position from body of person with chanting and a person will be cured. Nowadays, they have started medical help in case of snake bite with increase awareness level about importance of medical treatment.

4.4 Charmadia Dada Ni Deri



Source: Field Work

4.2 Rituals and Cultural Aspects among Devipujak Community

4.2.1 Dana Ceremony

Dana ceremony is a way among Devipujak community to understand a wish or order of the goddess. A goddess speaks to people with means of *Dana*. There are many occasions such as solving quarrel among family members, initiating any new task, going out of town, knowing

²¹ It is a Hindu festival celebrated by worshipping snake on fifth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Shravana.

reason of fever, confession of mistakes and so on when *Dana* ceremony is performed. A person called *Joshi* is the one who perform *Dana* ceremony among the community. They have their own pattern of performing *Dana* ceremony and there might be slight difference I region wise. A *Joshi* will first spread a cloth on ground and will arrange necessary things like Jawar (sorghum), incense sticks, picture of goddess on cloth for the ceremony. They perform it with pattern of *Vachha* (even number) and *Vadhamana* (odd number). A *Joshi* will make five heaps of sorghum in sequence which should in in order like *Vachha, Vadhamana, Vachha, Vadhamana and Vachha*. They perform it three times and all the time same number of heaps of sorghum happening in same sequence then they believe that goddess has blessed them and has given permission to do task. They follow either three heaps, five heaps and nine heaps while performing *Dana* ceremony. I had attended such occasion when they are performing *Dana* ceremony during my field work. Initially, I was not allowed to attend their rituals; but once the rapport and trust established, they were allowing me to participate in their rituals. I had first time participated in *Dana* ceremony at house of Karajibhai who was himself was Bhuvo. One of his relatives who was residing near his home came to Karajibhai due to one mistake committed by her son Mahesh. She wanted that goddess to forgive his son due to his mistake. It was an evening time when the ceremony was started. He was nearly 23 years old and married to girl from other caste and resident of north eastern state. Karajibhai sat down on floor and made the space ready for *Dana* ceremony. There were 7 to 8 members seating in round including wife of Karajibhai, family members of Mahesh and myself. He lightened incense stick and started throwing heaps of sorghum to ask whether goddess has forgiven Mahesh for his mistake or not. He was trying but the pieces of sorghum heap were not coming in exact number to forgive him. He tried it for long time but goddess was not forgiving him. Karajibhai then asked Mahesh to complete task of *Melap*²². After completion of task, Mahesh came back and they started *Dana* ceremony again. Now, heaps of sorghum came into exact pattern and goddess in last forgave him for the mistake he committed. I asked Mohit who was maternal-uncle of Mahesh what mistake he had committed. He told me that Mahesh married to other caste woman which is allowed and not considered sin among them; but he touched his mouth to his wife's body parts below neck which is prohibited and considered sin among them while having physical relationship. Mahesh has to purified to get rid of sin with permission of goddess. After dinner, Karajibhai sat again to perform *Dana* ceremony. He sent both Mahesh and his wife for taking bath with milk and roli to get

²² A custom among Devipujak to give a quarter wrist rice to birds to get rid from sin and a symbol of good act.

purified. Both of them came back after bath and Karajibhai called one child around 5 to 6 years old and made him sit opposite direction in a way he cannot see what Karajibhai was doing. He then spread heap of sorghum and selected one piece of sorghum out of heap with incense sect. He asked child now to turn back and selected the exact piece of sorghum which he selected from it. A child made some attempts but not succeed and finally he selected a same piece of sorghum which was picked by Karajibhai. They believe that child is a form of deity and it is not child who picked piece of sorghum but it was goddess who made child to do so. Mahesh got rid from the sin and was forgiven by goddess with the ceremony. He was told not to repeat the mistake again. This time goddess forgave him because it was committed unconsciously. Mahesh put some rupees near photo of goddess at the end. Karajibhai folded all the things of worship and ceremony was ended late in night.

The Dana ceremony was held at Vajabhai's house due to health of his younger brother Hirabhai which I attended. Hirabhai was suffering from high fever for last some days. He was feeling very weakness and lying on floor when I reached there. He also went to doctor and took medical treatment but his health was not improving. They believed that goddess is not happy with them so Hirabhai is suffering from this problem. Some of his relative were asking to visit Community Health Centre (CHC) which was 10 to 15 km away from them, but they decided to first call *Joshi* and try to know reason for unhappiness of goddess. If goddess gives them permission, they will go to see doctor at CHC. *Joshi* came there after sometimes and started to perform *Dana* ceremony. After sometimes, he told them that goddess is unhappy with them because Hirabhai's wife had consumed food at house his relative which was prohibited by Rakhadada. He also told them that they had earlier wished to give *Bali* to goddess which they have not fulfilled still so goddess is very unhappy with them. He asked them to give *Bali* to goddess as early as possible. With certain symptoms of Hirabhai, I suggested them to get medical report of Dengue fever. They visited doctor next day and a dengue fever was diagnosed. They have a strong belief in their goddess so they perform *Dana* ceremony in many occasions like taking permission to fix marriage, solving quarrel among family members, to get forgiveness of mistakes and more such.

4.5 Dana Ceremony



Source: Field Work

4.2.2 Jatiyu

The word '*Jatiyu*' is a local terminology which means goat. Devipujak generally offers goat to God and goddess in sacrificial ceremony. They believe that goat is a medium through which goddess talks to them or gives message. Sometimes, they take permission from goddess for any task, knowing reasons for fever or going out of village with medium of goat. They will gently move hand on back of goat. If goat shakes its body after it, they believe that goddess has given its consent for their belief. They consider goat as sacred. I was once involved in talk with Vajabhai about goat and his wife was also present there. I was normally having conversation and accidentally told that I had sometimes seen goat which was huge like donkey during occasion of Bakari-Eid in my town. Vajabhai's wife stopped me at the moment and said that I cannot compare goat with donkey. I felt that they did not like my comparison which I made unconsciously. Once Velsibhai's son wanted to go in nearby city for some days to sell the stuff he bought. A *Joshi* was not available on the day so he took permission from goat for going out. He moved hand on back of goat softly and it shook its body so he believed that goddess has given permission to him to go to city for earning.

4.2.3 Rajinama

India is a home for different castes which are having their own rituals and customs. Devipujak community is following a unique ritual which is called Josh or Rajinama probably not found in any other community or caste in India (Solanki, 2006). A person who is called *Joshi* selected by family can perform the ritual. Only married male and woman participate in rituals. Generally, it is performed in the month of *Chaitra*²³. It is very auspicious month for Devipujak community. It is a ritual when every married family member will confess all the offences he or she has committed during a year. In this ritual, *Joshi* will arrange all stuffs for *Dana* ceremony and sit inside *Madh*. There will be two other persons and among them one person will call family members inside the *Madh* one after another and second person will ask them what offences have been committed by them in whole year. A family member will confess all offences such as stealing, harming other person, having extra-marital affair etc before goddess and other people sitting there. A *Joshi* will ask goddess whether a person is speaking truth or not by spreading heap of sorghum. If number of pieces of sorghum come exactly in decided pattern, a person is found not guilty for more offences now. But he or she has been given punishment on the basis of offence committed by them (Solanki, 2006). Nanubhai shared to me that the ceremony of Rajinama, they also perform before organizing *Mandavo*. If all family members found innocent in ceremony, then only goddess will give them permission to organize *Mandavo*. He told me that it also creates problem among married couple nowadays if they express having extra-marital affair. It hurts its partner which result into quarrel among them. They believe that it is ceremony of purification in which goddess forgives them from all offences they have committed knowingly or unknowingly during a year.

4.2.4 Punishment

Devipujaks accept the punishment given by goddess for the offense or wrong doing. There are different kinds of punishment given to them. These are 25 times matchstick burns on tongue, 51 times hit by broomstick on head, 51 times round of temple, hitting by slipper and

²³ Regarded as first lunar month in the Hindu calendar and believed that Lord Brahma created the universe in this particular month.

putting stone on head. I had seen incidences of punishment during field work. A boy who had committed a mistake called his friend to give 25 match stick burn on tongue. I asked him why he is doing so and he replied that it is a form of punishment given to him by goddess for the mistake he committed. Once, *Joshi* gave punishment to Hirabhai and his wife due to their mistake. He asked them to hit broomstick 51 times on head and make 51 rounds of Rakhadada temple. The mistake was that a wife of Hirabhai had taken food at house of their relatives which was forbidden to them and not to have any kind of relation with that family member by God Rakhadada. But she committed the mistake by taking food at relative's house.

4.2.5 Madh

The worshiping place of goddess among Devipujak community is called *Madh*. It is considered very auspicious among them. There were three *Madh* of goddess in village. They worship goddess with lightening lamp and incense stick every day.

4.2.6 Bhuvo

There is a great important of goddess in life of Devipujak. They have deep faith in their Kuldevi and believe whatever happens in their life is due to influence of goddess. If something good happens to them, they will believe that it is blessing of goddess and any misfortune happens is due to wrath of goddess. They take permission first from goddess before initiating any task through Dana ceremony. The person who performs it is called *Bhuvo* among Devipujak. He is a strong devotee of goddess. He is a medium through which goddess talk to people. He is the person whose body is possessed by goddess. His body starts shivering when possessed by goddess. He will start dancing heavily with headbanging. People believe that goddess is there inside his body and they will ask questions to him. *Bhuvo* will answer their questions and people believe that it is not person but goddess is answering to them. So, *Bhuvo* is highly regarded person among them.

Usually, elder son in family becomes *Bhuvo*. There are certain rules which a person has to follow after becoming *Bhuvo*. They avoid eating outside food. They do not eat food cooked or served by woman who is going through menstrual cycle. They prefer not to see women having menstruation and not allowing her entry inside room of *Bhuvo*. *Bhuvo* does not eat food or drink water handed by lower caste. *Bhuvo* generally keeps long hair and is considered as main person to perform rituals of goddess.

4.6 Bhuvo



Source: Field Work

4.2.7 Bali

Animal sacrifice is practiced by number of sections as rituals in our society. It is very important part for worshiping many deities. There are certain festivals when hundred of animals are sacrificed on particular day, even smaller number of animals are offered to deities on most of weeks in year. It gives religious justification to sacrifice animal by offering it to deity or ancestor spirit. This practice is not considered as sin but believed as sacred act and consumed as *Prasad*²⁴ (Srinivas, 1980). Most of time goat is preferred for the sacrifice rituals

²⁴ Sacred offering of food or other items to a deity during worship.

in village. People usually keep certain number of goats earmarked for animal sacrifice ceremony (Govindrajan, 2015). Animal sacrifice also called as *Bali* which is very common among Devipujak community. Generally, they offer goat in *Bali* to their god and goddesses. Some portion of meat is offered to deity first and remaining is eaten by family members and relatives as *Prasadi*. Sometimes rooster, lamb and buffalo are also offered in rituals of animal sacrifice to deity among some sub-castes of Devipujak. They offer animal to deity with belief that they will be protected from ill-happening. There are many reasons for *Bali* such as to get cured from fever, to take new initiative, vow, accomplishment of wish or task. I had observed certain incidence of animal sacrifice during my stay in village. Once Hirabhai's daughter got fever and after some days Hirabhai himself got sick. So, they were believing that people are getting fever one after another in family due to unhappiness of God. They decided to offer Bali to God and pleaded to protect them from any misfortune.

4.2.8 Ancestor Worship

Ancestor worship is practiced in many cultures in which they worship their dead elders showing love and respect towards them and believing that they will protect them from any misfortune. Devipujak community also follows practices of ancestor worship. They believe that their existence is still around them and they bless them for good fortune. They install stone on name of deceased elders and worship them.

4.7 Ancestor Worship



Source: Field Work

4.2.9 Food Pattern

Devipujaks generally follow non-vegetarian food habit. They prefer fish, chicken and meat in non-veg items. They consider cow as holy so do not consume cow beef. Their majority of expenditure is also behind food.

4.3 Mandavo

Mandavo is regarded as one of the very auspicious occasions among Devipujak community. They believe that they can only perform *Mandavo* if goddess showers blessing on them. It is a big event in their life where there is gathering of family members and relatives, *Bhajan* (hymn) and *Dakla*²⁵ and rituals of Bali to deity. It starts during late evening and last till next day morning. They have to take permission from goddess first to perform *Mandavo*. For it, they are supposed to perform ceremony of *Rajinama* which means they have to prove themselves innocent before goddess through Dana ceremony. A *Joshi* will see Dana of each and every family member and they have to accept all offences and ill-acts before goddess. The exact pattern of Dana will not come unless they accept all offences committed. To perform this ritual, every family member has to come together even though they do not have speaking relations in normal days. They have to set aside all their differences and sit together in rituals. I had got opportunity three times to attend *Manadavo* during field work. Some of them, I attended outside the Pritampur village.

In Pritampur village, Karajibhai and his elder brother organised a *Mandavo*. I was invited by them to participated in an occasion which was started in late evening. A mandap was installed at Madh of Jogni Maa near house of Karajibhai's elder son. It was mandavo of Jogni Maa and Karajibhai himself was *Bhuvo* for it. There was gathering of family members of Karajibhai, relatives and other Devipujak from village which constituted nearly 250 to 300 people. Two separate seating arrangement was made for male and female on floor. They also called group

²⁵ It is a musical instrument and Devipujak community possess special skills to play it.

of artists for singing *Bhajan*. Some of the people were dancing in their own way during singing of *Bhajan*. Mostly, bhajans of their goddess and forefathers were sung in the event. Karajibhai who was main *Bhuvo* of occasion took bath during late evening. There were four to five people who were making him ready for event. He wore vest and *dhoti*²⁶ and was garlanded around neck. He wrapped up shawl which they call *Chandaravo*²⁷ on upper body. He applied tilak on whole forehead and then went to *Madh*. He first bow down to goddess for prayer at *Madh*.

4.3.1 Mata No Tavo

Tavo is the ceremony performed in Mandavo. They put clay pot on fire to boil oil. They make 16 *puri* for the ceremony. They put *puri* one after one in boiling oil till one of the puris make clockwise round. If one *puri* makes clockwise round, they believe that goddess has blessed them and eaten the food offered to goddess. There are people who sit in round near Tava. The main *Bhuvo* perform the ceremony while other *Bhuvos* and people support him. Surprisingly, they take out *puri* from boiling oil through their bare hands. They believe that they will not get hurt dipping hand inside boiling oil due to blessing of goddess. *Bhuvo* once possessed by goddess inside his body during ceremony will put his both the hands inside boiling oil and apply it on his head and body. He lifts hot clay pot and tries to drink boiling oil from it. But other people will catch him and not allowing to do so.

²⁶ A loose piece of clothing wrapped around the lower half of the body worn by men in India.

²⁷ A textile painting that is hand-block-printed and hand-painted by the Devipujak community and used during rituals of goddess.

4.8 Mata No Tavo



Source: Field Work

4.3.2 Bhuvo and Possession of Goddess

During the ceremony, the main *Bhuvo* and other *Bhuv*as possessed by goddess inside their body. The group of artists sing songs of goddess and praise deeds of forefathers of family through story. The goddess comes inside body of *Bhuva* and they start dancing with headbanging. People also ask them questions and pray for peace and prosperity of their community. *Bhuvo* will bless them for good fortune and advise them to live in brotherhood.

4.3.3 Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is offered to goddess in *Mandavo* ceremony. It is generally performed during late night. A *Bhuvo* will drink four cups of blood from the goat while giving *Bali*. This ritual may be different in region wise. Some of them do not drink blood but only apply tilak of blood on forehead during *Bali*. Before performing *Bali*, they apply oil and *Kumkum*

on back of goat. If goat shake its body, then only they take it for *Bali*. Once goat shakes its body, they believe that goddess has given them permission for *Bali* now. If goat does not shake body, they will believe that goddess has not accepted it for sacrifice. After sacrifice, they first offer it to goddess. There was total 9 goat sacrificed in Mandavo at Pritampur village. Eight goats were offered to goddess and one to Rakhadada.

4.3.4 Prasad

On next morning, meat is cooked and served along with *chappati* and rice to the people as Prasad. They feel themselves lucky to eat Prasad of goddess. Prasad is cooked by group of women.

4.3.5 Rituals in Cemetery

Karajibhai told me that they have to go cemetery and perform some rituals there when they organise *Mandavo*. *Bhuvo* will go there and perform puja inside cemetery. They leave some sweets there for spirit.

4.3.6 Expenses

It is very precious moment in life of Devipujak to organise *Mandavo*. But it has been very expensive nowadays to organise such big event. The family members of Karajibhai are working as agriculture labour in village or some of them have migrated to city for earning. Their socio-economic condition was also not good. He told me that they had spent approximately 1, 20.000/- rupees during *Mandavo* which they have borrowed from local money lender at high interest rate of three percent per month. It takes many years for them to repay borrowed money with such high interest rate.

4.3.7 Photography and Videography

Nowadays, many of families who organise *Mandavo* call professional photographer or videographer to record the event. I had carried camera with me when attended *Mandavo* at Pritampur. I was allowed to capture photographs and video of the event except actual recording animal sacrifice ritual which I did not take any photo or video. I also shared photos and video to Karajibhai who organised the event.

4.3.8 Daklu

Daklu is an instrument like *Damaru* in shape which is very famous among Devipujak community. It is played with small stick. They play it to please the goddess. It is intertwined with life of Devipujak. It is played with song to pray goddess so that goddess can take possession of Bhuva's body. Devipujak community is having special skill to play this musical instrument.

4.4 Festival Celebration

Festivals are occasions where people come together and celebrate their happiness which gives meaning and joy to their life. There are lots of festivals celebrated by different people in our country. Devipujaks also celebrate many Hindu festivals with joy and enthusiasm.

4.4.1 Dasha Maa Festival

Dasha Maa festival is celebrated by Devipujaks in village. They keep idol of Dasha Maa in their homes and worship goddess for ten days. During these days, the family members avoid

eating non-veg and restrain themselves to consume liquor also. There were many families among them who were celebrating Dasha Maa festival in village.

4.4.2 Navratri

Navratri is a festival of nine days celebrated to worship goddess Durga. It is celebrated two times in a year first in month of Chaitra (March/April) and second Ashvin (September/October). They play *garaba* during month of Ashvin in Navratri festival.

4.4.3 Gauri Vrat

The unmarried women observe fast for five days and worship goddess Parvati with wish to get ideal husband during Gauri Vrat. They do not consume salt during those days. The girls do not sleep whole night and pass their time with their friends in group or family members on last day of festival.

4.5 Marriage

Marriage is considered essential foundation of social organization and basis of some significant legal right and obligations. Since time of Rig Veda, marriage is regarded with great importance in society. After getting married, husband and wife are expected to fulfil their traditional duties as a couple and work towards material and spiritual well-beings of each other, family members and society. There is no uniformity found in rituals, rites, customs and ceremonies of marriage which varies from region to region, caste, community and religions (Chandrika, 1996). Like other communities, marriage is believed as sacred among Devipujak community. The community is having its own rituals in marriage ceremony.

4.5.1 Selection of Partner

In previous time, parents of both girl and boy were fixing the marriage. In most of the cases, bride and groom were seeing each other after marriage ceremony. Nowadays, marriage is primarily fixed by parents but boy and girl get chance to see each other before marriage. The marriage proposal is first initiated by boy's family and they approach to family of girl. The parents of boy will go to house of girl. They will talk with girl's family members regarding fixing of marriage. There are certain criteria in selecting of life-partner like socio-economic status, appearance, education, earning and so on. If family members of a girl want to see socio-economic condition of boy, they can go to his house for it. They do not believe in matching horoscope of bride and groom before fixing marriage.

4.5.2 Permission from Goddess

Devipujak takes permission from goddess before initiating new task which is also same in case of marriage. Both families of girl and boy primary agree to fix marriage, then family members of boy will take permission from goddess and ask whether they can go further for engagement or not. If goddess gives permission in Dana ceremony, they will go and fix the engagement.

4.5.3 Engagement

The family members of groom will come to house of bride to fix engagement. In engagement ceremony, coconut, *Kumkum* and one rupee coin are given to bride. During this time, bride price and *Dhabado*²⁸ are decided between two families. Both the families sit and also decide

²⁸An amount given by groom's family to the family of bride at the time of marriage.

when to take marriage like withing six months, a year or two. If any discord happened between families, they want to break the engagement which can be done by emptying water from *Kalash* (metal pot).

4.5.4 Fixing Marriage Date

The family members of bride will go to Brahmin to fix date of marriage. After Brahmin suggest them a date, family members of bride will go to groom's house to inform them about the date of marriage. They carry clothes, jaggery and ghee along with them. They will make groom sit on Bajot (square wooden stool) and make five rounds around him. They will give things carried with them to groom in hand along with note mentioned with date of marriage. The note will be taken up by mother of groom and marriage date is fixed in such a way. The guests are served ghee and jaggery. They will be offered feast after the ceremony.

4.5.5 Marriage Age

The marriage of a male usually takes places when he is 20 to 25 years of age and for female when she is between 18 to 20 years of age. Though, the participants were answering that marriage of boy happens at age of 21 year and for girl at age of 18 year due to awareness of laws but there were incidences where female was getting marriage at the age of 16 or 17 years and boy got married before 21 years of age.

4.5.6 Ganesh Sthapana

The rituals of marriage start with prayer of Lord Ganesha. It starts with either 2, 3 or 5 days before marriage. A picture of Lord Ganesha is drawn on wall in one corner of house. The girl and boy sit in puja at their home in presence of family members. Lord Ganesha is worshipped first before starting an auspicious function.

4.5.7 Pithi Ceremony

In Hindu marriage ceremony of *Pithi* applying is performed. This ceremony is also performed in marriage of Devipujak community. In the ceremony, wet turmeric on body of both bride and groom are applied by family members and relatives. This ceremony takes places separately at house of bride and groom. A bride cannot take bath till turmeric is removed on day of marriage.

4.5.8 Groom Procession

On the day of marriage, groom along with his family members and relatives proceeds towards house of bride. In earlier times, groom procession was reaching to bride's home on bullock cart as marriages were happening in nearby areas. Nowadays, they reach to bride's house through bus or car. Groom wears new clothes like Sherwani, Safa on head and *Mojadi* on that day. On arrival of groom and its members, the family of bride welcome them which is known as *Vadhamani*. The groom does not enter house of bride before ceremony of marriage. So, groom and its members are given place to stay at relative's house.

4.5.9 Hastmelap

The bride gets ready by wearing Saree which is known as *Panetar*. It is given to bride by groom's family. Both bride and groom come to wedding *chori*²⁹ and ceremony of marriage gets start. They both sit on wedding chairs which are kept side by side. Both bride and groom exchange garland to each other. The couple are tied with cloth as symbol of commitment. Then fire is set and bride and groom make four rounds of it which is called *Mangal Fera*. In

²⁹ A decorated place where bride and groom sit together and marriage rituals are performed.

first three round groom is ahead and wife is behind him. In last fourth round, bride is ahead and groom is behind. While taking round of fire, both bride and groom stop at middle place, put down their *mojadi* or chappal and touch their feet to one small earthen pot which is known as *Khetarapal* (*snake god*). The earthen port is filled with rice, *Kumkum*, coconut and one rupee coin. They do this ritual believing that both bride and groom will be protected from snake harm. After *Mangal Fera*, the elders bless the couple and give them cash in hand known as *Hathgana*. The ceremony of marriage is performed by maternal-uncle of bride and not by Brahmin priest in Devipujak community. He does not recite *Shlokas* in ceremony. He is offered *Dakshina*³⁰ for his work at the end of ceremony.

4.5.10 Jamanvar

In occasion of wedding, food is served to family members and relatives. It includes roti or puri, sabaji, rice, dal, *farsan* and sweet. The family of bride make arrangement of food for the guests and relatives. This arrangement is made at open space near house of bride.

4.5.11 Padale Besavu

There is ceremony which is called *Padale Besavu* or *Rangakhan* after marriage among Devipujak community. Both the parties sit opposite to each other in this ritual. The groom is offered milk by brother of bride when he sits there. Big dish is kept in centre of both the parties. Among Devipujak community, there is not system of dowry but *Kariyavar* (bride-price). In bride-price, a family of groom gives money to bride's family. I had participated in this ceremony when attended two marriages of girls during my stay in village. There are two community rules governing this ritual among them; one is *Juno Dharo* (Old rule) and *Navi Chopadino Dharo* (New Book Rule). First, the decided amount of 450/- rupees was put inside dish by father of groom as bride price. *Dhabado* which includes other expenditure such as gold, decoration, clothes are also given by family of groom. Earlier, this amount was not very

³⁰ It is a money offered for their work of performing rituals.

high and ranging between two thousand to five thousand. But it has reached to lakhs nowadays. The two marriages I attended during field work observed that lakhs of rupees were given by family of groom to bride's family. In one marriage Rs. 1,50,000/- was given while Rs. 2,21,000/- rupees were given to family of bride by groom's family in another marriage as *Dhabado*. Additionally, rupees 35/- was given as *Nived* to Kuldevi *Bechari Maa*. They also give money for the *Dholi* who play dhol during marriage ceremony. He generally belongs to schedule caste in village. If more people are coming in groom process than decided, the extra money also given to bride's father for the additional people. At the end of ceremony, they sweeten mouth of each other with sugar as a symbol of happiness.

Dhabado is not fixed amount among Devipujak but family give according to their economic condition. Marriage can also happen with less expenditure like from Rs. 50,000 to 80,000/-. Some of the participants said that marriages are becoming expensive nowadays and cost nearly lakhs in their community which is difficult for them to meet the expenditure of it. Ajay who was around 25 years old got married before four to five years. He told me that his marriage cost was Rs. 50,000/- and he borrowed whole amount from local money lender at interest rate of 2.5 percent per month. He pays Rs. 15,000/- interest per year and paid total Rs. 60,000/- as interest only in last four years which was more than his principal amount. But his principal amount Rs.50,000/- is still there to be paid. Many of them are daily wage earner so it becomes difficult for them to repay borrowed money. There were examples of some boys who were not able to get married because they were not having enough money to give as bride-price. They believed that limit of bride-price or *Dhabado* should be set which will be beneficial to many families who are living with very low economic conditions. Ghelabhai around 30 years of age was unmarried. He said that there is an expenditure of lakhs in rupees to get married and his conditions is very poor. He is not able to give bride price and so he is not getting any girl for marriage.

4.9 Rituals of Padale Besavu



Source: Field Work

4.5.12 Juno Dharo and Navi Chopadi No Dharo

The term *Juno Dharo* means old rule and *Navi Chopadi No Dharo* means New Book Rule which are decided by community for marriage. In *Juno Dharo* system, the amount of bride price and other wedding expenditure are not pre-decided by families of both bride and groom. The amount of bride price can range from mere thousand to lakhs. The amount of each expenditure such as food, clothes, gold, Mandap decoration made by bride's family is given separately at the time of *Rangkhan* ceremony. At the time of divorce suppose happens, half of the given amount has to be returned to groom's family by family of bride.

In system of *Navi Chopadi No Dharo*, the amount Rs. 450/- is fixed as bride-price which should be given to bride's family by groom family. An amount of other expenditures like clothes, Mandap decoration etc are decided by both the families at the time of engagement which is called *Dhabado* in their local language. It can vary from family to family according to their economic condition. Some of the families spend lakhs while other spends in thousands. There are many factors such as economic conditions, appearance of girl, education

status while deciding *Dhabado*. This system is followed since long time in community. Many of them follow *Navi Chopadi No Dharo* while getting married to their sons and daughters. At the time of divorce, only amount of bride-price Rs. 450/- are returned by bride's family to groom's family without any additional amount.

4.5.13 Vidaai

It is the last ceremony of marriage after completion of all other rituals. The bride will leave her parental house and go to her in-law's house along with groom and guests. It is responsibility of groom and his family to take care of bride now onwards.

4.5.14 Tedavu

After some days of marriage, family members of bride will go to her in-law's house and will take permission to take bride at her parental home for some days which is known as *Tedavu*. A bride will stay at her parental home for couple of days. After it, family members of her in-laws will come to bring her back.

4.6 Divorce

Family, marriage and divorce are considered interconnected with religious rights in Indian society. Majority of us believe that marriage is not merely a ritual, but sacred part of life (Thadathil, & Sriram, 2020). In marriage, two people give commitment to each other to be with them and share responsibility towards each other. In recent time, there are many cases of disharmony happening between couples. The rift is leading to separation of two people in our society. The incidences of divorce are few among Devipujak society but the recent changes have also impacted the community. The elders usually make all efforts to save marriage life of couple. If no chances of improvement are there, they opt divorce as a last option. In recent

times, the cases of divorce are governed by their own institution Social Panch³¹. Very few takes path of court in case of divorce. The Social Panch will listen arguments of both families and give their judgement whether to save marriage or go for separation. The decision of Social Panch is normally accepted by both the parties. There are multiples reasons leading to divorce in community such as quarrel between couple, extra-marital affairs, drinking habits, rift between families and so on. Arvindbhai had second marriage and reason between divorce with first wife was not differences between couple; but a relative of Arvindbhai who played role to fix marriage had quarrel with father-in-law of Arvindbhai which resulted in divorce between couple. Sometimes, divorce cases also happen due to unfriendly relation between families not couple.

4.7 Remarriage

A person can go for remarriage in case of divorce or death of partner. Both male and female can opt remarriage. A custody of children remains with mother if she does not get remarried in case of separation. If she goes for remarriage, her husband or his family members can ask for custody of children. A women will not prefer remarriage if her children have grown up in age. There were some cases of remarried couples in village. Khambhubhai was remarried because of death of his first wife. Both the parents of Ajay had second marriage.

4.8 Child Birth and Name Ceremony

Child birth is a day of happiness for every family which is same with Devipujak community also. Among them, father or any other family members generally do not see and touch child except mother till forty days. They observe this period as polluting. Nowadays, they touch baby boy after fifteen to twenty days but avoid touching baby girl at least for forty days. The naming ceremony takes place on sixth day after birth. A child is named by *Foi* who is father's sister.

³¹ It is a traditional way of delivering justice found in India. A group of elders comes together to solve issue arising in community between people.

4.9 Death

Death is hard reality of life but it is also saddest part of human life. There are certain rituals followed at time of death which may have variation in caste, religion and region. In Devipujak community, they bury the dead person except two families in village who were following rituals of cremation in Pritampur village. The family members cry at the time of death. They follow mourn for twelve days. There was separate burial ground for Devipujak in village. It was a time of Navratri festival and there was death of young married women in community. She was suffering from fever for some days and had epilepsy all of a sudden. She died at very young age leaving her two children behind. The family members also took her hospital but she could not be saved. I went to meet family members along with Arvindbhai who was belonging to Devipujak community. The mother-in-law was crying with deep grief. The whole community suspended celebration of Navratri festival due to death of community member as mourning symbol. They follow ritual of '*Pani Pavu*'³² on 11th day for death of male and 12th day for death of female. On this day, their relatives visit the house of dead person for consoling them. During my field work, I had attended rituals of *Pani Pavu* of Vajabhai's relative. We went to village which was 6 to 7 kilometres away from Pritampur. They keep photo of dead person and keep axe near its photos. There are earthen pots filled with water. The relatives come and greet family members of deceased. Male relatives meet male members while female meets female. Velabhai tied towel on head to deceased's brother and gave him Rs. 50/-. They keep separate notebook to write down name of relatives giving money. The relatives will take one glass of water from earthen pot and pour on space near photos of deceased. They believe that the water is reaching to deceased person. The relatives are offered food on the day of this ritual. If deceased is young, elder relatives will not eat food at its home.

³² Offering water to dead person among Devipujak community.

4.10 Summary

The place of goddess is very important in life of Devipujak. It plays central role in every aspect of their life. They strongly believe in their rituals to worship deities. They always take permission from their goddess before initiating any task in their life. Their *Kuldevi* was Bechari Maa, but they also worship Meldi Maa, Khodiyar Maa, Dagai Maa, Shitala Maa, Jogni Maa, Rakhadada, Hadak Maa, Jogni Maa, Shitala Maa, Motijardada, Nimoniadada, Kal Bhairav, Baliya Dev and Charmadia Dada. Dana ceremony is the way they community with goddess. A *Joshi* is the person who perform Dana ceremony in Devipujak community. The Rajinama is very unique ritual found among them. They confess whatever mistakes or prohibited acts they have committed throughout the year and plead goddess to forgive them for their wrong deeds. Unless and until they do not confess, they are not forgiven by goddess. They also accept the punishment by goddess for wrong doings. They call the worshipping place of goddess as *Madh. Bhuvo* is a person who is highly regarded in community. He is the one who is possessed by goddess inside his body. His words are also accepted by people when his body is possessed by goddess. There are certain rules that a person has to follow when he becomes a *Bhuvo*. He does not eat food cooked by mensurating women and prefer not have close contact with them. They also avoid outside food and offerings by lower caste people. He keeps long hair and he is the main person to perform all rituals of goddess.

The Devipujak community practices rituals of animal sacrifice and they offer animal to their deities. They consider *Mandavo* ceremony as an auspicious occasion in their life. They also celebrate various festivals such as Navratri, Dasha Maa, Gauri Vrat etc. The marriage is considered as sacred occasion among the community. The rituals of marriage are performed by maternal uncle in Devipujak community. They do not have custom of dowry but bride price. Nowadays the cases of divorce are happening in the community but they make all efforts to save marriage as possibly. Both male and female can opt remarriage in case of divorce or death of one partner. They do not have much restriction on remarriage of person. Death is very hard reality in life and very difficult to bear loss of loved ones. The family members cry at the time of death and follow mourn for twelve days. They were practicing burial of dead body except two families who were putting dead body on fire. They follow rituals of '*Pani Pavu*' on 11th day for death of male and 12th day for death for female.