



Living God to Bind Together: *Gam Dev of Rathwas*

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ABSTRACT

India has a great cultural heritage. In rural India the concept of *Pridevta* or ancestor worship is a country wide phenomenon. Folk of India worship numerous tutelary Deities and all of them have their different place in religious faith. Some deities are associated with a specialization in solving the problem while some are with combined benefits of their worship. Many deities are worshiped out of fear of them. *Rathwas* of Chhota Udepur worship various deities, which they conjointly call *Gamdev* of a particular village.

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Introduction



Worship of *Gram Devta* is practiced in every village of India and every village has special shines of them. *Gram Devta* is called by different names like *Kheda Devta*, *Dada Devta*, *Dada Bhaiyan*, *Gam Devta* etc. *Gram Devtas* are considered the first person who got settled for the first time in a specific village along with other tutelary deities and they are worshipped as the common ancestral god of the entire village (in some villages it is observed that the gram dev is not worshiped by some castes).

'*Graamdevta* term for a local tutelary deity in India. Such deities are identified as not being served by brahmin priests. most are goddesses e.g. *Camunda*, *Durga* and *Kali*. Generally, they are invoked in small villages where they guard boundaries and fields and are represented by painted stone, but they are also to be found in larger towns and cities.'(Chandra,1998). This belief is also supported by other scholars (Iyengar,2004). Some *Gramdevtas* are considered as *Avtar* of Shiva and *Vishnu*. In some areas these goddesses are connected with Cholera (Coulter, 2021) and Chickenpox for example *Shitla Mata*. Sometimes, these deities are natural forces who are worshipped in human form like *Meghurana Dev*, who is *Indra* the God of rain.

Chhota Udepur Taluka of Chhota Udepur district (third tribal dominated district after Narmada and Tapi in Eastern Gujarat) is a tribal region of Eastern Gujarat. It also has the tradition of Gaam Devta. This region is primarily dominated by *Rathwas* followed by *Naikda*, *Tadvi* and *Patelia*.

Research Methodology

This research adopts In Situ ethnographic fieldwork. Person to person interviews of devotees, priests have been taken. Museums and Places of *Gamdev* in various villages have been visited to collect data combined with Literature review.

Significance of *Gram Devta*

Gram devta is considered the protective power for the entire village who protects villagers from natural calamities, diseases and negative forces. *Gram devta* provides a sense of brotherhood and unity to the village as it reminds the new generations that they belong to the same forefather.



Compulsory worship of *Gaam Devta* brings the villagers together even for those who have migrated to cities for their livelihood and helps socialization. Some Folks who converted to other faiths also worship *Gaam Dev*.

Gram Devta is important in maintaining the moral and social order among the villagers. The suspect of theft takes oath in front of *Gaam Devta*. It is said by *Malaja* villagers that, if he lies then the *Devta's* horse will turn their face. Generally, Nobody takes false oaths and accepts their crime in front of God.

Prominent deities of *Gam Devs*

A comparative study done on 3 villages namely *Malaja*, *Devaliya* and *Singhla* as they have changed recently and placed name plates in front of each deity. *Devaliya* village situated 13 km west of *Malaja*. *Singla* village situated 17 km towards south of *Malaja* village.

Malaja village *Gamdev* contains, total 10 deities. Namely *Toran Dev*, *Baba Kuvasiyo Dev*, *salkiyo Dev*, *Baba Jheriyo*, *Kundu Ranodev*, *Baba Indra Raja*, *Keyda Kunbi*, *Kheda Bai Mata*, *Hadarja Dev* and *Gaam Gondraj*.

Gamdev of *Singla* village has total 16 deities named as *Berubai Mata*, *Baba Dev*, *Khedu Bai Mata*, *Bakra Dev*, *Baba Kalurana Dev*, *Gay Goro Dev*, *Baba Hodal Dev*, *Baba Ehara Dev* and some names are not possible to read.

Whereas the *Devaliya Gamdev* (picture 1) contains, total 19 number of deities. *Gaam Gundaraj* , *Hajarjo Dev*, *Bagheshwari Mata*, *Chalakiyo dev*, *Gaam Khedu*, *Kaalu Rano*, *Khodo Jhajar*, *Meghu Ranodev* (in *Devaliya* village *Meghu Ranodev* means god of rain *Indra* is situated in centre and adorned with tiger, swamp deer, lamb, chicken and a large lamp), *Khabu Rano*, *Naavaniyo Dev*, *Ukadiyo Dev*, *Kelo Kunbi dev*, *Dudhiyo Dev*, *Moto Rano Dev*, *Nano Hudor*, *Nana Ratubhar*, *Bhamariyo Dev*, *Valvaniyo Dev*.

Image:1



In Gathiya village, where the *Gamdev* was changed on 30/09/2002 has around 12 deities but they do not contain names.

10 deities are found in more than 1 village in some cases the names are slight different in pronunciation for example *Bokaliyo Dev*, who worshipped for the protection of goats is written as Bakra Dev in other villages. ‘*Bakra*’ word is used for buck in Hindi, while ‘*Bokaliyo*’ is called in Gujarati. Some deities like *Simodi Devi* (goddess of village boundaries), *Khatrij* (the deceased one of a family) *Gand Gaam Gondraj* (deity of household animals) have separate shrines or place of worship in village.

Deity worshipped for	S.N.	Deity list (given by Naran and Vikesh Rathwa of Achchala village)	Malaja <i>Gamdev</i> (22*22’58.33’’N 74*05’35.64’’E) Changed on	Devaliya <i>Gamdev</i> (22*22’30.45’’N 73*51’12.33’’E) Changed on 21/12/20022	Singla <i>Gamdev</i> (22*15’12.84N 74*01’10.59E)
Deity of house	1	<i>Gharli devi</i>			
	2	<i>kuldevi</i>			



	3	<i>Jhaplyo Dev</i>			
	4	<i>Khatrij Dev</i> (separate shrines in all)			
Deity of village boundary	5	<i>Gamdev</i> (present in all villages as group of deity)			
	6	<i>Bhagol dev</i>			
Deity of animals	7	<i>Bokaliyo dev</i>			as <i>Bakra dev</i>
	8	<i>Baba Behodev</i>			
	9	<i>Govaldev</i>			
	10	<i>Vaghtor Dev</i>			
	11	<i>Bagheshwari Devi</i>		Present	
	12	<i>Jheriyo Dev</i>	present	Present	
	13	<i>Khatiyo dev</i>			
	14	<i>Gam Gundraja Dev</i>	separate	Present	
Deity for marriage	15	<i>Simodi mata</i>	separate		
	16	<i>Gotrijdev</i>			
	17	<i>Senadiyo Dev</i>			
Deity for rain	18	<i>Rani Kajal</i>			
	19	<i>Dudhiyo dev</i>		present	
	20	<i>Sangatiyo Dev</i>			
	21	<i>Kalurano Dev/ Kanu Rano Dev</i>		<i>Kaau Rano Dev</i>	Present
For mother and child	22	<i>Aathem mata</i>			
	23	<i>Berai Mata</i> (separate in some villages like Gathiya)			present



	24	<i>Toraniyo mata</i>	present		
Deity for diseases	25	<i>Baliya Dev</i>			
Deity of harvest	26	<i>Khetarpada Dev</i>			

Rituals of worship of *Gram Devta* in *Rathwas*

Gram Devta is compulsorily worshipped on every auspicious occasion whether it is a festival, child birth or marriage. Main festivals in this area are *Akha Tij* or *Akshay Tritiya*, *Holi* which is celebrated for 5 consecutive days, *Ind*, *Jatar*, *Divasa*, *Navai* and *Diwali*.

Coconuts, chicken, lamb, urad *Debra* (a black lentil snack), grains/harvests, *mahua* flowers & wine, sugarcane, coins, *Dhaba* (a small terracotta shrine), pots, terracotta animals (horse, elephant, lion, goat), terracotta *Hookah*.

On *Divasa*, *Ind*, *Jatar*, *holi* large scale ceremonies are organized and *Gayna* (religious songs), music-dance performed by the folk.

On some special occasions, for example, if rain does not occur during the monsoon season, then the *Badwa* (*Rathwa* priest) advice the pooja of *Gaamdev*.

Gaam Sai* or *Karodiya Ind

Gaam Sai is the process of changing the *Gaam Dev*, it is also called *Pidhi Badalwama* means change of generation. *Gaam Sai* is said to be done after 100 years. It is a process that many generations are unable to witness. In some cases where the village is witnessing multiple negative events then on the advice of *Badva*, the *Gaam Dev* can be changed before 100 years as it is considered that *Gaam Dev* is not happy. A large event/fair is organized by the village on this occasion, during this event nearby villages and relatives are also invited.

Village collects funds and orders the wooden pillars, offerings etc. New wooden pillars are worshipped in an *Akhara* (a makeshift bamboo house) before they replace the deities (wood pillars). Wooden toy carts are used (sometimes symbolically) to transport the gods. *Gayna* and dance with traditional music in



matching tribal outfit performed on this occasion. Long bamboo tied with pots, bamboo baskets, *Jwara* (sprouted barley), palm-broom is used in worship.

Special offerings to some deities, for example, *Dudhiyo Dev* in *Devalia*, offered two bulls and *Gaam Kheda/ Kheda Bai Mata* offered Tiger. Some gods like toran dev of Malaja, Nana *Ratubhar* of *Devaliya* and *Verubai Mata* of *Singhla* are decorated with Toran (wooden gates). *Keyda Kunbhi* of *Malaja*, *Khabu Rano* of *Devaliya* had offerings of *Hukkah*. Goddesses are pleased with coconuts.

Installation of *Gamdev* wooden pillar and purification as deity performed by *Badwa* with chanting mantras and singing of *Gayna*. The old ones are kept aside at the same place. An after Feast is given by the village for all invitees from the sacrificed edibles.

Effects of modernization on *Gaam Devta*

Modernization did not affect *Gaam Devta* much, if we see in the last century particularly in this area as the folk feel so proud in following their culture. High Participation of youth in religious ceremonies is an optimistic aspect of culture preservation.

We can see a difference in style of making the *Gaam Dev*. The use of chemical paints tin shade for protection, name plates and cemented floors are prevalent in newly changed *Gaam Devs*. Use of DJs and modern outfits are common in some youth. Apart from these slight physical changes the spiritual beliefs and rituals are common in *Rathwas*.

Conclusion

Gamdev is an integral part of *Rathwas* culture, it is most sacred for *Rathwa* tribe (includes other tribes of village). *Gamdevta* Considered the most powerful souls (as well as natural forces in human form) who are protecting villages for centuries, It works as a bond between the villagers apart from their different religious identities today. Some common deities in several villages, despite their distance, prove that they had the same ancestors in the past. Through studying *Gamdevs* in different tribal regions across the country, we can find out tribal identity and interconnection in a better way.



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