

**Culture, Identity and Livelihood: An Ethnographic Study of  
Devipujak Community of Gujarat**

**A Synopsis submitted to  
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work**

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**Submission Date: 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2023**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

India being a country of democratic values and diversity promotes principles of equality, fraternity and liberty. Indian Constitution guarantees dignity, freedom and equity to all sections of society including tribal, schedule caste, women and other backward classes (OBC). It is important to take into consideration that certain communities like Nomadic and Denotified Tribes (NT-DNTs) are still lagging behind in inclusive society. No universal classification of these groups has been made and they are included into different social categories in different states. Criminal stigma labeled on them by British government had pushed them far away from developmental purview and still these groups are living marginalized and backward life.

Some of the scholars noted that number of these communities in Northern India fought against British in 1857 freedom struggle. The local kings were involving these groups either directly to fight against British or indirectly to assist their armies against colonial force. They were working as informants to freedom fighters, assisting them with food, cash and weapons (Devi, 1992; Radhakrishna, 2001; Kannan, 2007). As a result, the British government was considering them threat to their rule and declared these communities as born criminals under Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871. It did not only curtail their freedom but led them away from mainstream society (Dandekar, 2009). Some of these communities belonging to small princely states were thrown out of power and listed under criminal tribes. The purpose was to abolish their identity so it will not challenge the British administration at local level in future (Yang, 1985). The British officials were claiming that they wanted to reform these groups as their main occupations was to commit crime but the real intention was to suppress them one or another way. The CTA totally ruined life of these communities. Not only restrictions were imposed on them but they came under purview of suspicion and whenever any theft was committed, they were first in circle of doubt and forced to accept crime which in reality not committed by them. The police officials and even people in society are having very prejudicial mindset toward these groups. It is estimated that there are around 198 Denotified and 313 Nomadic communities numbering nearly 60 million in country (Resist Initiative International, 2007, p.2). Among them, 28 Nomadic and 12

Denotified tribes are found in Gujarat. Due to wondering nature, they have always been looked upon with suspicion and remain away from associating with other communities in society at large.

### **1.1 Nomadism**

The origin of the word 'nomad' is derived from the Greek word *nemein* means 'to pasture'. Nomads are defined as “people that travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for their animals and have no permanent home” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 1205). It includes broad category from hunter gatherer to other moving groups for earning livelihood. Their movement is organized with cyclical and seasonal pattern for survival with purpose. With nomadic nature, they have well preserved their cultural and social history (Gilbert, 2014).

### **1.2 Denotified Tribes**

The CTA was first enacted in year 1871 which declared certain communities as born criminals. The act imposed many restrictions on movement of these groups and it had strict provisions to mark their attendance in nearby police station at the end of a day. The act defines Criminal Tribes as: “any tribe, gang or class of persons addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences” (Simhadri, 1991, p. 121). With enactment of the act, entire communities were declared as born criminals whether they had actual committed crime or not. Earlier the act was confined to Northern India but undergone several amendments in year 1897, 1911, 1923 and 1924. The Criminal Tribes Act, 1924 remained in force till it was repealed in 1952, hence these groups came to be known as Denotified tribes.

### **1.3 Historical Perspective of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes**

Asia, Africa, Europe and Northern America are considered home to nomadic people. During post-pastoral period, sedentism became preferred way of life and nomadism came into conflict

with sedentary people. With the evolution of nation-state, industrialization and globalization, nomadic nature of life came under threat. The nomadic groups were once proud and service provider in the society who later reduced to one of the most marginalized and excluded sections due to historical injustice committed to them during colonial as well as post-colonial time. It is necessary to analyze historical context to understand situation of nomadic groups. In economics, principles of utilitarian consider people based on their utility (Japhet et al., 2016). The practice of isolating people who were having less utility was followed during sixteenth-century in Europe. The poor, lepers and person with unsound mind were eliminated from the mainstream society by keeping them isolated and sent out to remote lands (Foucault, 1988).

Some of the theories such as biological theory based on Francis Galton's eugenics theory and criminological theory of Cesare Lombroso considered intelligence and criminality have hereditary traits respectively (Galton, 1869 & Lombroso, 1864). Based on these theoretical understanding, efforts were made to possibly re-engineering society with biological and sociological intervention. These assumptions resulted into passing of Habitual Criminal Act, 1869 in England. It empowered police officers to identify, supervise and arrest 'habitual criminals' which equated them with criminal identity leading to stigmatization of these people in society (Radzinowicz & Hood, 1990; Wiener, 1994; Pavlich, 2010). The Criminal Tribes Act was enacted in British India immediately after two years of Habitual Criminal Act passed in England. The British prepared list of nomadic communities to identify and control their movements and compelled them for settled life (Japhet et al., 2016). The marginalization of these various groups was started with reign of power by British in the year 1858. The colonial legislations replaced the native customary laws which led to dissolution of traditional norms of Indian society. Over the period, nomadic communities were deprived of their traditional rights on land, forest and animals due to enactment of various legislations. Before nineteenth century, the different nomadic communities of India played very important role to render necessary services to far away villages which were otherwise inaccessible in normal circumstances. Though they were excluded by caste, they had very special place to provide distinct services like entertainment, sharpening knives in society.

#### **1.4 The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**

The British government enacted the Criminal Tribes Act in the year 1871 with aim to gain control over rebellion groups who protested against British annexation in India. With effect of the act, many nomadic groups were declared as born criminals and harsh provisions were imposed on them. The act gave much power to law enforcement officials regarding implementing the act including convictions and imprisonment of such communities without trials. Those who were enlisted under the act, it was mandatory for them to register themselves in nearby police station which had severely affected their movement. The rehabilitation centers were established on the name of reformation of these communities where they were chained and shackled with high wall surrounding in reality. If any person from criminal tribe committed same offence second time under first schedule of Indian Penal Code (IPC), he was imprisoned for seven to ten years. The sentence was deportation for life convicted third time of same offence where as it was only three to six months or no sentence for people belonging to non-criminal groups of committing such offences. The law was discriminatory for criminal and non-criminal communities (Sher, 1965).

#### **1.5 Habitual Offender Act, 1952**

After five year of independence, Habitual Offender Act was passed in the year 1952 repealing the Criminal Tribes Act. Hence, listed communities were declared as Denotified. However, stigma remained same toward nomadic communities and still they have not been incorporated into mainstream society. They are even today perceived as outcast. Though Habitual Offender Act, 1952 does not consider whole communities as criminal but individuals belonging to these groups still looked upon as criminals. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at its meeting held in the year 2000 recommended repealing of the Habitual Offenders Act (Devy, 2006). It emphasized to monitor atrocities against donotified groups, sensitization of police and state machineries toward them.

## **1.6 Different Committees on Denotified and Nomadic Communities**

There has been various committees and commissions formed to understand situation of criminal tribes. They have given various recommendations for reform and welfare of these groups; but it has not resulted to create sustainable impact to improve life of nomadic and denotified communities. Few development initiatives have reached to these communities.

### **1.6.1 The Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee, 1947**

The Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee, 1947 was constituted in United Province. It reported that nomadic communities will continue criminal activities till they get settled down and recommended making certain provisions under the law to settle them and need to teach them living an honest life against bad practices like idleness, prostitution and criminal tendencies due to their socio-economic conditions.

### **1.6.2 Ayyangar Committee**

The committee was set up under chairmanship of Mr. Ananthsayanam Ayyangar in year 1949. It conducted a detailed study on working of CTA and submitted its report in 1950. The report suggested repealing act with valid reasons. It emphasized to allocate enough funds for welfare of these communities and recommended Central government should provide fund not exceeding 50 per cent to State government for welfare programs of criminal tribes for initial ten years. The recommendations were accepted by Central government and Criminal Tribes Act was repealed with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1952 by enacting Habitual Offender Act to keep control on individuals who commit crimes rather than criminalizing whole communities.

### **1.6.3 Kalelkar Commission**

The first Backward Class Commission was appointed under chairmanship of Mr. Kakasaheb Kalelkar in year 1953. Its report suggested that criminal tribes should not be called 'Tribes' nor to be called as 'Criminal' or 'Ex-Criminal' and suggested to use word 'Denotified Communities' for them. For betterment of these communities, the commission suggested to distribute them in small groups in towns and villages where they will make contacts with other people which will help them to assimilate in mainstream society.

### **1.6.4 Lokur Committee**

The Lokur Committee was formed under chairmanship of B.N. Lokur as an advisory committee for revision of list of Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) in the year 1965. The nomadic and denotified groups were not divided universally as one community was listed under category Schedule Tribe in one state where as same community was included under list of either other backward class (OBC) or SC in another state. The committee was following strict guidelines for revision of ST and SC list but made certain favourable recommendations for nomadic and denotified groups. It suggested creating distinct category separate from ST, SC and OBC for nomadic and denotified tribes and need to make suitable measures for their development.

### **1.6.5 Justice Venkatachaliah Commission**

In the year 2002, National Commission to Review Working of the Constitution was constituted under chairmanship of Justice M N Venkatachaliah. The report made special recommendations for denotified communities and observed that they have been wrongly stigmatized as habitual criminals and required special focus by government as well as society in general.

### **1.6.6 National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes**

Government of India constituted two National Commissions for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes; one under chairmanship of Balkrishna Renke in year 2008 while second under chairmanship of Bhiku Ramji Idate in year 2015. The major recommendations by these commissions were separate welfare program specially targeting them, members of these communities to be appointed at National and State Human Rights Commission to prevent atrocities against them, making efforts for their inclusion into mainstream society, protecting them under Atrocities legislations and Constitutional amendment to create separate category for nomadic and denotified groups.

### **1.7 Devipujak Community**

Devipujak community is listed as Other Backward Class (OBC) in Gujarat. Devipujaks are scattered in most parts of the state. They were listed as born criminals under Criminal Tribes Act and this draconian law ruined normal life of community. They have been victim of historical injustice. The act had harsh provisions like members of these groups were compelled to register themselves at local police station which had badly affected their nomadic way of life. The CTA was replaced by enacting Habitual Offender Act, 1952 officially declaring them denotified. Though they were decriminalized under act, the stigma remains same and they continue to be perceived as socially outcast. Society at larger considers these groups as criminals and many of them are living in disgraceful condition even today. Devipujaks are divided into many sub-groups like Datania, Gamecha, Patni, Vedva and others. Government of Gujarat issued resolution in year 2001 to replace the word Vaghri with Devipujak because it was used very disrespectfully toward these people in society to show them inferior.

## **1.8 Rationale**

After seven decades of independence, Nomadic and Denotified Tribes are living very miserable life. The development measures are still very far from them and incidences of human rights violation become everyday part of their life. These communities are scattered in small groups and living away from mainstream society. Several committees and commissions were formed and many recommendations were given which hardly resulted for any sustainable development of communities. The stigma of criminal identity is still attached with these groups and many have lost their traditional livelihood due to economic changes occurred in last two decades. They have remained poor, marginalized and powerless since ages. Apart from it, they do not have strong political representation from community members. To overcome these hurdles, there is strong need to make sincere and concrete efforts for development of these communities.

Most of the existing literatures have concentrated on historical injustice, criminalization of these groups under umbrella term criminal tribes; and very few studies have been conducted on individual communities. Though they have many similarities in aspects of poverty, marginalization and atrocities but each community is having its unique culture, occupation, custom and way of living which need to be understood in context of particular community. The present study focuses on Devipujak community to understand ground reality of community covering their social history, culture, socio-economic conditions, their livelihood and stigma. It will help to understand Devipujak community with their views towards social reality. The findings of the study can be useful to plan welfare measures for community and future intervention for their development.

## Chapter 2

### Research Methodology

I know about Devipujak people since my childhood. They used to visit our home to collect old clothes in exchange of new utensils. Earlier, they were giving utensils of aluminum but later they started giving plastic utensils. I used to wonder why they were not taking money for the things giving to us. My family was having very cordial relations with them and they were visiting us four to five times in a year. Initially, I was not aware about the concept of nomadic, criminal or denotified tribes. I was pursuing Master of Social Work at Mumbai and had sometimes seen Devipujaks from my town at Mumbai railway station. As Mumbai was very crowded and people used to be in hurry so I never got a chance to interact with them. Females were also seen at Mumbai railway station with cloth bundle on their head. I was not aware that they were coming for selling old clothes collected by them in big markets like *Chor Bazar* situated at Grant road, Mumbai. Devipujaks were involved in occupations such as selling vegetables, collecting scarps in my home town. I had also observed that some people were not allowing them to sit nearby their houses to sell vegetables. Though I had known about Devipujak community since my childhood, seen their poor conditions, hardship; but I was not having much knowledge about historical injustice done to them. While studying in Master of Social Work course, I became aware about the problems of nomadic and denotified communities.

In the beginning, I had thought to do study on nomadic and denotified tribes but was not specific to conduct on which particular tribe. I had also seen other nomadic communities like Madari, Nat who used to come to my home-town for entertaining people but not very much knowing about their situations. Devipujak was the community that I had observed closely though not having detailed understanding of their situation in terms of discrimination they face, historical injustice, their traditions and so on. I started searching literature on them and referred various articles, reports and books which helped me to understand the concept of nomadic and denotified tribes. I got information about Criminal Tribes Act, settlements for criminal tribes by British, criminal identity, discrimination, torture and poverty. I was somehow aware about the conditions of Devipujak community which encouraged me to know about them, to understand injustice

suffered by them, their culture and identity. Based on studying existing literature and my own experience, I formulated research questions which led me to conduct an ethnographic study on Devipujak community. The research questions are:

1. What is social history of Devipujak community?
2. What were traditional occupations of Devipujak community and how changes have occurred in their traditional occupations over the period of time?
3. What is present socio-economic condition of Devipujaks?
4. How social organization influences life of Devipujak community?
5. What is identity of the Devipujak community for self and views for other communities as well as the perspectives of other communities towards them?

To get the answer of these questions, the specific objectives were formulated to gain deeper understanding about the community.

## **2.1 Objectives**

- To study social history and cultural of Devipujak community
- To study their traditional livelihood, its changing pattern and adoption of new occupations
- To study migration and its reasons among Devipujak community
- To study role of Caste Council and its influence on Devipujak community
- To study identity of Devipujak community from its own perspective, views towards other communities and views of other communities towards Devipujaks

## **2.2 Research Paradigm**

Qualitative research is “a set of interpretive practices and no single methodology privileges over any other” (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, p.8). It does not belong to any particular disciplines and

many disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology adopt this method in research. Nomadic and Denotified communities having certain problems in common; but there are many differences between these groups in terms of their culture, identity and livelihood. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research study are based on *Subjective Constructionist Interpretivist* approach. An ontological assumption of research is derived from what the reality is. The perceptions of people towards reality are based on their own experience and understanding. The research study is focusing to understand reality of Devipujak people considering their views and perception. The epistemological foundation of research is how to understand reality. The understanding of reality is different for different people and considering it, an epistemological assumption of research is based on interpretive approach to know the situation of Devipujak community with their experiences. To understand subjective reality, an ethnographic method was adopted to know meaning and function of human action particularly with Devipujak community.

### **2.3 Searching for Field Site**

Searching and deciding field site for ethnographic study is not less difficult than conducting it. It is very important to select suitable village considering objectives of the study. I was not having very close contact with Devipujak community and was not much aware about their culture, social organizations, and historical aspects in detail so it was very difficult for me from where to start to understand the community. One of my friends Jatin was working as a Physiotherapist at Community Health Center (CHC) in Saurashtra region and he had colleague named Maheshbhai who was belonging to Devipujak community and working in 108 Ambulance as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). My friend informed him that I am doing a doctoral study on Devipujak community. He made my telephonic talk with Maheshbhai and he assured me to provide all necessary support for this work. I met him in person and had long discussion about my research. I gained quit good information about Devipujak community from him especially about Saurashtra region which enhanced my understanding for the community. After couple of months, I started pilot visit to different villages where there were settlements of Devipujak population. I got list of Booth Level Officer (BLO) with their mobile number from Block office.

I contacted them and they helped me to make my initial contact with Devipujak people. A BLO is having close contact with people in their booth areas so it helped me to contact them in the beginning. I roamed around twenty-two villages and was meeting Devipujak people there. Maheshbhai accompanied me at three villages and he was busy with his job so was not able to be with me every time. I was sharing information with them about my research and was also observing which village will be suitable field site keeping in mind objectives of the study. I had decided certain criteria like migration, different caste groups, occupations, practicing cultural rituals for selecting the field site. Pritampur village was finally decided as a field site which was fulfilling broad criteria of research.

## **2.4 Entering the Village**

In the beginning, a BLO of Pritampur village helped me to get access of Magabhai who was resident of village. He was having contract of Mid-Day Meal in the school. I told him about my research and he agreed to extend his support. Magabhai asked me to meet him after some days because he was busy in election campaign. After a week, I met him and he sent his younger brother along with me to make my contact with Devipujaks in village. It was an evening time and we both went to the settlement of Devipujaks which was situated at periphery of a village. We reached there and saw that some of them were playing cards in group. They stopped it when we reached near them. Magabhai's brother gave my introduction to them and then I shared purpose of my visit. People did not understand what I was telling them that I am pursuing a Ph.D and would like to conduct a research study on them. I told them in simple way that I would like to write a book on you so I need some information from you. I did not get much response in first meeting and they told me to come after some days. Maheshbhai's maternal-uncle Kharmubhai was staying in village. After some days, Maheshbhai and I went to meet him at his house. Maheshbhai told him about my study; but he said that I will not get cooperation from other people in community. Kharmubhai told me that he will make my contact with people but they may not provide you right information. Kharmubhai told about my research to people in community and asked them to meet in group after two days for discussion. It was an evening time and we both went to meet people but only ten to fifteen of them gathered for discussion. We

had discussion about my study and purpose for staying here. I thought that it will help me to gain access in community easily but it was not so. Even they had known about me but they were not responding well. I felt that it would be good to meet every member personally which can help me to build a rapport with them. I started contacting them one by one after some days which helped me to gain access to people in Devipujak community.

## **2.5 Establishing Rapport and Data Collection**

Initially almost for two months, I was not getting responses from people. I observed that caste is considered an important factor in rural areas to build relations with people. People used to ask me very first question which caste I belong during initial meetings. I used to say them that I am belonging to Sindhi community and they were getting confused between Sindhi and Sandhi. Sandhi is another Denotified tribe of Gujarat. I was then clarifying difference between Sindhi and Sandhi to them by giving example of those people engaged in business at places like Naroda in Ahmedabad and Ulhasnagar near Mumbai. Another question they were asking me whether I am above or lower to them in social order. Devipujaks consider themselves superior to Schedule Caste and does not dine with them. I had to say them with unwillingness that I belong to higher caste business community. It was not making them inferior but they were happy that I belong to higher caste. I got one house on rent in village which was belonging to Schedule Caste. People later came to know that I am staying at house of Schedule Caste so they started ignoring me and not behaving with me well. They keep distance from SC and consider them inferior. I talked about this problem to my Research Guide and other Research Expert; both of them advised me to change my resident because I was there as a researcher so having strong rapport with community people is required. I got another house in village which was belonging to Patel community. During initial days, I was having very informal talk with them such as how are you?, what are you doing?, how life is going? and so on. They had also fear and believed that I am a CID officer who is collecting their information and will submit to Police so they were not responding to me. It continued for nearly two months and they started trusting on me slowly and gradually that I am here to write a book on Devipujaks and will not harm them anyway. Once the rapport was

established, they started cooperating me, share information and taking interest in my work. I was also meeting each and every household in community which helped me to gain their trust.

I used to go in community daily preferable in morning and evening time. I was not able to meet people who were going on work in morning but generally meeting elders who were remaining present at home and not going for work. Majority of my interactions with people were in form of unstructured interviews. An unstructured interview is an interview without any fix format but a researcher is having broad questions in mind line up with objectives. It gives freedom to researcher to ask any additional question emerging out of discussion. Another method was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) adopted during data collection. The FGDs were conducted with youth of community to know about their perspectives for their community, culture, problems and changes needed in community. It helped me to know about their views because contribution of youth is very important for any development in society. Participant Observation is widely used method in ethnographic study which was used in data collection. It is based on systematically recording of events, behaviors, and objects in the social context for study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). I used to take part in community events like marriage, death occasions, *Mandavo* which helped me to understand the social reality of the community. While observing as a participant, it is necessary to maintain objectivity to understand the social reality keeping in mind broad questions and objectives of study.

## **2.6 Leaving the Village**

I was stranger to them when I first came to village. They had no trust on me and believing that I am a CID officer who has come here to get their confidential information which I will hand over to police department. As days were passing, I was able to gain their trust that I am here to write a book on them. I was known by every household in the community. I was not only known by Devipujaks but almost other caste people in village knew about me that I am here to write something on Devipujak community. I had interacted almost all households in the community but had frequent interactions with key informants. I was able to develop very cordial relations with people in community. It became very difficult task to leave the village after staying there

more than a year. I had tried my best way to collect information from people relevant to research. I had confusion whether collected information is enough for study or not; but Devipujaks were very happy that I have stayed with them for longer period and collected detailed information of them. They had faith that I will write very good book on them. They were always asking me in what time I will be able to write book. They were telling me to come to meet them sometimes. I had met people personally in every household two days before leaving the village. They wished me good luck for my work and I believe that I had left good impression on them at the end of my field work.

## **2.7 Ethical Considerations**

After being in a field for long time, I felt that every researcher should follow ethical considerations while doing research. If targeted population of research study is illiterate or not much educated, a researcher should not take them for granted. It is duty of a researcher to inform people about the purpose of study and not making any false promises. I used to take their informed consent while collection data. I have always asked their permission before recording the conversations. They did not have any problem for taking photographs but I had always taken their prior permission before clicking photographs. I was told not to take photographs of sacrificial process so I did not take any picture of it during entire stay in field. Some of the participants told me not to write their names as they had fear that it may create animosity among them, so I have changed real name of persons in my study to maintain confidentiality.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Major Findings of Ethnographic Data**

#### **3.1 Demographic Profile**

According to Gram Panchayat data, Pritampur village was having population of 2048 with 347 families. Devipujak community is categorized under OBC in state so there was no separate population record for particular community available with Gram Panchayat. A survey was conducted to know socio-economic aspects of Devipujaks which found 603 people of Devipujak community residing in village. The village was having population of other castes also such as Darbar, Bania, Barber, Patel, Brahmin, Koli and Schedule Caste.

#### **3.2 Social History**

The Devipujaks who are residing in Pritampur village are not originally native of it but migrated there around 300 years before from nearby village named Medi. There is a story behind it which was shared to me during field work. Their forefathers were harassed by higher caste communities in Medi village due to their rituals. A Bhuvo is believed as a godly figure among community people. He is having highest place in Devipujak community. Their Bhuvo was once beaten by Mahajan for suspicion that they were performing sacrificial rituals. Devipujaks believe in Bali Pratha meaning goat sacrificial rituals which was opposed by higher caste communities in the village. They were often harassed for their cultural practices so decided to leave village and settled down to another village. They were heading to another village and Mahajan got information about performing goat sacrifice so he chased and stopped them in middle of the way. He asked them whether you are going to perform goat sacrifice to another village and carrying with you billy goats. Divipujaks usually offer billy goat not nanny goat to Goddess for Bali. Mahajan was not having trust to them and was confirming whether goats are billy or nanny and suddenly miracle happened that all billy goats converted into nanny goats by Goddess. They

believe that it was Goddess who saved them. They all had tea made from nanny goats' milk and drank it including Mahajan. Mahajan got white scars on body after drinking tea as punishment by Goddess for harassing Devipujaks. It is believed that descendents of Mahajan are still having white scars on body in village. Devipujaks then started to move towards another village. They decided to take rest after walking miles and stopped at village called Pritampur. A Bhuvo was possessed by Goddess in his body during that time and Goddess asked them to stay in this village. They accepted wish of Goddess and decided to settle down at Pritampur village.

### **3.3 Culture**

#### **3.3.1 Religion**

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.

#### **3.3.2 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.

### **3.3.3 Marriage**

I had chance to attend three marriage functions of Devipujak community during my stay in field. In earlier times, marriage was very simply performed among them with minimal expenditure. They are having custom of bride-price not dowry in marriage. A boy's family has to give certain amount to girl's family which is called bride-price and it was very less in previous time. Jahmatbhai, around sixty five year old, said that his marriage expenditure was six hundred rupees only forty five year back including bride-price which has reached to nearly two to three lakhs nowadays. Marriage was generally decided by parents earlier where changes have occurred nowadays. Bride and groom were not having any kind of meeting before fixing marriage. Family of boy first approaches to girl's family to fix marriage and visit their house. If both families like to go further, then family members of girl will visit boy's house and know the socio-economic conditions. Once both the families agree, boy's family will take permission from Goddess through Dana ceremony for fixing marriage. The marriage will be fixed if Goddess grants permission otherwise they will not go further to fix it. Among Devipujaks, groom with family members and relatives comes to bride's home for marriage. The marriage ceremony is performed by maternal-uncle not by Brahmin.

### **3.3.4 Divorce and Remarriage**

The incidences of divorce are happening nowadays in community. They try to save marriage by solving problems between husband and wife. They also plead to Goddess, perform Dana ceremony and making understand both husband and wife for reconciliation. The family members and even elders from community try for solving issues between both the parties. Divorce is considered last option. The matter of divorce is discussed in caste council known as Jat Panchayat. Jat Panchayat includes elder members of the community. Both the parties discuss matter and present their views and problems. On the basis of discussion, a jat panchayat is giving its final decision at the end and its decision is binding to all parties. The final decision is recorded on white paper which is signed by both the parties and considered as an evidence.

There are very few cases in community who take legal help in case of divorce even today. Remarriage is allowed in case of divorce or death of partner.

### **3.3.5 Death Practices**

A dead person is buried among Devipujak community. One family who considers themselves as a real descendent of forefathers settled down in village is practicing custom to set a dead person on fire. The family member, relatives and friends express mourn on death by crying. There was festival of *Navratri* and they had organized *Garba* in community. Suddenly one of the persons from Devipujak community died due to disease so they discontinue *Garba* celebration as a sign of mourning. I had once attended death occasion of relative of Vajabhai in nearby village. It was eleventh day after death of a male person. They perform a custom of *Pani Pivdavu* meaning pouring water on eleventh day for death of male and twelfth day on death of female. Vajabhai met younger brother of deceased and covered his head with cloth on reaching there. Vajabhai went near photo of deceased, took water from small pot kept beside and poured water on land which is known as *Pani Pivdavu* among them.

### **3.3.6 Goddess**

They are very strict worshipers of Goddess and having blind faith. *Bechari* was Kuldevi of the community. They take permission from Goddess through performing Dana ceremony for any task they want do. They also worship other Goddess like *Meladi*, *Char Bai Maa*, *Hadak Maa* with their Kuldevi.

### **3.3.7 Rakhadada**

Rakhadada is worshipped as a God by Devipujak people. There was a small temple of Rakhadada at village. They believe that Rakhadada is a savior of their life. He protects them

from any misfortune so they worship him to keep their life safe from any difficulty. They offer goat to Rakhadada believing that he will take care of them.

### **3.3.8 Jatiyu**

Goat is called *Jatiyu* in their local language. Devipujaks generally offer goat sacrifice to God or Goddess. They believe that Goddess resides inside goat. They move their hand on goat three times to take permission from Goddess for any decision or wish. If goat shakes its body after moving hand, they will believe that Goddess has given permission to carry out task.

### **3.3.9 Dana Ceremony**

I had been part of this ceremony many times. Dana ceremony is performed for many reasons such as resolving quarrels, knowing wrong deeds or mistake, try to know whether person is lying or not, taking permission for marriage or any other task. A *Joshi* is a person who performs Dana Ceremony. He sits on floor with photos of Goddess, incense sticks and Jowar grains. He unfolds the piece of cloth on floor and takes some grains of Jowar in fist then throw on cloth. They take permission in form of *Vachha* i.e even number and *Vadhamana* i.e odd number. If pieces of Jar comes in pattern like *Vachha Vadhamana Vachha Vadhamana Vachha* for three times, they will believe that Goddess has given consent for it or a person is considered innocent.

### **3.3.10 Bhuvo**

Bhuvo is a person who is very respectful in Devipujak community. They believe that Goddess stays inside his body. He dances shaking head and hands when possessed by Goddess. People pray and take blessings for happy, prosperous and peaceful life from him. They believe that it is not a person but Goddess speaks through his words.

### **3.3.11 Rajinama**

In the month of *Chaitra*, Devipujak people have to confess whatever they have done during whole year and should prove themselves innocent before Goddess. Every member of family has to confess anything wrong they have done like stolen something, not returned borrowed money, quarrel with family members and relatives or extra-marital affair. They have to confess every wrong doing before all members present. It is believed that Goddess will not leave them unless and until they do not accept their deeds. They perform Dana ceremony to confirm whether person is speaking truth or not. It is considered as purification for self and asking forgiveness to Goddess for whatever wrong done by them in year. Goddess will forgive a person if he or she confesses their acts.

### **3.3.12 Punishment**

A community is having their own customs and ways for punishment if a person has committed any sin or anything wrong. Punishments can be different kinds such as fifty-one times hitting by broom, fifty-one burns by match-stick on tongue or fifty-one rounds of temple on feet. They believe that a person has to accept punishment otherwise Goddess will cause harm to them.

### **3.3.13 Mandavo**

I had attended three to four *Mandavas* during field work. It is considered very auspicious occasion for them. *Mandavas* are mostly organized in *Chaitra* month. Those who stay in cities visit their native place to worship Goddess during this month. In *Mandava*, all rituals are performed by Bhuvo. They offer goat sacrifice to Goddess and God. Bhuvo drinks blood of goat collected in small bowl while performing sacrifice. They believe that blood reaches to Goddess when Bhuvo drinks it. A *Tavo* means vessel of earthen pot is kept on fire in which oil is boiled. Bhuvo and other members of community sit around it and put *Puri* inside *Tava* and take it out from boiling oil through their bare hand. They do not feel burning due to blessing of Goddess.

### **3.4 Occupation and Livelihood**

In Hindu society, caste-name is derived from the principal professions people following in particular caste or crafts. For instance, Brahmin means practicing occupation of rituals and worshipping. Many of the individuals in Brahmin community were engaged in priestly occupation for long time, but it has changed now and group members are not only pursuing priestly functions but have taken up role in allied fields like writing, clerical work very different to original work. Kumbhar name is derived from a group who is engaged in making pot. Tili or Teli caste is involved in occupation of oil (Ghurye, 1950). The British government misunderstood criminal tribes on the wrong belief of Indian caste-system. They believed that these groups commit crime from one generation to another same way particular caste group carries forward their profession from one to another generation (Kapadia, 1952). Devipujaks were living as hunter-gatherer earlier and they were assisting local rulers for hunting in jungle. Many sub-groups of Devipujak community like Datania, Chunaria, Gamechia, Chibhadia, Talpada are named on the basis of their occupations. Chunaria Devipujak were lime burners where as Datania were engaged in selling babool stick (Enthoven, 1922 as cited in Singh, 1994). With the advancement of technology, new form of occupations emerged. It was not possible for all members of community to practice their age-old traditional occupations due to growth of population and changing scenario. In some cases, traditional occupations became superfluous and many communities had to adopt new means of livelihood. The traditional weaving occupation was lost due to arrival of new technology in weaving industry. Datania Devipujak who used to sell babool stick to villagers lost their age-old livelihood due to tooth-brush usage. This changing scenario led to migration of many communities to urban areas in search of livelihood.

#### **3.4.1 Traditional Livelihood**

Devipujaks are very brave and adventurous people. They were forest-dwellers and possessing sharp skills of hunting. Local rulers used to take them in jungle for hunting due to their powerful hunting skills. They were recruited as soldiers in army of local rulers for their warrior like

characteristics. I met Karajibhai whose family was given rights to provide *Dantun* to villagers by local rulers. It was their traditional occupation and his mother was giving *Dantun* to villagers everyday and they were getting food from them in return. Their family condition was very poor and still they have not much progressed socio-economically. *Chowkidari* meaning guarding the farm land was also traditional occupations practiced by community members. Their duty was to protect farm land from looters and animals. Farm land was given to them for one year contract by big farmers in village for guarding. They were given either cash or food grains by farmers for their work. It was their responsibility to protect farm land otherwise they have to bear loss if any damaged caused to crops. Other occupations were animal husbandry, rearing livestock like sheep, goat, buffalos practiced by them. They were also practicing occupations of growing vegetables and fruits like brinjal, foot kachri, and watermelon near river bank and fulfilling their daily needs.

### **3.4.2 New Means of Livelihood**

Many nomadic and denotified groups have to adopt new occupations leaving their older ones due to technological advancement, enactment of certain laws and outing demand of traditional occupations. Some of these communities were dependent on forest produce and game-shows of wild animals like bear, snakes, monkey, birds which became illegal after arrival of legislations on wild life and forest conservations. There was not any other option left for these groups to move out from their age-old occupations. The traditional occupations of forest products and domestication of wild animals which were earning sources for them became offence suddenly due to legal restrictions.

Many families of Devipujak community have migrated to urban regions like Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bangalore for earning. They are engaged into different occupations like second-handed items, new clothes, bags selling, spices and so on. I had observed that large numbers of families are engaged in occupation of second-handed clothes during my stay at Mumbai. They go out in the morning and roam house to house for collecting old clothes and other items. They collect old clothes from customers and give them plastic utensils in return instead of cash. Items

like old clothes, watches, camera are collected by them. After having enough collection of old items, they go to *Chor Bazar* which is largest second-hand market situated in Mumbai for selling stuffs. They sit on footpath and sell collected items to various customers who are visiting market. Market starts early in morning at five hour and remains open for next three to four hours. Devipujaks are also engaged in horticulture nowadays. They keep huge land on contract for a year and do farming of mangos, gooseberry, banana, chiku and coconut (Talpada, 2020).

### **3.5 Migration**

With changing scenario of livelihood opportunities and less earning options in village, Devipujak families move to urban regions for income. They migrated to big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai in search of earning and engage themselves into different occupations. I visited Mumbai and stayed there for a month during field work to understand their life in city. In village, people are not getting employment for a whole year. Most of them are working as agriculture labourers there. Three families were having ownership of agricultural land and two of them have more than 150 acres of land. It becomes difficult for them to sustain themselves in village due to less earning options so they migrate to cities. Life is also not less miserable in cities. They face various difficulties in terms of proper habitat, cleanliness, basic amenities and all. I had visited slum where they are residing during my stay in Mumbai. The slum was very congested and deprived of basic amenities. They earn little well in urban areas compare to village; but the problems of education for children, unhygienic surroundings, no-permanent dwelling are there. The houses were very small in size where it is difficult to stay even for one family in which two to three families including their children live together.

### **3.6 Stigma**

With enactment of Habitual Offender Act in year 1952, these communities were decriminalized under law; but they have not got rid off from societal stigma. People shared many incidences of stigma and discriminations during my stay with them. I was conducting FGD with youth and they shared an incidence of discriminatory behavior of other caste people towards Devipujak

community. A boy was working at marriage decoration shop in Ahmedabad. He was somehow not able to adjust himself there so returned back to village. He was in search of employment and he approached one of the hotel owners for work. He was denied and told by an owner that other caste people will not come to his hotel if they know that Devipujak is serving there. Devipujak community is included under OBC category and does not belong to ex-untouchable group; but higher caste people do not eat with them. They consider Devipujaks lower than them in social order.

### **3.7 Discrimination and Exploitation**

There was one family who migrated to Pritampur village before some years from nearby village. They left their village due to harassment by Darbar community who was considered very powerful. They were compelling Devipujaks to work in their farms with lower wages and sometimes exploiting their women. They cannot go for work to another village even though they were paid high. If they did so, they had to face consequences from the Darbar community. The attitude of police is also not supportive and positive towards Devipujak community. Even today they are first suspected and caught by police if any theft happens in village or nearby areas though they are not involved in it. The community people are having fear of police due to their discriminatory nature toward Devipujaks.

### **3.8 Caste Council**

During my stay in village, I attended caste council meetings twice. One was for discord in marriage and another for engagement issue. The role of caste council is very important in life of Devipujaks. It is system of informal justice practiced in our society since ages. The caste council consists elder members of community. I had taken part in such sitting which was for marriage discord. Members from both the parties gathered at one village for discussion which was not village of any of them. They sat opposite to each other and expressing their views. The caste council should listen from both the parties about the matter. After prolonged discussion, they

deliver their decision at the end which is binding to both parties. People are still reaching to caste council for justice instead of formal mechanism like judiciary.

### **3.9 Illegal Acts**

General view of society towards Devipujak is still very suspicious. They look them as criminals even after decriminalized almost seventy years before. I stayed nearly a year with the community and observed that all families except one were earning their livelihood with honest way. They work for whole day in field. Only one family was involved in liquor selling illegally in community which itself was not liked by Devipujak people. It was negatively affecting image of whole community in village.

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