

rests with the goddess. She is asked, while in possession, whether she wishes the dance to be performed for her, and if people do not wish to do so that particular year, they attempt to persuade her to allow them to dance the following year. After the goddess has given her decision, she cures those who are in need of care and then departs. The people gathered at her shrine continue to clean and divide the meat, and toward the end of the afternoon, they send portions of it to every family in the village and leave the shrine.

Bhadvi Sat Jagran

The Bhadvi Sat Jagran takes place on the sixth night and seventh morning of the month of Bhadra (August-September). It is considered the most important jagran of the year and is held in all the village temples. The ceremony is conducted in the same manner as described in the last chapter and is in honor of all the gods.

Gauvri

The Gauvri dance, held every two or three years by the people of Ratakote, seems to be of local origin. The Maharana of Udaipur introduced a festival to Gauvri (an alternate name for Paravati) in Udaipur at the beginning of the last century. It was held in the month of Vaisakh (April-May; see Tod 1829:454,460). The Bhils living in villages near Udaipur began a dance to Gauvri, but apparently timed the dance to coincide with the worship of village goddesses in the month of Bhadra (August-September). The dance is now a common feature of the ceremonial cycle for villages of the Udaipur area, but is not performed as far south as Kherwara.

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For the villagers Gauvri is a major undertaking requiring great expenditure of money and time. Before Rakhi, the village elders discuss prospects for undertaking the dance, and if the crops seem abundant and the year a prosperous one, they usually agree to have it. They discuss where they will get the money to buy the dance costumes and other necessary paraphernalia, and when that important problem is solved, a tailor from Nagar, or more recently the Sudhu tailor in the village, is summoned and the villagers who are to play special parts in the dance are notified.

They next build a small wooden platform (pāṭī) on a hill in the middle of the village and cover this with a red cloth. At Iharal Mata Puja, the goddess is told that if she will take responsibility for the safety of the cattle and keep disease from the village, the villagers will dance Gauvri for her. She agrees to this and gives her blessing to the dance. After this, her participation is not necessary but she frequently possesses a bbopa at her platform and in other villages when the dancers are on tour. On the seventh day following Rakhi (Bhadra 7 dark) the village headman calls a meeting of all the heads of household to pass out costumes to the principals of the dance and to urge each family to send one of its members to dance. The Bholi is also present at this time, for he will go with the dance group from then on as drummer.

On the next day, the dancers dance all day at a central place in the village and on the day following they move to a spot in Hamli Pipli phala where they dance for another day. Then the group leaves the

village and tours a number of communities within a twenty-five mile radius of Ratakote. The group remains away from the village, returning on the fourteenth of Bhadra (light) for a rest and to be present at the beginning of a nauratra ceremony held as part of Gauvri. Barley seed is planted near the platform to Dharal Mata, and ceremonies pertaining to the planting are held. On the following day, the dance group again leaves to tour nearby villages, finally reaching the service village of Nagar on the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Ashiwan (September-October). They dance for the Rajputs and Mahajans of Nagar on the following day, along with dance groups from other Ehil villages which are performing that particular year, and at the end of the day, they procure a decorated pottery elephant (hāthī) from the Kumar (potter) traditionally associated with the village and carry this back to Ratakote in the evening. On the ninth of Ashiwan, the goddess' platform is moved to the central dancing place and the elephant is put next to it for everyone to admire. The barley shoots are cut and immersed in the stream near the cremation grounds, and the elephant is also left by the stream. At the dancing ground a buffalo is made of wheat dough and the dancers symbolically kill it, each vying with the other to grab handfuls of the dough, which they eat later. The dance is then performed for the last time around the remains of the buffalo, this time in the opposite direction to "unwind" Gauvri. With this the dance is officially over and people settle down to entertaining guests.

The Gauvri dance group includes a number of specific dance roles: there is a bhopa and several pujaras; there are two hereditary bhūrīās (narrators) one of whom wears a decorated wooden mask and carries a wooden sword, and another who carries a wooden axe; there are two hereditary rāīs, or men dressed as women to represent the goddess Gauvri; there is a large group of kēlās (players) who form the main body of the dance group; and there is a Dholi drummer and another man, usually any one of the dancers, who plays on a brass plate. Before the group reaches a village in which it intends to dance, two of its members wearing ankle bells go on ahead to give bil leaves to the headman of the village as an invitation to him and to his village to attend the dance. The village Balayi, if there is one, announces the imminent arrival of the dance group and his warning serves as a signal for people to prepare food to be given the group when it arrives later. The dance group arrives in the evening, its members walking in single file, wearing ankle bells and led by one of their number who carries a pennant on a bamboo pole. The group is housed by the host villagers wherever there is room, and food is brought to them.

On the following day at about noon, the dancers prepare to perform. They put on their costumes and inform an elder from the host village that they are ready. A general announcement to this effect is called throughout the village, and people quickly gather at the place where the dance is to be held. The dancers walk in single file onto the dance ground, face east, and bow. Their bhopa drives an iron trident into the ground, fixes the group pennant next to it, builds a fire to the

goddess, and sits down with the pujaras. The other dancers begin to walk around this altar area in a counterclockwise direction and the bhurias walk back and forth on the north side of the circle and begin the narration of a story.

The Gauvri dancers dance eight or ten separate dances or "sets". Each has its own theme and its own main characters who dress especially for the parts, and often the story is designed to be comical. Several sets show the Khils as robbers making off with the goods of Mahajans, the latter pretending to be very brave when the robbers are not present but running with fright when they appear. One dance is about the "king of Delhi" who usually turns out to be dressed like an English administrator. Other stories parody sadhu holy men, who profess their dedication to god in loud terms to the crowd, and then turn around to chase girls and drink liquor. Spirit possession is also a target of their mirth as are village headmen and the relationship between husband and wife. The worth of a particular Gauvri dance party is judged differently in different Khil villages. The people of Ratakote appreciate good expressive dancing and tend to be critical of a dance party which relies too heavily on verbal slapstick and bizarrely dressed characters. People of other villages, however, seem to be turning to this sort of horseplay, and Ratakote villagers appear conservative by comparison.

When the dance is over, the rais and burias stand before the headman of the host village and receive from him a payment of from four to twenty rupees. The headman gives the group an amount in excess of what

the headman of the dance group's village gave the dance party from the host community in the previous year. In this way, just as with nuth, at weddings, villages remain obligated to exchange dance parties. The system has the effect of linking a great number of villages, although the link frequently serves only to maintain the dance relationship and does not necessarily guarantee cordial relations between the villages.

The dance also has the effect of bringing together kin living in different villages. Dance groups usually dance at villages into which people of the dance group's community have married their daughters or from which they have taken their wives. Gauvri tends to reaffirm such relationships by having associated with it several occasions which feature the presentation of gifts and the extension of hospitality between kin. When a dance party is dancing in a community other than its own, the rais of the party are fed by their "sisters," actually girls who were originally from the dance party's village. Later, at Nagar and following the end of nauratra ceremony, guests flock to the villages whose inhabitants have danced that year, bringing with them sweet balls and clothing for all their relatives there. Because they must be entertained in turn by their hosts with meat and liquor, Gauvri is an expensive occasion. Even if people do not travel to see their relatives in the villages which have performed the dance, they send along the necessary gifts with others. The last days of Gauvri are marked by great excitement throughout the Bhil area around Udaipur. Many people, dressed in their best clothes and carrying their weapons, go traveling from village to village, often staying with their relatives.

Many of the men remain perpetually drunk, and everybody seems to enjoy himself thoroughly.

Nauratra.

Nauratra (literally nine nights) is one of the most important religious ceremonies held in Ratakote. It may not occur every year because villagers feel that it is only necessary to perform it in a year when crops are poor or disease is rampant and there is particular need to propitiate the gods and to enlist their help. In this sense, the ceremony is a sacrifice in itself. In Northern India Nauratra is dedicated to the worship of Durga, the dark aspect of Siva's consort, and is sometimes called the Durgapuja (Crooke 1926: 237; Monier-Williams 1891:431), although in rural caste villages the ceremony may take on an entirely local flavor (see Lewis 1958: 215-217). In Ratakote, Nauratra is a ceremony of general curing and prediction, and shares at least the latter attribute with the ceremony as it is practiced in neighboring caste villages. The custom of planting seed and observing the growth of barley shoots in order to predict the nature of the rains for the coming year is likewise found locally in both caste and Ehil villages. The very frequent spirit possession which marks Ehil observances is, however, not found in caste villages.

Nauratra begins on the first day of the light fortnight of Achivan (September-October) and ends on the ninth. On the first day of the ceremony, the bhopas and village elders assemble at every village temple, and the temple idols are washed with water. A mixture of ghee and bil leaves is applied to the nose of each image as a way of inviting him to the ceremony. Next the bhopa makes a fire in the altar fire