

# **DIPLoma PROJECT**

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## **Aliens in Their Own Land :**

**Tribal identity and alienation among the 'Rathwa'**

**Sponsor : Gurjarvani (Xavier Centre for Culture and Communication )  
Ahmedabad**

**STUDENT : URMILA MOHAN**

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**GUIDE : AKHIL SUCCENA**

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**1998-99**

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**COMMUNICATION DESIGN FACULTY (VIDEO)**

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**National Institute of Design  
Ahmedabad**

The Evaluation Jury recommends URMILA MOHAN

for the

**Diploma of the National Institute of Design**  
**IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN (VIDEO)**

herewith FOR THE PROJECT "ALIENS IN THEIR OWN LAND : TRIBAL IDENTITY AND  
on fulfilling the further requirements by ALIENATION AMONG THE 'RATHWA'"

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• Subsequent remarks regarding fulfilling the requirements

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Chairman

# Synopsis

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From time immemorial the hills, river valleys, mountains and forests of India have been populated by tribal people. Now the encroachment on their land, caused by growing urbanisation has subjected them to new pressures, which have endangered their traditional lifestyles. The third largest tribal group in India, the Bhils, are found mainly in central India. Those Bhils who occupy the Rath or hilly and plateau area are called Rathias or Rathwas in Gujarat. During the project I worked with the Rathwas of Chota Udaipur taluka. My study lead me to look at issues of tribal culture, welfare and development. Every issue whether politics, economics, religion or art ultimately involved the larger theme of interaction of tribal and mainstream culture. This lopsided relationship had resulted in the familiar problems found in the tribal belts of India- a history of exploitation of land and resources in the name of development and the uncomfortable position of the tribal vis a vis the state and its machinery.

The majority of the mainstream population has failed to realise the dynamic value of the tribal culture in India, as hitherto they have been stereotypically viewed as primitive and uncivilised people. While they have been granted political rights, the reality is that the majority are socially and economically marginalised. In the case of the Rathwas this has gradually lead to 'detrribalisation' and adoption of mainstream Gujrati culture. With hardly any options that would integrate their tradition and past into the present, their tribal lifestyle may ultimately loose the struggle for survival. This form of ethnocide has meant the loss of some of the most unique cultures in India.

The video traces change in the Rathwa tribe through the symbolism of their art of wall painting. It deals with the changes in occupation, belief systems and consequently loss of tribal identity itself. The issue of tribal alienation is an extremely complex problem. The video serves as an initial awareness programme about the process of alienation of a tribe's culture, using the illustration of change among the Rathwas. The attitudinal changes needed to redress this problem cannot be brought about overnight as it involves many people and social dynamics. However the film can be made more contextual and applicable to the specific needs of the audience through discussions held by social workers, teachers, audience members etc.

# Acknowledgements

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Fr. Mathew, Legal aid office

Mr. Subash Issai, SN college, *at Chota Udaipur*

The tribals from the Rathwa villages in and around Chota Udaipur

Mr. Immanuel Suresh

Mr. R.K. Banerjee

Swadhaben Majumdar

and the Resource centre, *at NID*

Mr. Haku Shah, expert, Tribal research

my guide, Akhil Succena

and my family

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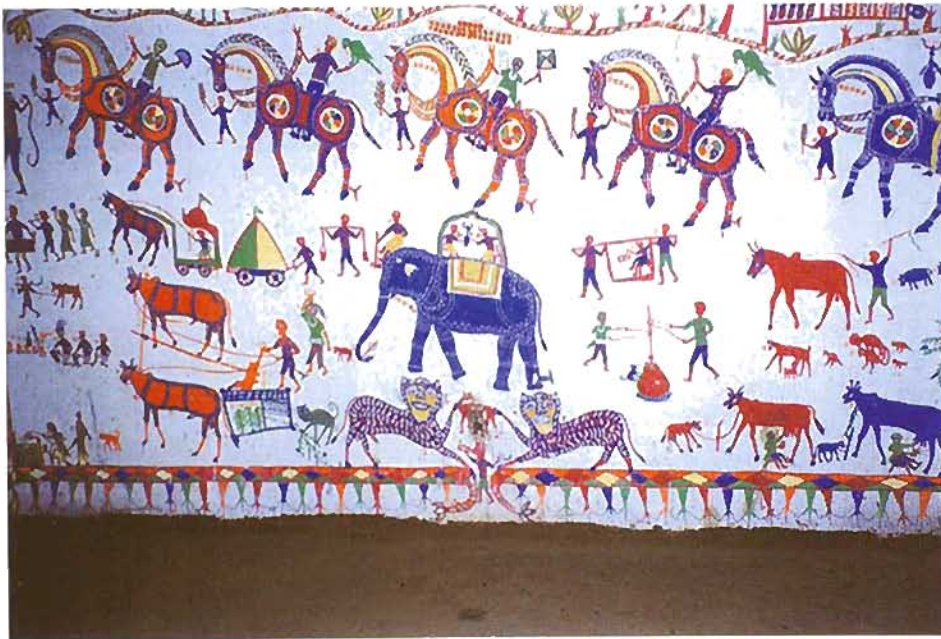
# Introduction

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The six month diploma project is the culmination of a student's educational experience at the National Institute of Design. This is an opportunity to put acquired skills to test as the student prepares to embark upon a professional career. The motto of the institute has always been learning through the process of doing. This equips the student with both conceptual and practical experience and abilities. By selecting a project of one's interest and working with a client, the student gains real life, professional knowledge. It is a challenge. Balancing the aspirations and interests of the student with the constraints of the project is an important learning. The student has to bring out her best against the

demands made by the client and the practicalities of implementation of the project.

My interest in the theme for this project was sparked off by a visit to Chota Udaipur. Excited about the possibility of integrating my interest in tribal art and culture into the project, I approached Gurjarvani. Since then the nature of the project has been defined and redefined



*Pithoro painting in the village of Malajo*

as part of the process of discovery and prioritisation.

# The Sponsor

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## **GURJARVANI Xavier center for Culture and Communication**

Gurjarvani, meaning the voice of Gujarat, is a communication centre which produces audio and video programmes aimed at a wholistic development of society. Their communication activities include:

Production and distribution of audio video programmes

Communication Media training, specially in group and low cost media

Collaboration with artists, communication centres, social activists

Developmental and health education programmes

In their communication activities they focus on the development of the marginalised, urban and rural poor, giving voice to the voiceless and presenting the predicament of the underprivileged to the mainstream. Some of their major productions are listed below:

**THE CHOICES SERIES:** An ongoing series of video programmes that raises issues related to human values. Targetted at adolescents the programmes provoke discussion. Several themes like copying in an examination, ruthless competition, the value of sharing etc. are woven into an interesting dramatic format.

**THE AWARENESS SERIES:** the programmes are aimed at creating such awareness that could lead to happier and healthier lives.

**Growing up:** A thorough, scientific, value based course on sex education for adolescents.

**For your eyes only:** A 15 minutes programme on keeping eyes healthy by regular eye exercises.

**Sugarland:** A fantasy dance programme for children on learning to keep their teeth healthy.

**MEDIA EDUCATION:** Mediocracy, the rule of the media- This introductory programme analyses the power of the media, its present role in society, and explores ways to harness the power of the media for the

welfare of society.

**ON ENVIRONMENT:** Trees give life: The programme challenges us to act in favour of ecological preservation and restoration. The film is presented through bhavai (traditional folk dance drama of Gujarat) and puppetry. It was telecasted on Gujarat Doordarshan in 1993.

**Green Earth:** The programme takes up the issues of air, water and noise pollution and their impact on life and the environment.

**ART AND CULTURE:** Broken twigs and paper boats- the world of the Indian child. The programme deals with the joys, creativity, diversity of the lives of Indian children. The verses from Tagore's 'Crescent Moon' describe the enchanted world of the child.

**CHRISTIAN FAITH INFORMATION:** I nailed him to the cross: A moving drama set hours after the death of Jesus. The programme calls for a deep experience of the call to forgive "seventy times seven...".

**The gift of love:** A programme on the first holy communion, to help children understand the selfgiving of Jesus in Holy Communion.

**Isvar Sathé Sumel:** A programme on the sacrament of reconciliation. It looks at the issue of sin from the personal, social and environmental perspective.

**VIDEO PRAYERS:** Let us pray: Three very effective, audiovisual biblical prayers, to be used for group prayers, retreats etc....

**The Prodigal Son:** Choreographed by the world renowned dancer/ choreographer Mrinalini Sarabhai, the parable of the father's forgiving love is movingly presented in dance.

**The Lost sheep:** The joy of the shepherd who finds his lost sheep and the joy of God when a sinner repents are reflected in the programme.

**SOCIAL AWARENESS:** The Displaced: A docudrama on the displacement of Adivasis. The programme presents disillusioned adivasis in a city slum recalling the stories of their displacement. The artistes are Adivasis themselves.

**Know the laws, enjoy your rights:** The programme explores three atrocities- denial of access to public drinking water, bonded labour, sexual exploitation of women, to make the poor aware of and claim the benefits of

a powerful law- 'Prevention of Atrocities against scheduled castes and tribes act, 1989'. Inputs on how to access the law are also given.

Laaj: The veil used by village women to cover their faces in front of men, becomes a symbol of subjugation. A woman's life is controlled by men be they a father, husband or son. 'Bondage', a powerful poem by Dr. Swaroop Dhruv, is visualised to show the web of bondage that is woven around a woman from her birth- in the name of beauty, modesty or protection.

# Client brief

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The client wanted a 20 minute video programme in their series of social awareness productions. The programme would deal with an aspect of the life of the Rathwas. The final theme and details of the programme were to be decided after research and fieldwork.

The programme would have to be thought provoking, educational and motivational. Thus it would need sufficient information for subsequent debate and action.

The programme would be dealing with the issues on an informative and symbolic level, using the potential of images and soundtrack. The final product would have commentary and subtitling in English. Later it would be dubbed into Gujrati and Hindi.

# Time schedule

	No. of weeks
<b>PHASE 1</b> Finalisation of topics and information collection	5
<b>PHASE 2</b> Analysis, synthesis and concept generation	5
<b>PHASE 3</b> Refinement and finalisation of concepts	4
<b>PHASE 4</b> Scripting and storyboarding	3
<b>PHASE 5</b> Production	2
<b>PHASE 6</b> Post production	3
<b>PHASE 7</b> Documentation	4
<hr/>	
<b>TOTAL DURATION OF THE PROJECT</b>	<b>26</b>

# Choice of medium

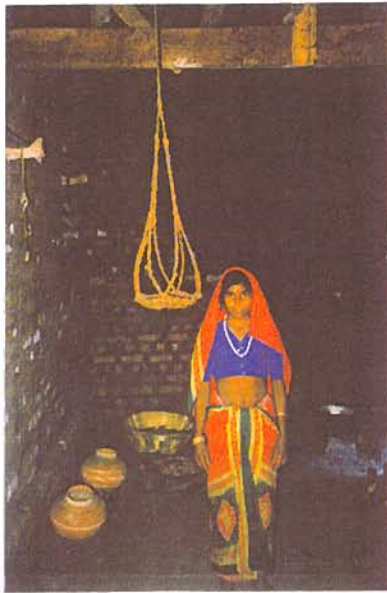
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The medium of video offers moving images, sound, colour and immediacy. Real time images on a screen have a certain authenticity, a persuasive quality. One identifies more readily with situations that are projections of oneself, whether fictional or real. This aspect of the medium lends itself to dealing with a variety of issues- social, political and economical. Breaking the myth that audio visuals are primarily for entertainment, Developmental Communication, by providing information interestingly helps provoke thought and spur discussion. Reaching out to the rural as well as the urban, video technology can be used to motivate changes in thinking patterns, changes that can have far reaching effects in the way we develop our minds and conduct our lives.

Audio visual communication with its powerful visual impact can cut across language, race, culture barriers and reach a very large audience. Moreover such high impact programmes have maximum retentive and recall value. Regarding production, video is a more convenient and low budget means to make non profit programmes.

# Audience profile

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*Rathwa girl inside her kitchen,  
Gabadia*

The issue of loss of tribal identities is almost universally applicable. Examples like the fate of the tribes in the Americas, Africa, South East Asia, Australia and India, come readily to mind. The tribals are viewed either as exotica who must be 'museumised' or as resources to be exploited by the 'civilised' mainstream. The abuse of nature and the environment extends to the people who inhabit these lands and all life that is supported by it. While this forms the basic assumption, one must also recognise the difference between every tribe's status (political, economical, social) and the danger of generalising the problems or needs. The issue is also one of perceptions and the attempt to guide people into viewing tribals as more than just "people who roam 'nangaa' (nude)". (In fact, the first action of civilising encounters has always been to clothe the 'naked jungle'.)

The target audience for the video film are both the adults and youth belonging to mainstream communities, educated tribals especially those residing in the towns are also included. The film acts as an initial awareness and sensitisation programme and serves the purpose of provoking discussion.

# Problem statement

## TRIBAL IDENTITY AND IT'S ALIENATION

'Adivasis' (tribals) have become aliens in their own land. In South Gujarat, one particular tribe- the *Rathwas* live in the hilly areas in Panchmahal and Chota Udaipur Talukas of Baroda district. Like all adivasis, Rathwas belonged to their land and the land belonged to the Rathwas. They lived off their forests and rivers. Gradually the idea of ownership of land, saw the claiming of previously undivided land, first by the state then by the outsiders. Roads and railways were built to exploit the wealth of the forest. Rathwas got pieces of land to cultivate, but they could no longer roam freely in the forests. This was the beginning of the destruction of their tribal way of life.

The outsiders were other farming communities, officials, traders, daruwallas, exploiters of the resources. The various mainstream religious sects came with a zeal to socially and spiritually reform the tribal, and civilize him. The new socio economic situation saw the dependence of the Rathwas on different ways of life. Consequently there was marginalization and alienation of the Rathwas in their own land, progressive loss of self identity with the younger generation ashamed of their roots. The

message being given out to the tribals was and still is that, to be civilised they have to adopt mainstream culture and values.

The task of changing attitudes and the ignorance, to be dealt with, especially among the mainstream, is overwhelming. No one film or publication can succeed without the support system of dedicated activists,



*Rathwa boy holding a flute made out of a plastic pipe, Gabadia*

*Rathwas celebrating Holi, Chota Udaipur*





*Holi at Panibhar , the character of the Gherani, a man dressed as a woman*



*Gher at Kawant, the occassion gets its name from the practice of collecting money or 'gher' at Holi time*

educationists and policy makers.

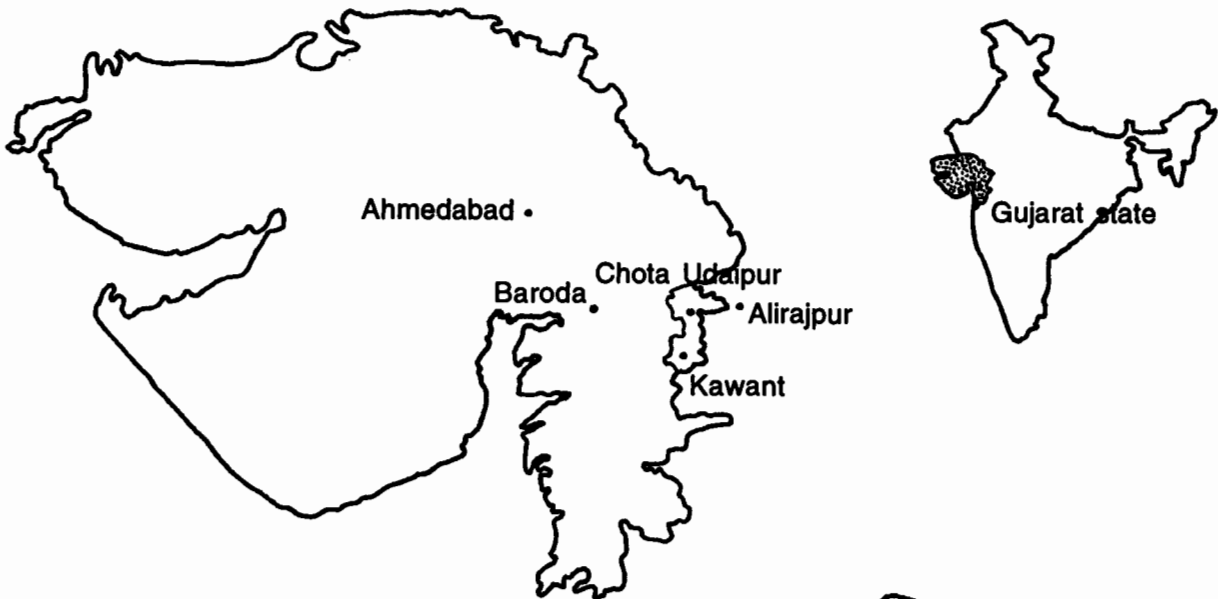
This introductory film through the illustration of one tribe, the Rathwas of Chota Udaipur, attempts to create a feeling of how tribal cultures are human and valuable, questions the social and economic values of the mainstream vis a vis the tribal, and raises the issue of tribal identity and alienation.

# Budget

	Rupees
<b>1 COST OF STUDIO MATERIAL</b>	
a. 5 hi 8 tapes	5,000
b. 3 U matic tapes	3,000
c. 5 digital tapes	5,000
d. 5 print films	500
<b>2 COST OF PRODUCTION</b>	
a. Production expenses	5,000
b. Local conveyance, outstation boarding and lodging	2,000
<b>3 COST OF SERVICES</b>	
a. Camera hire for 5 days	10,000
b. Camera assistant	1,500
c. Creative team	
Cameraman	10,000
Music director	1,500
Voice over	1,500
d. Post production	
Editing and post production	8,000
Recording studio hire	2,000
<hr/>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55,000</b>
<b>4 Contingencies (10% on the above)</b>	<b>5,500</b>
<b>5 Stipend (for 6 months)</b>	<b>18,000</b>
<b>6 Documents (two copies)</b>	<b>3,000</b>
<b>7 Contribution to NID's educational fund</b>	<b>4,000</b>
<hr/>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>85,500</b>

# Map of Gujarat (not to scale)

showing the field area of Chota Udaipur taluka



## CHOTA UDAIPUR TALUKA



# Information Collection

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research material for the project was made up of information gathered from printed books, journals and unpublished mimeographs together with field work. The tribe I refer to can be called 'Rathwa' or

'Rathwas'. I have chosen the latter and used it both as the name of the tribe as well as to denote plurality.



*View of the Orsang river that runs through Chota Udaipur*

## THE FIELD

With reference to the project I made several visits to the chosen field area of Chota Udaipur town and the surrounding villages.

Accompanying the intervals between the visits, was the process of definition and re-definition of concepts, ideas

and forms. The initial visit focussed on the wall painting of the Rathwas and the rituals connected with this art. I viewed paintings at the village of Malajo and was fortunately able to attend an actual installation (Panghu) of one such painting at Gabadia village. The next visit was during the festival of Holi. Accompanying the Sisters of the 'Missionaries of the Sacred Heart' and the Fathers from Don Bosco school, I visited a number of villages (refer map on page 15) scattered geographically along the north- south axis of the Alirajpur/ Kawant highway (Ambala, Ambali, Raipur, Kawant) and others towards the interior (Sursi, Baroj, Sadli, Pratapura, Kanalwa). These visits were oriented towards continuing the research started and discovering possible themes for the film.

The festival of Holi was once again an opportunity to see the new



Depiction of modern transportation like trucks and planes in the Pithoro painting at Don Bosco

and the old, by tracing changes in Rathwa practices, whether religious, occupational, cultural etc.

Following this sensitising experience I worked on various themes for the script. The process of redefining and focussing became crucial. After much discussion with the client I worked on a script combining my initial interest in the art of the Pithoro wall painting with the larger issue of change of adivasi identity. The final visit dealt with cross

referencing and identification of people, situations and treatments appropriate to the theme.



Above Travelling by the common mode of transport in Chota Udaipur  
Below A new symbol of power

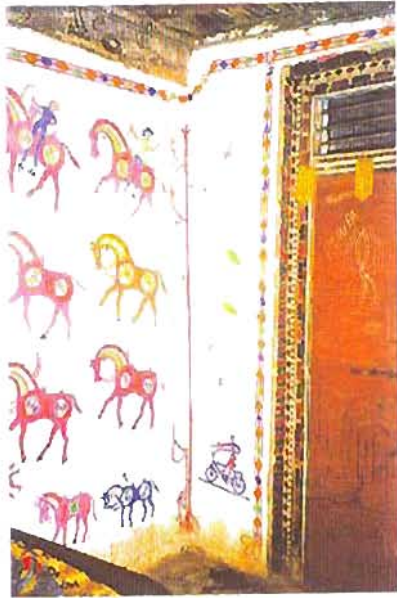


## ORIGIN OF THE RATHWAS OF CHOTA UDAIPUR

The 1991 census (excluding J & K) records a population of 850 million of whom 8.08% are scheduled tribes. Various states of India have varying tribal population and Gujarat ranks fifth among such

states, with 14.22% of the total Indian tribal population. In all there are 29 tribes in the state of whom 5 are primitive tribes. The rest are Scheduled tribes, the largest number being the Bhils. The highest tribal concentration is in the Dangs (92.31%) followed by Surat and Panchmahal (21.48%) and Vadodara (13.37%). Other tribes are the Dubla, Ghodia, Gamit, Nayakda, Chowdhary, Rathwa, Konkana-kunbi, Dhanka and Warli. The Rathwas number some 3,03,411 a sizeable figure. (Lal, *The Rathwas of Chota Udaipur*)

The tribe of Rathwas are concentrated in the Chota Udaipur, Naswadi and Tilakwada Talukas of Baroda district and in parts of Panchmahal district, in middle Gujarat. In Chota Udaipur 88.62% of the population is tribal, while the figure is 84.54% and 50.67% for Naswadi and Tilakwada respectively. Hence this area is included as part of the



tribal pocket.

The name 'Rathwa' originates from their inhabiting the Rath or hilly and plateau area. They are presumed to belong to the same group as the Bhilalas of Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh and they maintain marital relations with them. The mythology of the Rathwas includes references to the land of Dhar, Raja Bhoj of Dhar, the throne of Alirajpur etc. (Jain, *Painted myths of creation*) The Bhils have resided in the Western Vindhyas. One of the earliest races in India, they have been brought into contact with all the racial migratons into India. In their own traditional lore the Bhils of Jhabua and Dhar trace their origin from the Rajputs. (*The Bhil track*) This intermingling of Bhil and Rajput blood is also found among the



Scenes from the Pithoro painting depicting the honeycomb and farming

Rathwas, many of whom bear Rajput and Brahmin clan names and worship Rajput heroes. The area of Bhil-Rathwas is contiguous, formerly part of Alirajpur and Chota Udaipur states respectively. Formerly a princely state under Rajput rule, Chota Udaipur became part of the Gujarat state in 1960. (Lal, *The Rathwas of Chota Udaipur*)

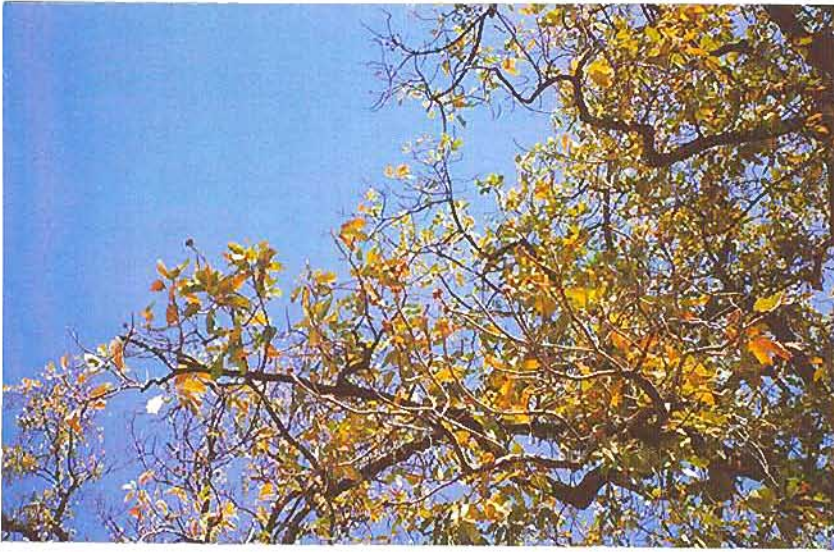
### TRADITION AND CHANGE AMONG THE RATHWAS OCCUPATION

The settling of the Rathwas has turned them into agriculturists.



Drying of makai and paapads at Pratapura

Their land is their principal means of occupation. The diversion of forest land for nonforest purposes lead to the Forest Conservation act of 1980, however it was only in the National Forest Policy of 1988 that special recognition was given to the symbiotic relationship between tribals and the forest. 87% of total tribal workers depend on agriculture for their livelihood.



*Above The Mahuda blooms out of which native liquor is distilled  
Below Storage of the gourds from which liquor is served*



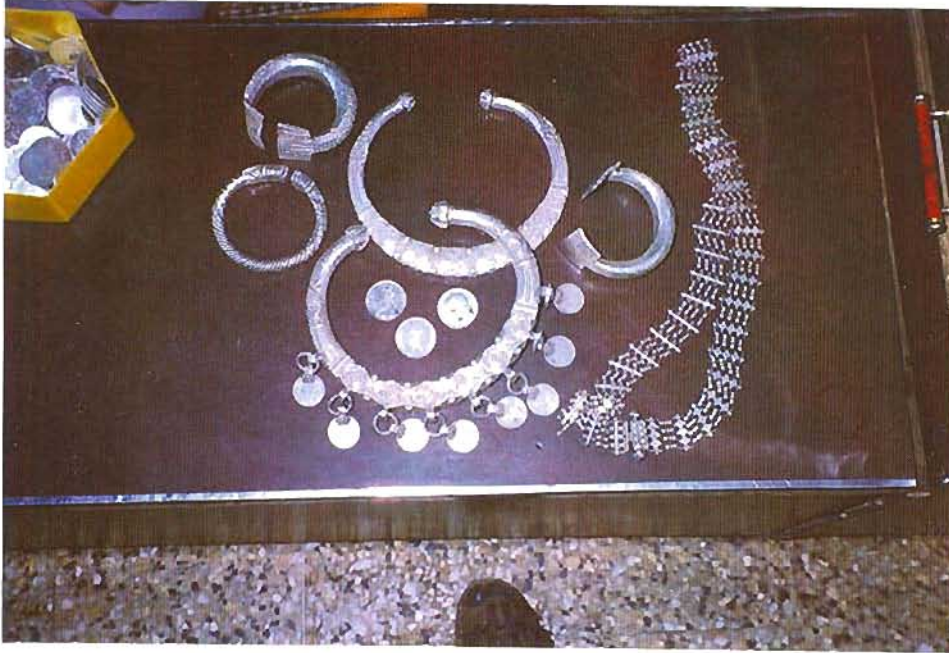
Although there is greater amount of land available for cultivation in Chota Udaipur taluka the density of population is also high for a backward area, 274 persons per 59 mile as compared to the state average of 290.

Among the Rathwas many still use crude means of cultivation and most rely on the rains rather than irrigation. Even those who have wells can irrigate only part of the field, so maximum productivity is not gained. Lack of agricultural productivity is responsible for indebtedness, land alienation etc. In India, 72% of the tribal population are indebted to non institutional sources (moneylenders, traders, friends etc.) while 4% take loans from institutional sources (banks, cooperatives etc.)

In Chota Udaipur, the crops grown are mostly cereals and pulses like makai, jowar, rice, dal, some

vegetables and cotton. The forests have trees like sal, mahuda, jamun, ber, kadam, neem, palm. Most of the forests remain in name only, with encroachment and depletion. During the dry season most work as labourers on the fields of richer non tribal farmers, Patidars or migrate for labour. (Many Rathwa families are bonded labourers for decades.) Collection of forest products like toddy, mahuda, beedi leaves and honey also earns them money. One of the most important socio economic activities is the 'Haat'. Every area has its own fixed day for the market. For example in Chota Udaipur the Haat is held on Saturday. Now factory and hand made items ranging from clothes, cosmetics to arrows and clay tawas are sold.

Nowadays, a significant number migrate to the cities of Baroda, Surat and Ahmedabad for coolie, construction labour, diamond polishing and semiskilled work in factories. The jobs as clerks etc. in government organisations are highly valued as they are viewed as fixed jobs.



*Pawned silver jewellery at a vanio's shop in Kawant*

members migrate on a semi permanent basis. Displacement is the biggest cause for socio- economic changes in the community. The contact with life in the cities has changed their lifestyle and expectations.



*Nayakda potter making Tawas at Kanalwa*

population. Such Rathwas are referred to as 'Sudhrelas'. Their language,dress, worship and eating habits are more Gujrati than Rathwi. The women wear sarees or salwaar suits instead of their traditional gaghra, kachvai and odhini. Even among the traditional Rathwas can be seen the custom of laaj or veiling. Thus the influence of mainstream culture (that can be traced to the 'Rajputisation' of the tribe before independence),

However the lack of supportive infrastructure for further education reduces the work opportunities.

### **SOCIAL LIFE**

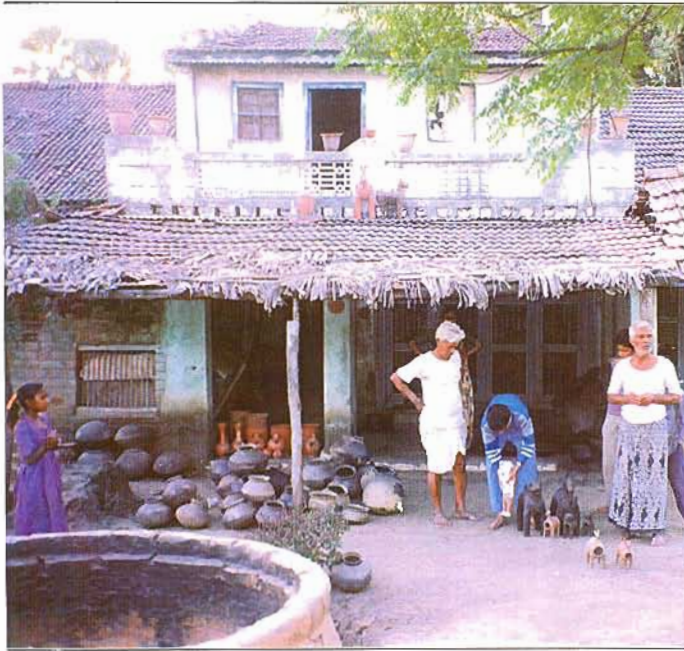
In the Rathwa village the houses are scattered and families are nuclear or in those villages where land is scarce, joint families are found. In the case of large families and little land, some

Simultaneously the city has come to the villager. Chota Udaipur and Kawant (the former commercial centre of the princely state) are towns where the Rathwas come in contact with mainstream culture. The migration of Rathwas to other places has affected family life with increasing cases of divorce. While the bond with their land and identity fades, they have adopted the lifestyle of the local Gujrati



*Slip decorated tawa made for 'craft' sales to non rathwas*

such villages will only decrease in the future.



*Kumhars who make wheel thrown votive figures for Rathwa offerings, Chota Udaipur*

## RELIGION

Among the Rathwas there are hierarchies on the basis of economics, power, lineage (whether traceable to a Rajput ancestor or not) and religion. The last two have increased as outcomes of the increasing 'Hinduisation' of the tribe. The religion of the Rathwas is now a combination of animistic religion (the attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomena) and Hindu rituals and beliefs. As yet the impact of Christianity and Islam is minimal or nonexistent. According to the Sisters, the issue of disease and cure, assistance provided by the

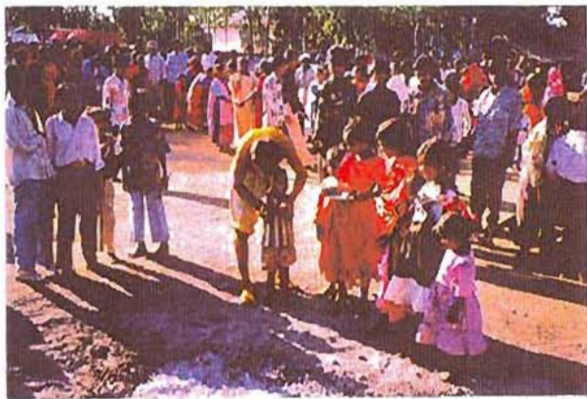
through such practices, cannot be denied. The men cut their hair and no longer wear the turban or langot. However their identity is revealed by the distinctive tattoos on their face, arms and legs. Among the second generation Rathwa immigrants and the educated all such cultural markers like traditional jewellery (gold is preferred to silver), dress, tattoos etc. are missing.

There are those interior villages where the orthodox Rathwa way of life continues. In these villages the prosperity of the tribals is obvious with large granaries and better health. Yet the number of

In the villages, Rathwas and tribal groups like Dhankas and Nayakdas are interdependent. Of these the Rathwas are considered superior. The other tribal families perform functions like announcement of weddings, delivering Rathwa babies etc. On a different level, the Nayakdas share a 'great tradition- little tradition' relationship with the Kumhar potters. The tawas used by the Rathwas are handmade by Nayakdas and are built on the broken pots made by the Kumhars. However all wheel made pots and votive figures are bought from the Kumhar. A number of potters have migrated from Gujarat to make such items for the Bhilalas in Madhya Pradesh.



*Shrine in Rathwa home, Raipur*



*Puja before Chul walking, Chota Udaipur*



*Bhagat at Pratapura village*

Catholic organisations, serve as experiences leading to their new faith.

The various Hindu sects have been influencing the socio religious lives of tribals in Gujarat for a long time. Most movements in the tribal areas of Gujarat have been an exercise in fostering social changes by adapting the moral and spiritual values of the 'Great tradition'.

(Lal, *Socio- religious movements among tribals of south Gujarat*) The festival of Holi is one such example.

All over central India the tribals celebrate the month of March as their agricultural cum fertility festival. This seems to have been combined together with the Hindu festival of Holi creating rituals which have tribal remnants like worship of the earth, fertility and sexuality. Rituals like Chul or coal walking, Badha (vow) undertaking, initiation of Badwos and crossdressing bear no connection to existing Hindu practices. Yet the Rathwas are 'educated'

about the 'meaning' of Holi by the Hindu sects. I met a Rathwa woman who believed that the origins of Holi were common for both Rathwas and Hindus, as she had been taught the story of Hiranyakashupu by the local Bhagat guru. In the village of Ambali, the Holi na dev (represented by the patlo or small bench) has also been assigned a place for worship amongst the other deities.



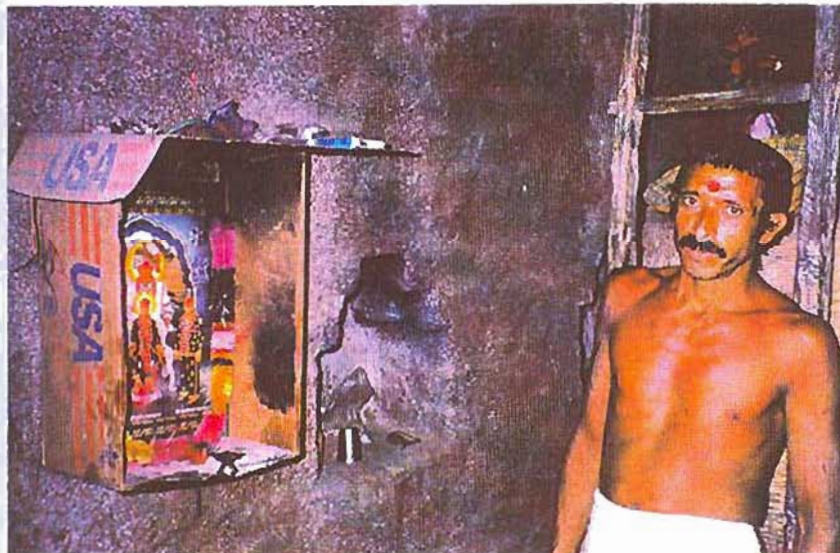
'Lavang' stones in a Rathwa home to ward off spirits, Baroj

The villages like Sadli and Raipur that are more Hinduised, make paapads for Holi whereas in the interior this custom is not there.

Simultaneously the tribal's need to be accepted by the mainstream motivates him to adopt the religion of a more powerful community. A number of Rathwas change their religion after becoming Sudhrelas or converting to one of the many sects like Swami Narayanan, Kabir pant

etc. Some turn to the Hindu way of life after associating the root causes of misery in their community as their traditional social life and habits.

The case of toddy is an example of how a tribal practice has



Above Religious posters in a house at Raipur  
Below Rathwa bhakt, Ambali,

degenerated. The adivasis tapped toddy and distilled liquor for themselves. In the beginning of the twentieth century the British introduced a new exise policy called the 'Madras system'. The rights to make and sell liquor was taken away from the adivasis and auctioned. Later the payment of money to a people who had no knowledge of such an economy led to the inevitable problems of indebtedness and alcoholism. This has become a repeated pattern in all encounters between tribal and mainstream economics and values, including the Rathwas where alcoholism is covertly supported through a bootlegger- police nexus.

Some social groups like the Harivallabh ashram were based on Gandhianism, addressing social change and deterioration within the adivasis. Some of the sects are in the

nature of conversionists, taking no interest in economic and political reforms. Conversely large sums of money are often collected for the

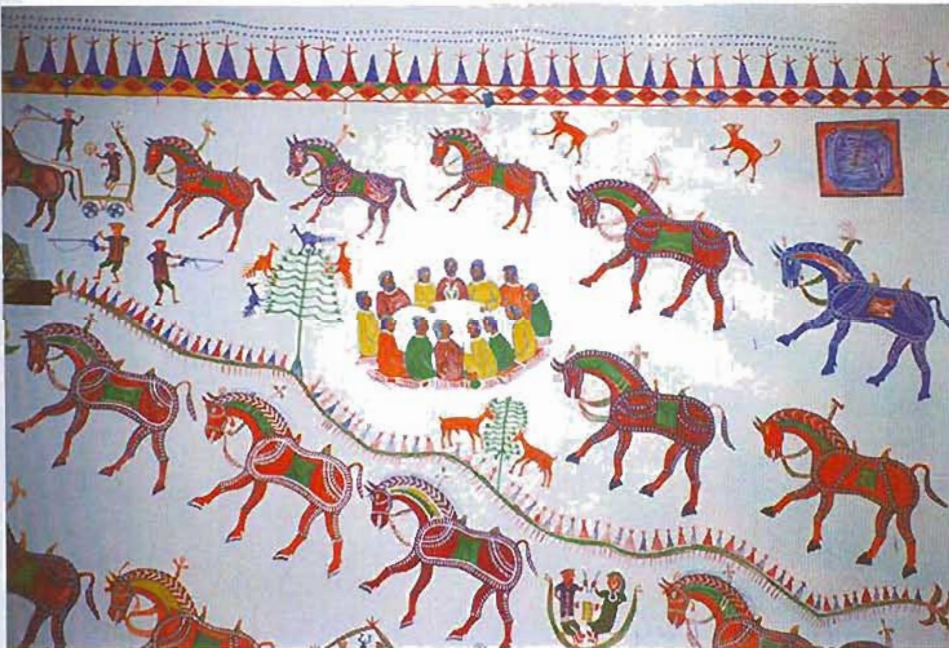
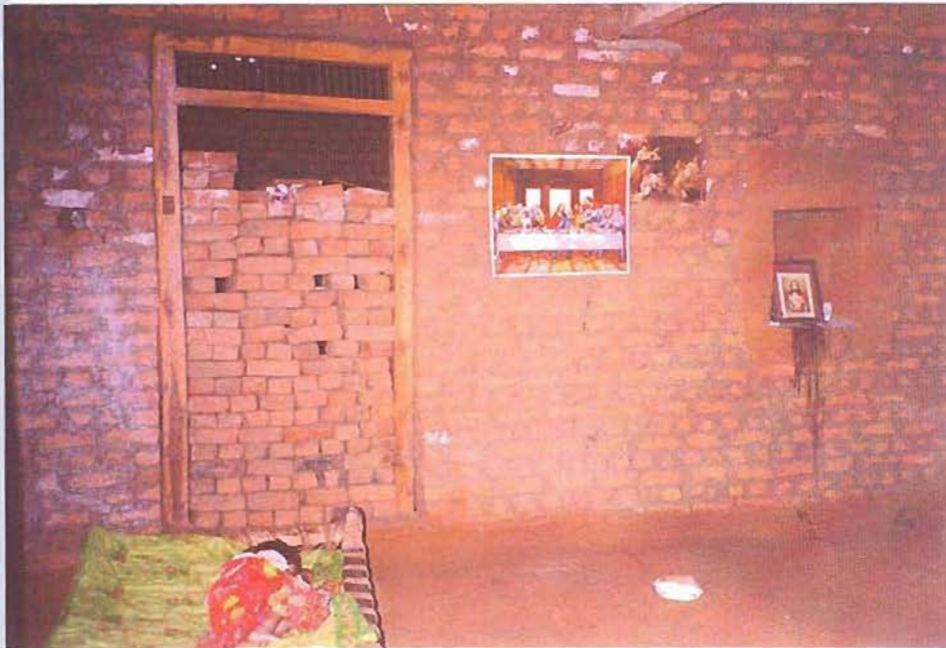
darshans and activities. A family I met in Ambali quoted this as the reason for their discontinuing the practice. Even after conversion, there is no 'equality' between the tribal converts and the sectarians. The Hindu tribals in turn maintain superiority in the village by not eating or drinking with the 'Nungras'(adivasi nonconverts). The staunch Bhagats even wear different coloured odhinis. Whether generated from within or without, the issue of socio- religious conversion has become a symbol of the fact that

for the adivasi, 'accommodation' has become the price of survival.

### POLITICISATION

Regarding the Rathwas the question for developmental workers is how to provoke the politicisation of the tribe. Although there is an MP and MLA from the tribe, there is no social activist of stature . Many Rathwas seem unaware or feel powerless about issues of exploitation. The Rathwa politicians and sarpanches are described as exploiters of their own people. In many cases the leaders of the villages are responsible along with local nontribals for forest depletion, exploitation, crime and harrassment in the villages. The presence of the 'powerful' mainstream system has led to the breakdown of traditional law,

and social structures within the community. This has left the community fragmented and disturbed.



*The chapel wall at Don Bosco incorporating the last supper  
The Catholic house above does not have a painting, Baroj*



Unused go-bar gas plant at Sursi

## DEVELOPMENT

The Indian tribal development programme did not take shape until the Fourth five year plan (1969-74). Under the Tribal sub plan (TSP) strategy since the Fifth five year plan (1974-79), the objectives have been: The socio economic development of the scheduled tribes and protection of tribes from

exploitation. This was introduced in a phased manner until the Seventh five year plan when it was applied to all tribes in India. Following TSP strategy, there are laws regarding exploitation by moneylenders and private traders, ban on transfer of tribal land to nontribals. Articles 15(4), 16(4), 17(5) of the Indian constitution provides for these. Despite the laws, exploitation and land alienation continues in nearly all states.

(A.B.Hiramani, *Cultural Correlates of Tribal Health*)

Transistor and schoolbag from a Pithoro painting in Baroj



One of the disruptive tendencies in virtually every developing

country is the emergence of a 'dual economy'. Two different patterns of living, widely separated even though living side by side leads to social and political tensions. (Schumacher, *Small is beautiful*) Family life collapses, psychological structures like social cohesion, cooperation, interdependence and self respect disappear. The rapid process of socio economic change leads to deculturation, in this case detribalisation. It implies the dropping or rejection of tribal modes of behaviour and adoption of other standards of behaviour. The challenge for people who study such cultures like sociologists, anthropologists, designers etc. is to make their work improve the quality of the life of the tribal people.

Civilised man has destroyed the environment that sustains him. Among material resources the greatest is the land. By depleting the natural resources of new lands



*Traditional dress of Rathwa men, the  
Kohta, Chota Udaipur museum*

he creates an ecological and cultural problem for the tribals who inhabit that land. In Chota Udaipur taluka the discovery of fluorspar/ dolomite deposits below the soil has lead to the growth of factories and mines. (Baroda district is the second largest supplier of dolomite in India.) The trenches left after quarrying are defined as 'water reservoirs' by project

officers. Once mined the land cannot be reused for any other purpose. There is no facility for irrigation although the first water shed is being constructed to tap the rain water. The economy of the tribals revolved around the forest. Although the forest policy mentions local needs, the investment policy is attuned to the economic needs of the wider society. Roads are stated to be for the economic development of the tribals but their main effect seems to be stimulation of commodity production. Proof of this is the rise of commercial centres in tribal districts.

A number of N.G.Os undertake projects in the villages. However as attitudinal changes have not been tackled the visible rewards are few. The villages of Sursi, Baroj and Ambala have been provided with constructed latrines which are unused or used for storage of crops. Prevailing attitudes towards health and sanitation ensure that most have no separate cattle shed, sanitary latrine or proper drainage. The provided gobar gas plants also remain unused due to misconceptions. The health of the tribals especially those without forest resources or land remains poor with higher female morbidity. This is due to poor nutrition, anaemia, frequent pregnancies (refer figures on page 28) and manual tasks like agricultural work, collecting water and firewood.

In the field of education, there is disparity between the state literacy rate (60.91%) and tribal literacy rate (21.14%), a disparity that increases when compared to the literacy rate of Rathwas (11.9%). Education of girls lags far behind in this tribe, with a female literacy rate of

3.2%. The lack of higher education and supportive infrastructure means that technical posts in the tribal area are occupied by nonadivasis. Most tribal youth prefer to get instant money through labour and during the dry season, migration is at its peak. The past three decades has recorded the changes in occupations due to migration. The number of cultivators has dropped in favour of migratory work like agricultural labour, bonded labour, industries and construction work. (Lal, *Emerging tribal situation in Gujarat*)

The nature of formation of the elites within the tribe, determines the future politicisation and identity of the tribe. These tribal elites are mediators between the outside world and the tribe. Within the Rathwas the lack of requisite political will shown by representatives of the tribe has also undermined the possibility of an alternative developmental process and hastened the loss of tribal identity.

'Development' to be real must be total, it must transcend purely economic dimensions to include the tribe's social and cultural well being as well. It must be based on the rights of the tribals as human beings. The mishandling of tribal interaction has reduced the tribal in Gujarat from a free spirit to the 'mental cast of a Hindu of the depressed class'. (Lal, *Socio religious movements among tribals of South Gujarat*) This created inferiority complex combined with economic necessity can destroy an entire way of life.



Changes in dress visible at the Gher at Kawant

## SOME DEMOGRAPHIC FIGURES

All statistical figures have been obtained from the census reports of the Government of India (Population and literacy) and studies by Tribal research and Training Institute (Morbidity and mortality)

### Population

Population of Gujarat 1991		Tribal population in Gujarat 1991		Rathwa population 1991	
<i>Total</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>% off state population</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% off tribal population</i>
41,309,582		61,61,775	14.92	3,03,411	4.92

### Literacy

Literacy rate for Gujarat state 1991			Literacy rate for scheduled tribes in Gujarat 1991	Literacy rate for Rathwas in Gujarat 1991		
<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Persons</i>
72.54	48.50	60.91	21.14	20.4	3.2	11.9

### Morbidity

Illness episode in tribal Gujarat, according to sex, during 1996-97:

<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>
163	46.4	193	53.6	356

Cause of illness in % as reported in tribal Gujarat, n= 323 :

<i>Malaria</i>	<i>Anaemia</i>	<i>Fever</i>	<i>Diarrhoea</i>	<i>Scabies</i>	<i>T.B</i>
34.4	28.5	14.8	16.4	1.0	4.0

### Mortality

Cause of death in % as reported in tribal Gujarat, n=207:

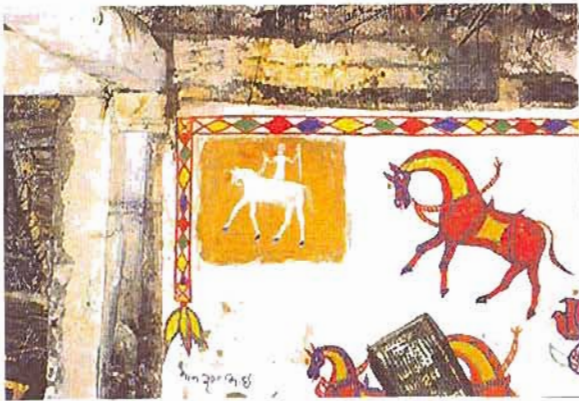
<i>Diarrhoea/ Cholera</i>	<i>Asthma</i>	<i>Fever</i>	<i>Stomach pain</i>	<i>Delivery</i>	<i>Anaemia</i>	<i>Fit</i>
37	14.8	14.8	14.8	11.2	3.7	3.7



Version of the Pithoro painting at the Chota Udaipur museum

### THE RELIGIOUS ART OF THE RATHWAS- the Pithoro painting

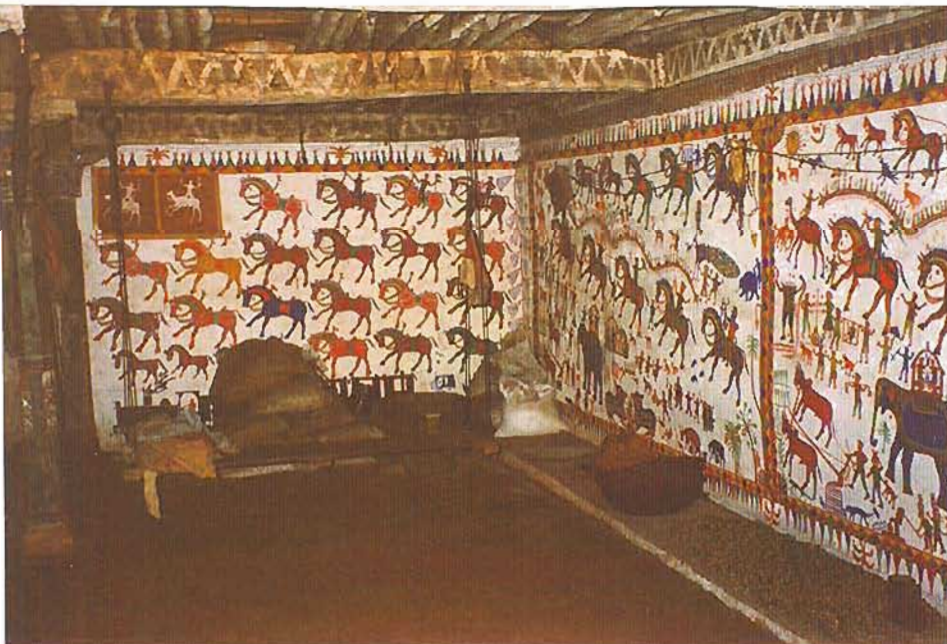
A cultural study of the Rathwas would be incomplete without studying their unique art of wall painting. Against the backdrop of their religious mythology, it remains an extremely powerful, visual record of change and the way this tribe view themselves and the nontribal.



Nakti Bhutan, the spirit is painted on the left side wall in order to appease it

Located in the religious worship of the Rathwas, the Pithoro painting is for the non Rathwa, an unique combination of art and craft, one that like any living art form has changed over time. The painting is installed on the advice of the Badwo (shaman) to resolve infertility of lands or family, misfortune etc. and to sustain prosperity. The two Gods who have the powers to do this are Pithoro

and his uncle Ind. The idea of vow taking 'Badha rakhvu' and vow

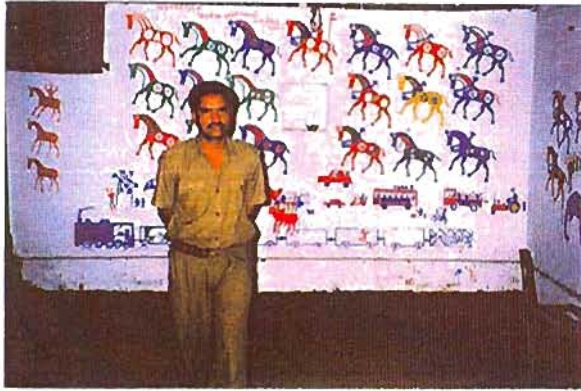


Interior of Rathwa house showing position of the painting, Malajo

breaking 'Badha uttarvu' forms the cycle of renunciation, propitiation and release. The kind of propitiation needed can vary. The prominent ones are the installation of Pithoro, the Ind ceremony, 'chul' (coal) walking and 'gol pheriyo' (hook swinging).

The painting challenges our notions of the process by which we construct and interpret meaning. For the

Rathwas, who speak a dialect called Rathwi but have no written script,



The depiction of the forest officer, police is a symbol of power for the Rathwas



Above Bhinth Thukvanu, spray painting over a stencil  
Below Magan Veerka, Pratapura



our definitions of reading and writing did not hold true. The act of painting is Lakhvu (to write) not Dorvu (to draw) and the artists are called 'Lakharas' or writers. The process of recording oral myth through the painting is akin to writing. The process of writing is viewed as magical and the reading of that writing forms the ritual. (Pandya, *Made in culture*) The act of painting and writing is completed only after it has been read or interpreted (Vanchnar) by an individual who is not the writer. The Badwo (shaman, healer) is the person who 'reads' and interprets the painting.

For the Rathwas, of whom 89% are illiterate the act of 'lakhvu' is something powerful. Nowadays the artist and Badwo even sign their names in Gujrati in a corner of the paintings. A visual image when made by hand can either be drawn or cut (Bhinth Kapvanu) or sprayed (Bhinth Thukvanu). The Pithoro painting uses the former method. Nowadays, instead of a knife, a pencil is used to draw the outline.

Abstract concepts are visualised with great creativity. Regarding the idea of fate, the painting depicts two sisters- Lekha and Jokha, who at the door of the other world maintain the account book of each Rathwa's deeds. The powers of inscribing and assessing are associated with them. Further the agricultural year is divided into the cold season- Lekha for cultivation, and Jokha- the other half when activities are suspended. The Holi festival coincides with this period of fallowness and regeneration. During this short period, between the shooting of the first bamboo and end

of Holi, neither painting installations nor marriages are conducted.

### A symbol of change

The origins of the myth of Pithoro and the earlier versions of paintings associated with it are found among the Rathwas (Bhilalas) of Madhya Pradesh. Initial versions depicted only the line of



Lekha and Jokha, Malajo

horses in the marriage scene against the background of the mud wall. Unlike the ornate, colourful paintings in Gujarat where human riders represent the Gods, traditionally the horses themselves represented the Gods. (Jain, *Painted myths of creation*) It is difficult to find old paintings as wall paintings are a living art form but I viewed one painting about 30 years old, in the house of Magan Veerka of Pratapura. It shows hardly any other elements except for the horses. The ornateness of the new paintings with



its depiction of roads, transportation, village life etc. is missing.

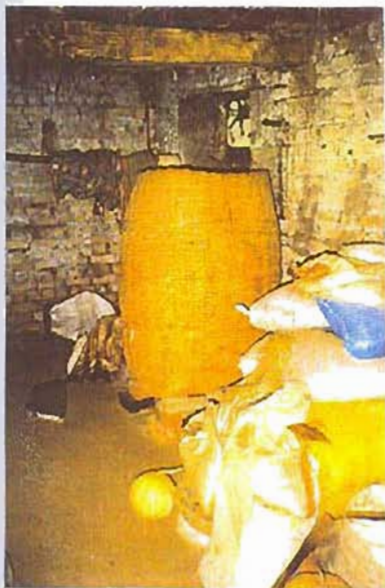
According to Lallo badwo of Baroj he paints modern scenes because "Earlier we did not even have slippers. A cycle was a rare sight. When they had come newly I decided to paint them in. Later we painted clocks and radios. By painting these items we feel that Pithoro and the family possess them." The painting displays the resources and people who are important in Rathwa life. Powerful men like the Vanio and forest police, resources like the gunnery, granary and consumer items are shown. The resulting ornateness of the painting has also become a symbol of prestige.



The painting can be viewed as a definition and

Above Painting in the house of the Badwo of Baroj  
Below An activity around the painting

redefinition where tradition and change are constantly interacting to



create new meanings. Hence the painting cannot be approached as a fixed form. Jyotindra Jain talks about the importance of change in the painting:

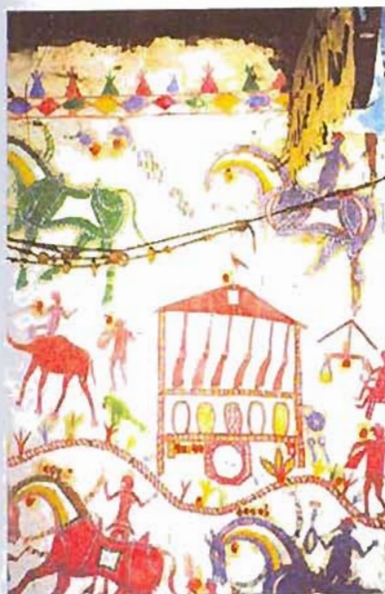
"A detailed documentation of the positioning, shifts and growth of nonsacred images might reveal stages of the response that the convention bound tribal had of his modern other." (*Five contemporary folk and tribal artists*)

The painting is best viewed as an evolving story, the elements of which are constantly changing thereby altering the location and importance of the myth itself.

### Formation of the Pithoro style

The transformation of a symbolic 'art' form to a sign 'style' form is a process of relevance to communication theory. Similar to the wall paintings of Warli and Madhubani, with exposure and publicity, the Pithoro style has evolved. The badwas and lakharas now paint either the whole painting or parts of it on small pieces of cloth and paper, to sell as art or craft items depending on whether the product is sold anonymously or not. Some 'artists' have broken away from the myth and paint anything they wish to. NGO's and organisations like Gurjari encourage the commoditisation of this form as a response to the existence of a modern consumer and the economic needs of the tribals. The artists are also hired to paint the walls of private, ethnic- chic houses. The loss of original meaning has opened this style to new uses, prominently ahistorical borrowing by artists and designers.

This relocation of a tribal, religious wall painting into the craft emporium, mela, art gallery and ultimately the walls of middle class Indians or foreign tourists creates an entirely new dialectic within which to approach the Pithoro painting. While the mainstream has redefined a place for their art, the tribe itself is slowly discontinuing the practice as they are directly or indirectly forced to give up their tribal lifestyle and religion.



Above Granary and gunnery, symbols of wealth and power, in the painting, Malajo



Scene from the marriage procession, Gods Pithoro and Hudol

# Analysis

I view the Pithoro painting as a well designed form of communication, a story that lends itself to poetry and interpretation, a religious art form based on a myth, dear to the Rathwas that basically tells the story of the marriage of Pithoro, the family god or 'Dev' to Pithori. My initial fascination with the painting led, in the course of the project, to working on the subject of the people themselves. In addition to using the literal interpretation, I extended the narrative to connect with the issue of tribal identity and its alienation. The painting thus formed a very important symbolic part of the film.



Above Depiction of the Panghu ceremony in the painting, Malajo  
Below The actual ceremony, Gabadia



The different elements of the painting belong to the worlds of the traditional, ie. mythical as well as the worldly. In the earthly we find the village and the city, the adivasi and the outsider, the vanio and the forest officer. The changed world that the Rathwas find themselves in, is expressed dynamically and creatively- a statement of the tribal's ability to adapt. Unfortunately this ability has been presumed upon and exploited to the advantage of

the nonadivasi. Ideally when two cultures meet, both must meet each other

halfway. However the meeting of adivasi and nonadivasi has become a form of neocolonisation, in India. Mainstream Indian society has little awareness and consequently even less respect for tribals. Much of my information strengthened this viewpoint. This lopsided interaction was creating various kinds of problems for the Rathwas.



*Above The sprouts in the Akhada  
Below Worship of the Kado branches  
during the Panghu, Gabadia*



Whether a relationship of profession- migration, religion- conversion, environment- exploitation, the Rathwa was moving and being moved away from his home, community and identity. While dealing with the issue of alienation the tone of the film had to avoid the dangers of exoticising tribals but simultaneously present their culture as a valuable one, with a distinct religion, economic system etc.

# Conceptualisation

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To make a film 'within' a Culture, that the filmmaker does not belong to (Rathwas in this particular case) implies showing and seeing some thing that is a distance displaced from the image maker's culture and (if the audience is not Rathwa) also the image consumer's culture. Keeping this factor and the client's brief as the constraints to be worked within, the conceptualising was undertaken.

## First possible treatment: Dialogue approach

An integration of the story I wish to tell and the story the Rathwas themselves wish to tell about themselves. This would be the foundation for a consultative meeting with Rathwas, based on previous relationship built with individuals within the community. The 'stock' images of tribals are of vibrant colourful people attending festivities and having a romanticised life style Juxtaposed to the presence of the film maker are the people who are involved in the making of the film.

Developing the script structure: The following two procedures could be-

A. "Inside to Outside"

What problems are articulated by Rathwas ?

Themes could be financial, spiritual, political, ecological, changing times and standards of life, medicine, health, etc.

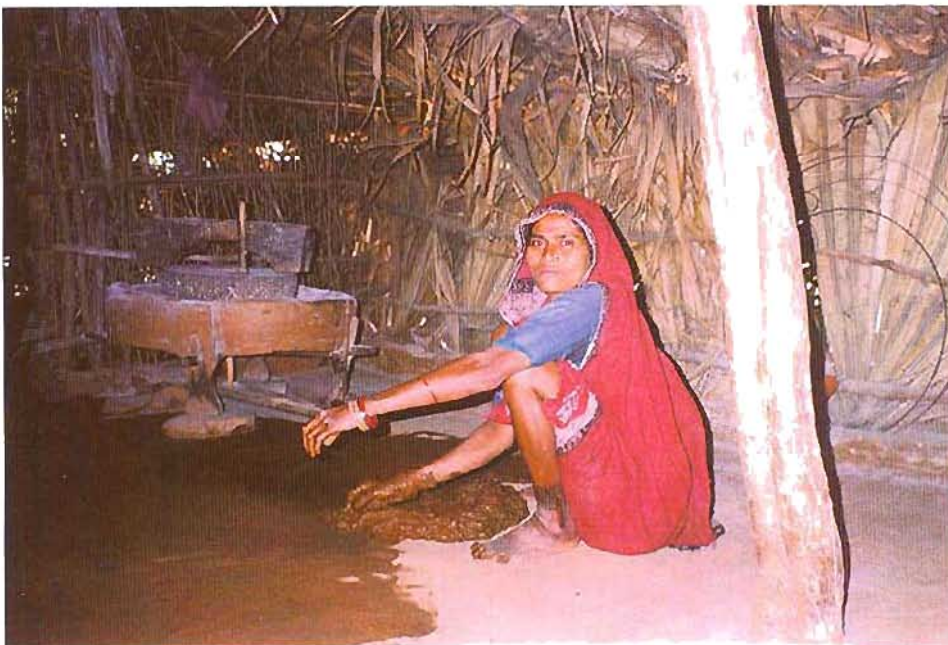
B. "Outside to Inside"

What are the images of a tribe and what is the related or non related reality ?

There is no single, monolithic Rathwa tribe. For example the stereotype of the lazy, drunk, violent,

### Possible characters

*Wife of the ex Pujaro of Ambali, accused of being a Dakin, issue of tribal religion*



superstitious, poor Rathwa. (The film could have a collage of some stereotypical statements made by the non-Rathwas about the Rathwas and the investigation of the actual situation). The second step would be to take one of the above procedure and then create the footage to be edited, to create a dialogue of the images and narratives. (Here the film maker facilitates a conversation between two "world views"). Take up a plot from the health worker's meeting and go to the villages to show the story as



**Possible characters**

Above Ringlo in front of his shrine  
Below On the 'gol phereo' during his initiation to become a Badwo, Ambala, issue of tribal religion

unfolded by the Rathwa narrator.

Visually the extra material that can be used are the painting, the walls of the Bhagats or transformed Rathwas, the fairs, healing by Badwo and doctors, life in the city and the village. The idea is to debunk the stereotypical notion of a Rathwa and show the real complexity as perceived by the people.

**Second possible treatment: Biographical Vignettes**

This is to select three or four individuals for five to six minutes

visual and narrative biography to be composed in the context they are in and bring out a common theme in their lives. Like say presenting them with a common situation as to what it is to be in the city and the village.

The biographies can also be used to deal with issues like 'tribal and mainstream'. Some themes could



be- Worker in Chota Udaipur (factory) and in his village (field), Going for treatment to the hospital and the alternative of being healed by the Badwo.

### Third possible treatment: Issue and Theme aspect

This is a kind of film in which the film maker dominates as the interpreter of the image presented in the film. The film maker is the

narrator or the story teller. Time is spent on creating scripts with 'segments' to be shot or 'staged' based on a script created before shooting. Needless to say the film maker is doing the scripting based on previous research.

This treatment could be regarded as a compromised blend of message transmission and something endemic to culture. For



#### *Possible images for a film on the tribal toddy culture*

*Above Animal sacrifice during the Panghu, toddy and meat are both banned by the Bhagats*

*Below Serving of toddy at a Panghu gathering, Gabadia*

example if the theme of the film is 'Alcoholism' the script could cover the following- Role of Alcohol in the Rathwa culture, it's making and the legend, the role it plays in the rituals, the ceremonial procedure it is handled in, the rhetoric of it's abuse and use, the tension and conflict-

corruption, dry state, the Bhakts and the response. Can it be banned, should it be banned ? Is it a political problem of outsiders versus insiders ?



After discussion with the client, the issue based approach was chosen and further concepts were generated.

## SOME INITIAL CONCEPTS

### **'TAADI' the culture and subculture of toddy**

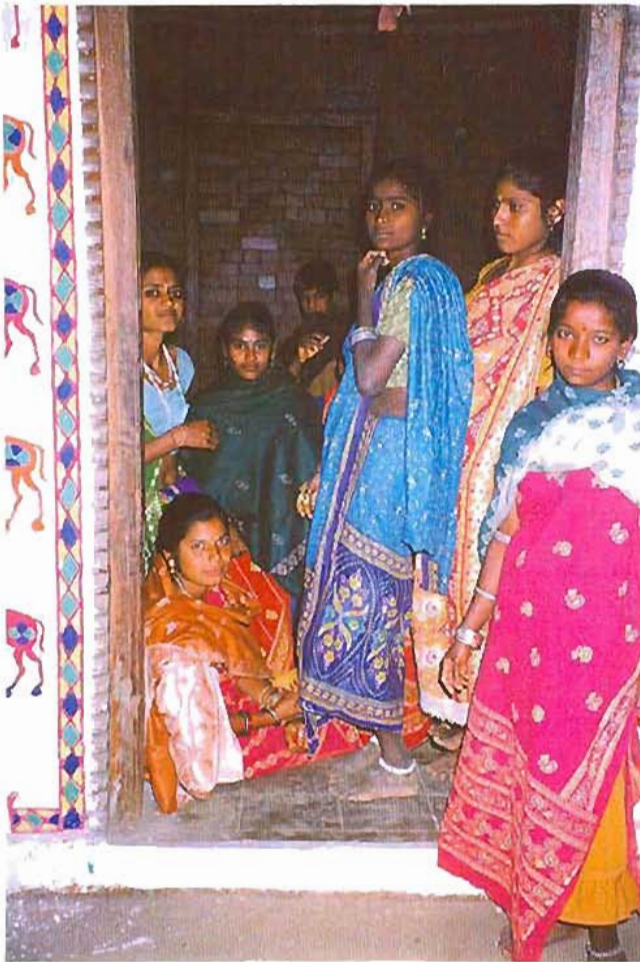
The image of a tribal as prone to alcoholism is common. The images conjured up by toddy consumption among the Rathwas are similar. Before policies and moral pronouncements are made on these tribals, one must consider the culture of liquor within the Rathwas and the reactions of non Rathwas to this issue.

Toddy and mahuda are made and consumed within their villages. The legend of how toddy drinking came to be reflects their view of what 'drinking' is about. Toddy is used not just in the notion of drinking 'to get drunk' but also in ceremonial usage and as a normal part of their daily life. Ironically the ban has spread a culture of alcohol abuse. Do representatives of the mainstream like the policy makers and nontribal bhakt sects consider the difference in the cultures

of consumption between the tribal's and the non tribal's? What reactions does this create within the Rathwas?

The film while considering the issue of alcoholism is not a debate about the act. Instead it will look at the issue in the context of

tribal culture with opinions of both sides. Using the theme of toddy it raises the question of how the Rathwa culture relates to and is often made secondary to that of the mainstream.



**Change in dress**  
Rathwa girls during the Panghu ceremony, Gabadia

**Tribal culture** Memorial stones for ancestors





*Worshipping the earth and chul or 'Yoni' as a symbol of the female cosmic entity, Holi, Panibhar*

## **'LAND OF THE RATHWAS' the Rathwa's relationship with his land**

Land for the Rathwa is the basis of his identity. The possession of land ensures him a place in the community, it symbolises security and continuity. A man gains prestige and power by virtue of the amount of land he owns. A Rathwa is his land. The topography of the land tells us these stories. Socio-economically his life is tied up with his land. The primary productivity of the land is agricultural. The traditional divisions of the land into forest and clearing, portions the areas for religious worship from the area of cultivation. The year was divided into Lekha and Jokha- a time for cropping and a time for fallowness. Human life, marriages, rituals follow this agricultural division of the year.

New methods of farming, new crops, watershed development, hand pumps also aim to increase the productivity of the land. Land is used for other purposes- it is leased out for dolomite mining and brick making. The land shows the implementation of various projects, gobar gas plants and latrines and other developmental work. Tribals live on land they fought for and won from the reserved forests. Land has been the basis for the tribe's identity, developmental policies,

*Gram dev near Gabadia*



remuneration and exploitation.

The film will show this multifaceted relation between Rathwas and their land through a journey into the land and the encounters with the tribals who live there.

## 'ALIENS IN THEIR OWN LAND'- an illustration of tribal identity and alienation

Under this theme a number of issues dealing with aspects of tribal culture like their religion, economy, integrated lifestyle etc. are conveyed through the example of the changes occurring among the Rathwas. The negative impact of these changes and the alienation of Rathwas from their land, their integrated religion- economy- lifestyle

structure are raised as the issue of the video. The attitudes of nontribals are also indicated through their display of stereotyped views of the tribals. The video ends by asking where such alienating change can lead to for the Rathwas and numerous other tribes in India.

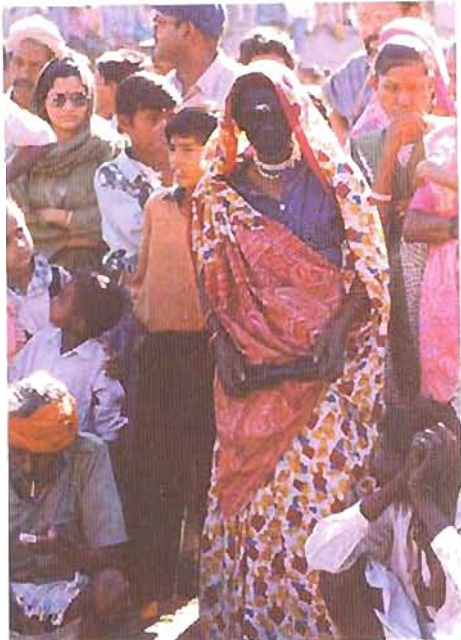
In this structure the tribal and mainstream are made to interact with each other



Above Fishing at the village of Asar, Holi

Below Characters from the Holi melo, Kali Mashi and Dudhiyo, examples of cross dressing and sexuality on display

as every section like occupation, religion etc. is dealt with one after another.



### Selection of concept:

After discussing the various possibilities with the client the concept 'Aliens in their own land' was selected, as it was felt that it was more wholistic in it's view. The other ideas like toddy and relevance of land could be integrated into the script of this concept.

DESCRIPTION	SOUNDTRACK
Opening shot of the Panghu ceremony, process of painting of the Pithoro scenes from the painting	Music of flutes, the recitation by the Badwos. V.O introduces the Rathwas, the ceremony and its relevance to their identity as cultivators.  "Painting the wedding of their god Pithoro, is a ritual by which the Rathwas sustain the fertility of the land and along with it sustain their economy through agriculture. The painting is also a depiction of the lives of the Rathwas and the manner in which they view themselves.
Dissolve from the farmer in the painting to actual farming scenes	Scenes of cultivation are an integral part of the painting and their identity. The concept of time is also centred around agriculture- Lekha and Jokha-
Interview with lakhara Fatiyo or Badwo to describe the relevance of Pithoro, Babo Ind, Barmatho no dev, and elements, to agriculture.	a period of cropping and a period of fallowness.  Once slash and burn cultivators the Rathwas are now settled agriculturists, but it is their unique identity as tribal cultivators that distinguishes them from other farming communities."
Title appears 'Aliens in their own land'	
Interview with old Rathwa about the forests in his days scenes from the painting depicts the roads, the railways and the various modes of transportation used by the outsiders	OCCUPATION "The forests once belonged to the tribals although not in the manner of possession and exploitation. Gradually the resources of the forest have attracted a number of outsiders. Land was divided and occupied. Roads now help carry out resources even from the interiors- the timber of trees cut down from the tribal's forest, the minerals quarried from beneath his land. Many inroads have been made in the name of modernisation and change. These roads bring along with them new meanings and new expectations. But, for the Rathwa where does this road lead to?
dissolve to actual transportation scenes, trucks entering villages empty and coming out full shot of trees, dolomite mines, brickmaking	
Interviews dealing with land holding patterns, change in occupation, roaming nature of the	The Rathwa's identity has been affected by the changes in occupation. Those who cultivate the

tribals, reasons for migration, kind of jobs taken- bonded labour, diamond polishing, construction work, disruption of family life, breaking up of interdependence

Interview with diamond polisher, construction workers, Rathwa families, Mathew

cut back to Panghu ceremony

scenes from painting depicting the ancestors, gods, Rathwa worshipping the thaml

pictures of Hindu and Christian gods and shrines inside Rathwa houses, the irony of the integrated picture at Don Bosco and the empty wall in a catholic house

Interview with Bhagat maharaj, Rathwas worshipping at temple

soil remain rooted both to the land and the Rathwa identity. Due to a variety of reasons, a number of Rathwas migrate to jobs outside their homes. This migration leads to a gradual uprooting from their families, their villages and as a result from all that defines them as a tribal community. The adopting of mainstream Gujrati lifestyles and values from cities like Baroda and Ahmedabad quickens the process of alienation.

These new occupations displace the Rathwas from the culture of a tribal farming community to that of faceless manual labour- an identity caught between the land and work not of the land."

RELIGION "The Rathwas depended on and respected nature. To this purpose their religion, their occupation and their environment were integrated. Worship and cultivation both happen in the forest. The Rathwas see the spirits of their gods and ancestors in the trees, the rivers and the mountains around them.

Similar to the changes in their identity as cultivators is the increasing change in their belief system. Their adivasi religion lays emphasis on the worship of spirits- of their ancestors and of the forests and the mountains. Their gods are seen as residing with them in their houses as part of their family. This acceptance of their traditional gods as a natural part of their life and the rituals associated with their worship are being replaced by a new belief system. (dominance of Bhajans over Badwos bol)

The attempt to convert the adivasi is based on the idea that he lacks an organised religion. Many mainstream religions attempt to uplift the spiritual life of the adivasi. The tribal beliefs and values are rejected as being baseless and certain

Interview with Kul Singh, Ambali, Bhagat, Praptura, Ringlo, Ambala- perception of the difference between Bhagat and Nungra, link between social status and religion, difference between Dev and Bhagwan

Cut back to the Panghu ceremony, worship in front of the painting, related scenes from the painting

Cut back to the honey comb, mahuda tree in the painting, distilling and drinking of mahuda, dissolve from the toddy tapper to actual scene

shots of daily and ritual use of toddy, interview with badwo

Interview with Elsen about the impact of imfl

Interview with tribal- about the ver, availability of imfl, toddy versus hard drinks

ritual practices are banned. For all Rathwa Bhagats the need to assert identity change is expressed through the denial of toddy and meat. This has created new divisions and heirarchies within the community. Some cope with both influences, by combining tribal rituals with offerings of coconuts and gur water.

For many adivasis the implicit connection between conversion to a mainstream religion and becoming part of the mainstream, provides the motivation for the identity change.

Living in a reconstituted world, these changes in their traditional beliefs have trapped the Rathwa between the tribal and mainstream value system.

TODDY "The painting depicts the various resources of their environment that the Rathwas live on. Honey collecting and the making of Mahuda are important seasonal activities. Such activities construct the life and culture of the Rathwas The toddy tree is also an important symbol of their tribal lifestyle.

In contrast to this cultural acceptance of toddy is the value system of the mainstream whether spread by the religious sects or the law makers.

Ironically it is the arrival of the outsider, the bootlegger that has caused the conversion of many rathwas from drinking toddy and mahuda to harder, alcoholic drinks. The ban on native and foreign liquor in the state has created a nexus of corruption between the police and the daruwallahs, out of which everybody profits except the Rathwa. The new socio economic conditions, the

availability of instant money from majdoori have made drinking hard liquor an attraction. This creates new meanings for drinking as an activity only to get intoxicated on. Trapped between the law, the bootlegger and the bhagat maharaj, the culture of native liquor has given way to that of alcoholism.

Interviews with mainstream reps. like the policeman, shopkeeper, project officer- primitiveness, development, stereotypes like alcoholism, poverty etc.

Images from serial, song at the bus station statements from young tribals about their identity, values, confusion

Cut back to Panghu ceremony

Complete painting, the traditional elements and the modern ones

interview with badwo about the modern elements in the painting

overloaded jeeps travelling down the road

Cultural collage with tribal music

End with the full shot of the painting

The Rathwas like many other tribes in India have been overburdened with the meanings and values assigned to them by the nontribal.

The media like film and songs also reinforce the stereotyped ideas about tribals and the superiority of the mainstream life."

CULTURE "The Pithoro painting depicts the coexistence of the two worlds, not only the earthly and the spiritual, but the adivasi and the outsider. With a sense of vitality and creativity the symbols of the outside world have been integrated into the traditional lifestyle and values of the Rathwas.

Outside the forests have decreased and the roads have increased in length. As the Rathwas travel down this road, it carries them further away from their tribal identity, alienating them from their culture. (dominance of traffic sounds over tribal music)

In the world of their Gods the Rathwas have created a space for the mainstream, however the mainstream has not created any space for the adivasi."

**Feedback on script:**

From this final script to the actual product further changes were made in the structure of the narrative. Whereas the earlier structure introduced the mainstream- tribal tension from the beginning, the later structure attempted to establish the tribe of Rathwas first and raise issues according to the traditional world view of the tribe itself.

As religion, was viewed as encompassing all activities among the Rathwas, the issue of religious change was dealt with first. This lead to points like the rupture of the traditional religion- occupation- economy association and its replacement with new belief systems. Moving from here the video deals with changes in values, divisions in the tribe, presence of the mainstream, exploitation of tribal resources, displacement, marginalisation and ultimately the spectre of ethnocide. Interviews with Rathwas, nontribals from Chota Udaipur, tribal experts, lawyers etc. create a dialogue within themselves to emphasise the points made by the commentary.

# Production

## **The village shoot:**

Even though we were ready, the shoot schedule remained undecided, because of the onset of the monsoons. We had already been warned that the access roads to the interior villages would be cut off due to the rain. Doubtful about whether we could carry equipment and trek it to the village, we decided to shoot in the villages nearer the road. The second problem was would there be people to shoot ? As it was their long awaited rainy season almost all the Rathwas would be in the fields. After waiting for a month and finding that we were running out of time, we decided to brave it. Fortunately for the entire week we were at Chota Udaipur, there was hardly any rainfall.

I left for Chota Udaipur a day earlier to organise the shoot. As we (the crew consisting of Fr. Devasaya, Fr.Kishore and I) were staying with the Catholic missionaries, accomodation was taken care of. Reaching Chota Udaipur, I contacted Mr. Subash Issai, my guide to the area when I had first visited in January. He put me in touch with Mr. Nair who would help us to go to some villages (that were not visited by the missionaries). Thus by combining our contact resources we were able to visit a variety of villages.

The first day of the shoot seemed the most difficult as it took time for the process to fall into a rhythm. We visited the village of Ganthia whose Badwo was a local celebrity and has featured in other films too. The route to Ganthia was dry but extremely rocky. Reaching the headman's house we camped there and started rolling the camera. The Badwo was away and I realised that we would have to inform the people in the next village before arriving. Luckily since it was close by it was possible. Unlike the controlled shoots I was used to, I could not presume that people would be available. We decided to work the rest of the shoot by ear, finishing general shots and leaving only specific ones for particular villages. The presence of forest rangers frustrated our attempts to get people to talk. I decided to conduct the rest of the

interviews with no other outsider (except the three who formed the crew), excepting for those where the guide's presence was essential. After spending the morning in Ganthia we left for Gabadia. As I knew the Badwo of the village we were able to make him stay back for the shoot. With the afternoon session we made better progress. We completed the interviews with the Badwo and a Bhagat in the village. The light was dimming so we decided to return the next morning.

Day two started with the shoot at Gabadia. It involved the sections dealing with the Pithoro painting and the enactment of the ritual for which we provided the required props (a chicken, coconuts, incense and oil). However the Badwo refused to chant for the camera. We also completed the interview with Amar Singh, a young Rathwa whose help was valuable. As the tribal women were very shy, we decided to shoot them when we visited the other villages with the Sisters. In the afternoon we visited the Hindu village of Punyavant where we interviewed a young Bhagat, Rai Singh and the school teacher. Our guide's contacts were useful in this village. The interviewing was a tricky process as people were suspicious, especially the educated tribals and nontribals. We projected the film as being about developing tribals and 'uplifting' them and were only then able to get answers. While shooting the opinions of the local nontribals, like shopkeepers, we wished we had a hidden camera as the strongest

prejudices were only voiced off camera.

The third day was spent shooting entirely in Chota Udaipur. We recorded the presence of the Rathwas at the bus stop, the bazaar etc. Our guide was also able to get us an interview with the PSI of the taluka. In the afternoon we documented the adivasi workers at a local dolomite factory and interviewed the owner. Here too our guide's



*The crew , Sisters and the Rathwa women at the village of Baroj*

contacts were useful as our association with the local pro tribal missionaries, made some people view us suspiciously. People were fearful of being projected as exploiting tribals, child labour etc. We ended the day by interviewing the local MP's wife, Manju Rathwa.

The whole of the fourth day we spent at the village of Baroj. We were guided by the Sisters and as I had been there earlier I knew what to look for. As we were a small crew and were carrying light, portable equipment the trek to and from the village was made easier. In the village we interviewed a Catholic couple, took shots of the painting, scenery etc. and statements from some other people. By evening we were exhausted.

The last day at Chota Udaipur was the 'Haat' day. Finishing the interview with Fr. Mathew, a free legal aid lawyer, we completed our schedule by taking shots at the market. We then set out for Ahmedabad, stopping only to shoot the broken railway line at Pavi jethpur.

#### **The city shoot:**

This was restricted to an interview with the ex Director of the Tribal research institute, Dr. R.B. Lal. The shoot was planned as we realised that we would need the statement of a person who had been involved both with the study of the Rathwa culture and had seen the impact of development.

#### **Post production:**

Working within the constraint of my limited grasp of Gujrati and even less understanding of Rathwi, I started translating and transcribing the interviews. Fortunately as the questions were explanatory I was able to do most of the work without the help of a translator. After this I marked out the sections needed for the film. Completing the transfer from the shoot format (digital) to the editing format (hi 8) and having cued the tapes I was ready to start the rough edit. Following feedback about the script and structure of the film, I reworked the interviews and shots into the new structure, establishing the culture of the Rathwas before bringing in mainstream comments and dialogues. The actual editing took about a week while the rest of the allotted time was spent in preparation and feedback.

**Rough edit feedback:**

The first presentation of the rough edit was made to the client, members of the Jesuit community and a filmmaker from Ahmedabad. The feedback received was extremely useful as it indicated how to mould the film and present the ideology clearly instead of making it a neutral look at the process of change. Suggestions were made to make the commentary more hard hitting and obvious, the interviews were to be cut down and one section was to be removed as it did not deal directly with the theme of the film.

The second presentation of the cut was made to my guide who pointed out that the soundtrack was overbearing at one point. I realised that the footage, (whether visuals or sound) I intended to use, to speak against tribal alienation would end up doing the opposite if over extended. I made the third presentation to the lawyer Fr. Mathew who has worked with the Rathwas for the past seven years and with other tribes like the Vasavas. Following his feedback I incorporated shots indicating the largeness of the Rathwa population and strengthened the commentary.

Integrating the various feedback received upto this point, I proceeded to complete the final edit.

## The final product

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*Installation of the painting, Gabadia*

## ALIENS IN THEIR OWN LAND

A video awareness programme on tribal identity and alienation among the 'Rathwa'

Duration: 20 minutes

Target audience: Urban, adults and youth

Language: English

**A Gurjarvani production**

**© 1998**

## **FINAL COMMENTARY:**

“For the tribal Rathwas of Chota Udaipur the whole world is present on their walls. The life of the Rathwas is constructed in and around this religious painting, depicting the story of the marriage of their God Pithora. The installation of Pithoro is a means to sustain the fertility of their land and ensure their way of life. The shaman recites the myth of creation and invokes the various Gods. Through this oral tradition the Rathwas recall the origin of their world. The painting is a written record- the images part of a visual script- the artists are called Lakharas or writers. The images recall history as well as the manner in which the Rathwas view themselves. This religious art is a living tradition - a record of the past as well as the present.....

The Rathwas depend on nature. To this purpose their religious life and their environment are integrated. The land is used both for cultivation and worship. Connected with religion is their occupation, their economy, their lifestyle and their social customs. Their animistic religion is distinct from other religions and lays emphasis on the veneration of spirits. The Rathwas see the spirits residing in the forests, the mountains and the rivers around them. Nothing is lifeless and hence every part of the environment is valuable. Religion for the Rathwas is not a part but the whole of their life. Each season is marked by a specific religious ceremony.....

Pithoro is viewed as part of the family. He is fed, worshipped and placated to ensure prosperity.....

Once slash and burn cultivators the Rathwas are now settled agriculturists but it is their unique identity as tribal farmers that distinguishes them from other farming communities. Their relationship with the land is symbiotic and to be rooted to the land is to be rooted to their culture.....

Many images in the painting deal with the importance of agriculture. The concept of time is the agricultural year- a period of cropping and a period of fallowness, a full granary is a symbol of wealth. In addition to

farming the Rathwas subsist by living of the forest produce. The collection of toddy and mahuda are important seasonal activities. Native liquor is used in community life and religious ceremonies. The culture of native liquor is thus an important part of a Rathwa's identity.....

Both men and women wear prominent cultural markers like clothing, ornaments and tattoos. This traditional attire creates a distinctive visual identity for the tribe.....

During religious and festive occasions customs like singing and dancing help reinforce their identity as Rathwas.....

The acceptance of their traditional Gods is a natural part of their life. Yet the rituals of worship are being replaced by new belief systems. If the presence of the painting tells one story its absence speaks of another....

For the Rathwas who have converted to Hinduism and are called Bhagats, tribal worship and customs are banned, creating a division within the previously integrated tribe.....

Conversion of the Rathwas seems based on the idea that they lack an organised religion. In this process their identity and values are completely changed.....

The implicit connection between rejecting their tribal identity and being accepted by the non tribal mainstream, provides further motivation.....

Some Rathwas have also converted to Christianity.....

The arrival of increasing numbers of outsiders and the division and possession of forest land have drastically altered the landscape for the Rathwas.....

Displaced from the culture of a tribal farming community, the Rathwa identity has been reduced to that of faceless manual labour. Many families are even bonded for generations together.....

Viewed as an inferior class and unable to retain their former prosperity, the tribe is slowly being torn apart.....

Like many other tribes in India, the Rathwas have been burdened with the meanings assigned to them. Their culture is portrayed as that of uncivilised and lazy drunkards because of practices like singing, dancing and consuming native liquor. The prejudices of mainstream media and representatives have biased all interaction between Rathwas and nontribals.....

The Pithoro painting depicts the possibility of coexistence not only between the heavenly and earthly, but also the tribal and the mainstream. With great creativity this so-called backward tribe has integrated the outsider into their worldview.

In the world of their Gods, the Rathwas have created a space for the nontribal. However, constantly stereotyped and marginalised, they themselves have had no other choice but to travel down the roads built by the mainstream. As they travel, they are carried further away from their homes, their land, their occupation, their religion, their unique knowledge systems and ultimately their identity as a tribe.

For the numerous tribals who have been shamed or displaced from their cultural roots- where does this road lead ?”

**FINAL STORYBOARD:**

Video	Description	Audio
	<p>Various shots of the Pithoro wall painting</p>	<p>Chant of the shaman starts            Commentary begins: For the tribal Rathwas of Chota Udaipur..... a record of the past as well as the present.</p>
	<p>Title appears "Aliens in their own land"</p>	<p>Chant continues</p>
	<p>Establishing shots of villages and ploughing activity</p>	<p>The Rathwas depend on nature..... their social customs.</p>
	<p>Rathwas worshipping their Gods</p>	<p>Their animistic religion.... specific religious ceremony.</p>
	<p>Interview with Badwo Kochariyo illustrated with images of festivity</p>	
	<p>Woman grinding maize</p>	<p>Pithoro is viewed..... to ensure prosperity.</p>
	<p>Interview with Badwo Lallo illustrated with agricultural activity and images from the painting</p>	

Video

Description

Audio



Process of painting and religious worship, agricultural scenes

Music of pipes and drums.  
Commentary: Once slash and burn..... rooted to their culture.



Interview with Rathwas



Intercut of images from painting and live shots of agriculture

Drum beats.  
Commentary: Many images in the painting deal..... a full granary is a symbol of wealth.



Intercut of painted images and live shots of toddy and mahuda trees, consumption of liquor

In addition.... native liquor is thus an important part of a Rathwa's identity.



Interview with Rathwas and Amar Singh regarding native liquor










Rathwas dancing, their ornaments and tattoos

During religious and festive occasions..... identity as Rathwas.



Statements from Manjula and Amar Singh, community feasting near the painting

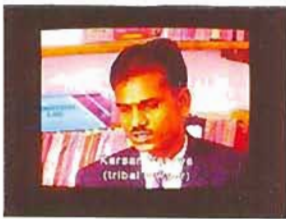
The acceptance of their..... by new belief systems.

Video	Description	Audio
	Dissolve from Pithoro painting to writing on a Bhagat's wall	If the presence of..... its absence speaks of another.
	Bhajan session, interview with Mathur Bhagat	For the Rathwas who have converted..... previously integrated tribe.
	Interview with Manju Rathwa	Conversion of the Rathwas..... .....completely changed.
	People praying at a temple in the city	The implicit connection.... ....motivation for an identity change.
	Interview with Bhagat school teacher	
	Interview with Catholic Rathwa couple	Christian bhajan music. Commentary: Some Rathwas have also..... to Christianity.
	Aerial pan of the town of Chota Udaipur	The arrival of increasing..... .....landscape for the Rathwas.

Video

Description

Audio



Interviews with Amar Singh, Kochariyo and lawyer Karson Vasava about the issue of tribal land



Rathwa construction workers, statements from tribals

Displaced from the culture.....  
....generations together.



Rathwa workers at dolomite factory, interview with factory owner



Scenes from the market

Viewed as an inferior..... slowly being torn apart.



Interviews with lawyer Mathew, Amar Singh and Dr. Lal









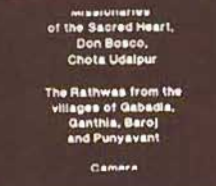
Overloaded jeep moving down the road

Like many other tribes....  
.... assigned to them.



Clips from hindi film depicting tribals

Their culture is.... Rathwas and nontribals.

Video	Description	Audio
	Rathwas at the bus stop	Song clip from Gujrati film.
	Statements from Rathwa girl, local nontribal shop owner, Policeman and Manjula Rathwa intercut with visuals from the market	Rathwa music
	Pithoro painting, visuals from the painting indicating the presence of nontribals	Flute music begins. Commentary: The Pithoro painting depicts..... outsider into their worldview.
	Interviews with Badwos Lallo and Kochariyo	
	Visuals of transportation from the painting dissolved into live shots	In the world of their Gods.... roads built by the mainstream.
	Images of the traditional lifestyle of the tribe superimposed over the shot of Rathwas travelling down the road	As they travel.... and ultimately their identity as a tribe. For the numerous.... where does this road lead?
	Fade out, credits	Tribal music

# Conclusion

The nontribal and the mainstream culture have dealt with the tribal population as a 'poor, backward, primitive' society. When dominant cultures enter tribal pockets they take over the land as well as whole ways of life. The silent killing of tribal cultures is noticed by few. While tribals fight for survival one may question the priority of saving their way of life or their lives. However in this symbiotic relationship can one make clear cut distinctions between the two ? This issue has to be dealt with as it affects even well intentioned development projects. Can tribal groups be 'developed' while retaining their previous pride in their identity ? What is 'Development' ? What happens to a community that is reduced from independent, self sustenance to living off the fringes of the dominant culture of the area ?



Above Depiction of clock and signature of artist in the Pithoro painting, Malajo

For a nation that prides itself on cultural diversity, the loss of yet another carefully integrated lifestyle, is a blow to the ethnic map of India. In this relentless motion towards an unicultural society, a lot is lost.

My experiences during the past six months have been varied.

Working on this issue has also helped me realise what other interests

can be associated with film making. My interest in the art of these people had led me to make the trip to Chota Udaipur. The 'object' I was looking at was a painting but from it I was led into the tribe itself. For a designer it is an invaluable learning to see how objects are designed by culture. It also stresses the point that a designer

View of the village of Ambali





*Scene from the sidewall of the painting, Malajo*

coming from the outside, must try as far as is possible to work with the sensibilities of the community. The Rathwas also have their own perceptions of art and design, knowledge and education although not in the way we would define it. A good design and a good development strategy would both have to incorporate the sensibilities of this tribe. This further emphasises the need for a sustained study of the community's culture including their perceptions and values. In this context

the designer must work with and if required learn the skills of anthropology or any discipline that teaches the methodology of the study of culture. While sentiment is required to pursue an ideology, it must be strengthened and channelised with a variety of skills.

During the project I have tried to integrate the disciplines of video and the study of culture, approaching each through the roles of designer and artist, towards the ultimate goal of fulfilling a given brief. I realise that the theme of the film is a complex one. At many times, I did find it difficult to reach a satisfactory solution. However I am glad for the learning that I received through the process, inspite of its ups and downs. I still retain as inspiration, the images of the



*A wooden chair designed using the joinery of the plough, Gabadia*

people who have devoted their lives to working with and for the Rathwas.



*Ornate doorway of the house of the Lakhara of Baroj*

# Reflections

While I have learnt much about the design process and the technology associated with film making, I have also gained experience in how to plan and manage the process. The film was not the outcome of a single person's efforts but the result of a constant dialogue between me as the 'designer' and the context within which I was working. From observation, experience and consequent reflection, I have come to the following realisations.

The designer must play multiple roles not only that of film maker but of manager and co-ordinator thus taking an active part in determining the course of the project. Inter personal skills play an important part in strengthening the communication between the designer and the people he works with. A tension faced by many film makers working for a client is to balance the demands of both parties. Insufficient attention to detail and a lack of professionalism can cause a lot of confusion in terms of expectations and division of tasks. Often the project brief given is vague and can be changed midway. To minimise this possibility all interactions whether brief taking, feedback sessions or negotiations must be documented and circulated to all team members. Although concepts undergo changes, the brief should be frozen at least after shooting. The application of design methodology in this manner helps avoid ambiguity inspite of later changes in perceptions or the absence of team members. The student film maker must also enlist the support of his guide from the educational institute. Foresight and planning by all parties concerned can help avoid problems like schedule delays and aid in a smoother production process.

The encouragement offered to the student through sustained interest and involvement, is crucial in motivating and determining the final quality of the film. Conversely a lack of enthusiasm and confusion regarding the aim of the film can divert too much thought and energy into processes of resolution. While such events can occur at any stage of the project, it is advantageous that both parties be aware of it and

work in a synchronised manner.

It is extremely important that the filmmaker has the freedom and opportunity to work not just as an executor of a preconceived plan but be involved and recognised as an equal contributor to the process. In the long term this benefits both the client and the student. Results can be achieved by disregarding the ideas of any one party but this kind of one sided demand, ultimately hinders the project from being a mutually beneficial, creative association. In this context the student must try and avoid being overly dependent on the directions of others as this could result in a curtailment and stifling of his own talent and contribution.

Feedback sessions are an important part of the film making process. However the feedback must be considered against the backdrop of the profile of the audience providing it. Homogenous audiences and a lack of proper briefing of the audience may result in dilution instead of construction. This places the onus on the designer especially in a situation where he is viewed mostly as an executor. All these factors combined cause much tension and confusion and ultimately this affects the quality of the film.

Instead, working within the constraints of time and resources both parties must attempt to create a smooth working atmosphere by clearly planning and assigning tasks. Focussed and detailed briefings and discussions throughout the course of the project can prevent misunderstandings and consequent delays. It is also important that both parties regard the project as a collaboration and make the required efforts to achieve the project goals in a professional manner.

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