



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL LIFE OF DALU'S OF GARO HILLS, MEGHALAYA

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ABSTRACT

This is an attempt to introduce the Dalus a remote ethnic group of people of Garo Hills of the Meghalaya state to the academic World of Social Scientists. There are no well-established historical and reliable recorded accounts about the origin of the Dalus, except some stray stories here and there, Whatsoever views being expressed in this paper are mostly based on our observations and contracts with the Dalu people of Killapara and Dalugaon areas of Garo Hill and the Derapathar village of Nowgaon district of Assam during the period from the seventies to nineties of the last century. We have gathered some vague ideas about this micro-ethnic group of people in respect of their various stages of migration, political, economic and socio-cultural development. In view of the present upsurges among these ethnic group of people, the administrative infrastructure of the State Governments for all the macro-ethnic and micro-ethnic people of the region has to be improved according to their own socio-cultural, economic and political genius.

KEY WORDS :- Dalus, Origin, Migration, Ethic group, Socio economic and culture.

INTRODUCTION:

Dalu's is the name of an unpopular and backward small ethnic group living in the North East especially in the west Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. There are no well established historical and reliable recorded accounts on their origin. The sense of identity among these ethnic groups of the people of North East India become the problems for the State Governments of this region as well as to the Central Government of India. The ethnical and cultural identities of the people of these areas have assumed a multi-dimensional importance in view of the urgent need of their economic, political and socio-cultural development.

It is true that in the pre-colonial period most of the groups or communities of North-Eastern region of India were not aware about their ethnic identities. They were mostly confined to their family, clans and villages with limited means of livelihood. The first sense of socio-cultural development of ethnic identity in some major groups of people was took place during the period of the British rule in India. But, many of the micro-ethnic groups were left behind without any mention of their future conditions of identities

After the Independence of India, the administrative authorities of these areas made some progresses only for the macro-ethnic groups but not for the micro-ethnic groups residing in this region. So, the issue should be viewed in proper perspective and the question of their socio-cultural identities should be analyzed broadly. In this paper, I tried to present the socio-cultural identity and living conditions the Dalus of Garo Hills.

The Dalus are the remotest ethnic group of people of Garo Hills. It is necessary to study their origin, migration, religion, language, political,

economic and socio-cultural development that were taking place since their migration from "Ava" (Cachar of Assam) to the South-Western border area of Garohills district, particularly in the "Quillapara" presently "Killapara" of the Dalu Block of the state of Meghalaya.

ORIGIN: There are some scattered stories about the origin and migration of the Dalus as narrated by the oldest legendary informants. I have just tried to record such informations added with my own observations about the community very closely. I visited. Baghmara, Williamnagar, Killapara. Dalugaon, Garobadha and Phulbari areas of Garo Hills. I also visited the Derapathar areas of Nowgaon district of Assam to study about the origin and migration of the Dalus. As per the reliable legendary informants, the Dalus regarded themselves as the aboriginal people of Manipur and were the followers of Hinduism. They have same ideological differences among themselves and were divided into two groups, such as, Bishnupriyas" the traditionalist and the "Moithoi or Meitei", the modernist. Among these two groups, the Meitei trace their origin from the legendary woman "Nagkanya-Ulupi" (Naga Woman) and the Bishnupriyas derived their ancestry to Babrubahan, the son of Chitrangada and Arjuna, Raja Chitrabahana being their direct descendants.

MIGRATION: Manipur has been devastated by the Burmese and the ruling groups were fled to Cachar. During these troubles period, one warrior Bijoy Singh Dhalji came into prominence and had joined one of the groups of troubles torn Manipur. The group which has supported by Dhalji defected very miserably to their rival group in their feudal struggles of power, for which Dhalji was held responsible. There were upsurges against him, so, he along with

his household members and few other faithfully followers fled away from Manipur to the Ava Country to escape the wrath of the rival. Even then it was not safe from them and they made their further concealment by entering into the South-Western border areas of the Garo Hills district where they were first established a village at "Quillapara" (Killapara) for settlement there.

Another story about the migration of the Dalus narrated by the villagers of Dalu Killapara that Bhagadatta was a powerful ruler of Assam and he had tried to expand his kingdom as far as possible and with that sole motive, he attacked Manipur. At that time, Raja Bijoy Singh Dhalji was the ruler of Manipur. Dhalji lost in the war completely to Bhagadatta and fled from Manipur for concealment. They were first took shelter in the Patkai Hills area of Naga Hills and after few months, they left the place as it was not so suitable for settlement. They were moving towards the south-west direction for their further concealment and finally they came to the south-western border area of the Garo Hills (present Dalu Block Area), where they settled permanently. However, this narrated story of the villagers has no historical background at all. Therefore, we may not take it granted for our purpose.

This event occurred most probably in the late seventeenth century A.D. Dhalji wanted to introduce his followers as "Dhal-Lau" means "Blood of Dhalji". The word "Lau" means blood in their ancestral Dialect. In course of time, the word "Dhal-Lau" corrupted into Dhallu' Daloo and finally Dalu. It is cleared that the Dalus of Garo Hills were the descendants of Dhalji or Dhalji's ancestors Chitrabahan, the son of Arjuna and Chiterangada.

AREA OF OCCUPATION: The Dalus were first established a village at "Quilla Para" where Dhalji was settled. This place later on known as "Dalu-Killa" and now as "Killapara". In times, Dalu territory was extended up to Kherapara in the North and Mymensingh district of present Bangladesh in the south. In the east it was extended up to Baghamara and Purakhasia in the west. There are some Dalus living in the District of Cachar (Assam) bearing the title "Singh" after their names. It is also found that a sizable Dalus are settled in "Derapathar" village (village No. 1,2 & 3) of Nowgaon district of Assam. The Dalus are also residing in the district of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakshmipur of Assam state. In Meghalaya, Particularly, in Garo Hills, they are residing in Phulbari, Garobadha, Tura, Dalugaon, Killapara, Baghmara and Williamnagar areas. Informed sources revealed that Dalus are also residing in Halughat and Naltabari police station areas of Bangladesh.

CULTURAL LIFE:

POPULATION: The total number of population of the Dalu Community has yet to be enumerated. However, a voluntary census has been carried out by our prominent Dalu informants during the seventies to eighties of the last century which estimated to be 35,000 souls of which 23,000 in Meghalaya and 12,000 in Assam (approximately)

CLAN SYSTEM: The Dalus are subdivided into several clans or "Dopha" which are strictly exogamous in Dalu society. There are ten number of "Dopha" or clan among the Dalus. They are Chichong, Pirra, Kona, Mash, Nengma, Karra, Maibara, Pabor and Gnadhi. In these clans system the Chichong is the largest one and the Gnadhi is the smallest one. The Gnadhi clan is almost extinct now.

However, the Dalus bearing all Dopha or clan members resides together in place and maintained cordiality amongst themselves without any clan feuds. The main functions of this clan system are to perform and regulate the socio-cultural activities in their own community.

LANGUAGE: The Dalus were claimed that they had their own Manipuri language at the time of their migration into the Garo Hills. In course of time, they were completely lost their language and now they are communicate with their neighbours in Hajong, Assamese, Bengali, Garo languages with typical rustic intonations. The Dalus of Assam adopted

Assamese language now. No bio-anthropological information is available on the Dalus.

FOODS AND DRINKS: The Dalus who previously relished only Vegetarian foods, today, they are fond of non-vegetarian foods mainly, Due to Bijoy Singh Dhalji, who influenced his people to take meat. Now-a-days, about 95% of the Dalus eat meat and fish. But they completely abstain from taking beef, port and buffalo meat. However, they eat goats, sheep, tortoise and duck meat. Rice is the staple food for them. They rear duck for eggs. Cows are domesticated for milk and also sell milk in the local markets to fetch financial stability because most of them are very poor.

As I said that the Dalus are traditionally agriculturists and rice is the staple food for them. They grow rice, jute, pulses and green vegetables in their fields. They also grow vegetables at the backyards of their houses for own consumptions. Like the Garos, Koches and Hajongs, rice-beer is an integral part of their daily consumption. This rice-beer is known as "Mod" in Dalu society. But, financially rich people of the community used foreign liquor also.

RELIGION: The Dalus follow the Vaishnava cult of Hinduism. The Gaur and Nitai are regularly worshipped. But, it is also a fact that they performed animal sacrifice. A Pujagar or shrine is compulsory for every Dalu family. On the outskirts of each homestead a small altar is raised and clean place is allocated to "Ma Monosha" or Snake Goddess. In the central courtyard time of early morning and evening. An area of the village is marked out for "Bastu Debota" or the village God. Once a year, after the harvest, all the villagers are worshipped it. This village God is regarded as the savior of the village people from evil affects. It was told that there were Gopal and Kamakshya temples in the first village of the Dalus at Quillapara and these temples are still exist there and became a religious centre not only for the Dalus but for other Hinduised communities also.

FESTIVAL: The festival of colours or "Dol-Jatra" occurs during the month of Phalgun (February-March) while "Basanti" Puja and Chaitra Sankranti are celebrated during the month of Chaitra (March-April). As I mentioned above that the month of Baisakh (April-May) marks the beginning of the New Year to their rites and ends with the celebration Chaitra Sankranti. The Dalus, like other Hinduised tribes consider Kashi, Gaya,

Nabadweep and Kamakshya to be their pilgrimage centres. The men and women of every Dalu village has to perform devotional songs or "Kirtan" in groups. The group which sings the praises of "a-Monosha" from Padma-Purana is called "Marogah". The group is invited to render devotional songs specially when someone is sick in the family. The Christian Missionaries were not able to inspire the Dalus from traditional practices they follows since the time "Bijoy Singh Dhalji".

SOCIO-CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR: Though they are following the Vaishnava cult but this community has under gone massive sanskritisation and in the process of adopting Brahmanic ways of life, they are now maintaining their own created customs. The Dalus are most obedient, subservient and submissive in nature, have never involved into any kind of controversy. These quality traits had been specially beneficial during their first settlement at Killapara. They are living amidst of Bangalees, Jaongs, Koches, Banais and Garotos since a long time and represent a case of peaceful co-existence, They are also living with their neighboring people and treated them cordially. The Dalus have a matriarchal society and women are still not in the same category as their men.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE: The Dalus are professionally agriculturists. They are also involved in carpentry, Pottery, basketry and blacksmithy as their alternative means of livelihood. The Dalus do not practiced the profession of a Barber. The Deswalli and sheel people entirely does this job for them. The Dalus, with the passage of time grew in size and the land they hold became too meager to produce crops for their daily needs. So they has to seek other alternative avenues for their survival. Being a most uneducated ethnic, they sought employment as office peon, Drivery and those unable to do so, worked as labourers in the farms and homes of the rich neighbours. The job of a policeman was the most sought for the Dalus. They earned ready cash by domesticating animals and poultry-bird. With the growing scarcity of cultivable lands, the Dalus are forced to seek job opportunities in the urban areas.

The Dalus are the micro-ethnic group of people living in the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya State. In the socio-economic-Political environment, they are lacking behind the Garos, Hajongs, Koches and others as far as numbering game is concerned. On the other hand,

they are relatively uneducated then their counterparts. Till now, no Dalus hold any high responsible posts in the Government offices by virtue of their less academic attainments, while Garos, Hajongs and Koches are found comparatively more educated and holding many responsible offices in the state Meghalaya.

In term of modern development facilities are concerned, have not getting any proper share till today. Either in the field of education or in other allied fields, they are always below the district standard. They have no capacity to complete with others in the state level. There are schools in the Dalu Villages but no Dalu teachers in those schools, particularly, in the primary section where it is necessary to give lesions to the children in their mother tongue. But, there no other live saving amenities for this poor people. It is the poor people suffered the most. The Dalus being the smallest group of people having no means to maintain their road communication of their area, except to approach the authority only. But, nobody want to listen their complaints. Politically, there is none to represent them for their economic upliftment.

In Meghalaya, they are not treated as Tribal and as such they are not included in the Scheduled Tribes list of 1977. But, before the creation of the Meghalaya State, the Dalus were included in the said list of Schedule Tribes, as per the provisions under Sub-section(1) of Section 2 of the Regulation No.1 of 1952 of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council. In that section, it has clearly, been mentioned that "Tribals means the tribes specified in the constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 and includes the Koches, and Dalos of the Garo Hills District." This regulation was received the assent of the then Governor of Assam on the 28th January, 1952. All the other Tribals like the Garos, Khasis, Jaitias, Hajongs, Koches, Rabhas, Megams and Lyngngams are included in the list of the scheduled Tribes in Meghalaya whereas the Dalus and Banais are left behind.

The question of identification of the Dalus must be seen from as angle entirely different from that of the other ethnic groups of people of the North East India. Without being subjective on the issue, we must acknowledged regarding the Dalus. We may also mentioned the violent changes took place since the inception of the community with the

migration of Bijoy Singh Dhalji into Garo Hills.

CONCLUSION

We may also mention the violent changes took place since the inception of the community with migration of Bijoy Sing Dhalji, in to Garo Hills. It was the partition of India when Dalu had to flee from their native village remains with in the territory of India as political boundaries were demarcated.

The creation of Bangladesh (earlier East Pakistan) compelled them to part their kith and kins in the area of Haluaghat and Naltabari police station of Bangladesh. Lastly, the separation and creation of Meghalaya by bifurcating the areas of Assam, once again isolated the Dalus of Garo Hills from those of living in Assam and left them from the Mainstream of the population of North East India. Once this group who have traced their ancestry from Kshatriyas and Brahmans now been reduced to a micro inconspicuous daily laborers for their survival. They are becoming more frustrated since they are subjugated through the state laws and bound them to appraise the matter to the Central Government for early comprehensive measure for their socio-cultural identify.

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