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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE DALU PEOPLE OF GOALPARA DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Ethnography is the scientific description of people and cultures with their customs, habits and mutual differences. Ethnography is crucial to international development because if we enact development programs without understanding the people who inhabit these regions, it is more likely that the programs will be ill-suited and unjust. The anthropology of development devoted to avoid these issues and critiquing development programs. This paper is an attempt to study the ethnographic profile of a small ethnic community called 'Dalu' living in Goalpara district of Assam. In this study, data were collected from 55 households from the village Matia Camp No 5, under Matia Revenue circle of Goalpara district, Assam.

KEYWORDS :Dalus, ethnographic study, origin, customs and rituals.

INTRODUCTION

Dalu is a lesser known community to the academic world, with a very few population scattered in different areas of Goalpara district, as well as in some parts of Darrang , Sonitpur, Nogaon, also in Meghalaya and Bangladesh. This paper is an attempt to through some lights on the micro-ethnic groups, living in Goalpara district. Though there is no any historical record from where they came, here in this paper whatever views are being expressed are based on my observation and contact with the Dalu people during fieldwork.

Methodology: For this study the household survey schedule was used to collect the demographic data, then observation method and interview method and also the case study method to collect in depth information regarding their rituals, in the Matia camp No 5 of Goalpara



district, Assam. In the study area there are altogether 55 households with a total population of 290, out of which 164 are male and 126 are female. And this paper is purely based on primary data and no other secondary sources have been used in this paper.

ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE DALUS:

Habitat: For this study the Dalus of Matia Camp No 5 of Goalpara district is selected, besides some of them are also being found in Nogaon, Sonitpur, Darrang and also some population in Meghalaya as well as in Bangladesh.

Language: The Dalus speak their own language Dalu language, besides the local language Assamese. They do not have their own script. They use Assamese and Bangla script.

Dress and ornaments: The dress of Dalu

male is similar like the neighbouring Hajong and Koch people. They used to wear 'Gamusa' at home, which is worn in the lower half of the body, and the upper half is remain uncovered. The traditional dress of women folk is called 'Patani' which is a single cloth worn from the breast above to below the calf. The Dalu womenfolk used to wear silver ornaments like necklaces (Hasil, Kathimala), bracelets (Boila, Churi, Biki kharu), armllet (kata bazu), anklet (gunjjuruti) and calflet (bikikharu, punjuni), hair pin (jot kathi) etc.

Food Habit: The food habit of the Dalus is very much similar to that of Hajong and Koch people. They take rice three times a day. A typical Dalu meal consists of rice and some traditional dishes like- 'Laba Hak', 'Noila pata jul', 'Bishi bhat', 'Bukani bhat'.

Social life: The Dalus practice endogamy, but sometimes marriages from outside of their community is also seen. Monogamy is the form of marriage, they follow; but in some cases of childless marriage and that too with the consent of the first wife, polygamy is allowed.

The Dalus are patrilineal by birth, and the line of descent is traced through the father, and he is regarded as the head of the family.

Family: Six different types of families have been distinguished among the Dalus of the studied area, on the basis of the composition of the family households.

Table-1
Family types of the Dalus in the study village

Sl No	Types of Family	No of Houses
1	Incomplete Nuclear Family	3 (5.45%)
2	Nuclear Family with dependents	12(21.81%)
3	Nuclear family without dependents	18 (32.72%)
4	Lineally Extended family without dependents	15(27.27%)
5	Collaterally Extended family	5 (9.09%)
6	Lineally Collaterally extended family with dependent	2 (3.63%)
	Total	55 (100%)

Family types based on Kolenda's classification of family types (kolenda 1968).

From the above table it is found that Nuclear family without dependents is the highest among the studied Dalu village, and Lineally Collaterally extended family with dependents is the lowest in numbers in the studied villages.

Table -2
Average Family Size of the Dalus in the study village

Sl No	Family Size	No of Households
1	Small (1-4)	33 (60%)
2	Medium (5-10)	15 (27.27%)
3	Large (10+)	7 (12.72%)
	Total	55 (100%)

From the Table 2 it is evident that there are altogether 33 small families comprising of 1- 4 members each, and 15 households is of medium size and 7 are of large family type.

Division of Labour in the Family: In a Dalu family of the studied area, every person of a household, they perform some certain role for the smooth running of the house every day. The division

of labour of a Dalu household is shown in a tabular form.

Table-3
Division of Labour in a Dalu household in the study village.

<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>Children</u>
<u>Domestic:</u> 1. Construction of the house. 2. Repairing of the house. 3. Bringing firewood.	<u>Domestic:</u> 1. Cooking. 2. Bringing firewood. 3. Looking after small children. 4. Looking after domestic animals.	<u>Domestic:</u> 1. Looking after the younger ones during absence of parents. 2. Helping the mother in washing cooking utensils. 3. Helping the mother to after the domestic animals.
<u>Economic:</u> 1. Go to their respective work place. 2. Working as wage labourers. 3. Selling of bamboo.	<u>Economic:</u> 1. Working as wage labourer. 2. Go to their respective work place.	

In the above Table-3 shows the different types of role played by the persons of a household is seen.

Mode of Inheritance: The mode of inheritance in a Dalu family is always through the male line, i.e. from fathers to son. After marriage the wife borrows her husband's surname and the children, their fathers. Property is inherited from father to son. In case of absence of sons, property is equally divided among the daughters. If there is no any direct descendents of the deceased person, the property is divided among the brothers and sisters of the deceased person. In the absence of any relatives, the property becomes a public property of the village. The ornaments are the women's property and they usually go to the favourite daughter and daughter-in-law or their grand children.

Marriage: In the Dalu studied village, there are altogether 70 married couple, 93 males are unmarried and 49 females are recorded as unmarried, during the time of fieldwork. 1 male is found as widower in the study village and 7 widows are recorded at the time of data collection.

A Dalu is always expected to marry within his own community, but of different clan. Among the Dalus they have 19 sub-clans which they call 'Dafa'.

Among the Dalus of the studied village, there two types of marriage if seen namely, Negotiated marriage (Borbiya) and Marriage by elopement (Diapara). In the traditional marriage, the first step is taken by the mother of the boy for negotiations. It is called by the Dalus as 'Bau-Jura'. On successful negotiation the mother of the boy invite the parents of the girl to visit the house of the boy. The parent of the girl along with the Dafa members made a visit to the house of the boy; this is called 'Jamai-dekha' in Dalu society. The next visit is made by the father of the groom to the house of the bride and during this period both the parties must treat each other with propriety, failing of which the marriage may be cancelled forthwith. If the negotiations completed successfully then the boy's family offer a sari and an ornaments made of either gold or silver and this custom is called as 'sona-kapur'. The Biyah or the marriage takes place in the house of the bride which is called 'Bhora-biyah' and on the next day the 'Basi-biyah' is performed. And after a lapse of eight days, the groom and the bride visit the house of the

bride's parent, and this is known as 'phiragaman'. All the expenses of the marriage ceremony is borne by the bride's family.

If a Dalu boy marries from outside their community, then they are exonerated from their own community and forfeited from all the benefits they enjoyed in the Dalu community and same is the condition for a Dalu girl also.

Religious Life: The Dalus of the studied village, they are the followers of Vaishnavism. Besides they follow all the religious beliefs of the Hindus. It is observed that rituals like Dol Jatra, Krishna Janmastami, Shiv puja, Durga puja and Manasha puja is celebrated with great devotion, but no doubt they celebrate the other rituals also in a great manner.

Shiv Puja: Lord Shiva is worshipped as a household god to avert untoward events in the family and for general welfare. A priest conducts the ritual by chanting mantras and guiding the family head to make offerings at the altar. Chanting of ritual formulae is followed by the recitations of Shiva stuti. The devotees listen to the recitations with attention. At the end of the puja, Prasad or offering of eatables made at the ritual is distributed among the devotees.

Manasha Puja: Ma Manasha is a Hindu goddess of snakes. The Dalu worship for the prevention and cure of snake bite and also for fertility and prosperity. Manasha puja is ceremonially worshipped on Nag-panchami in the Hindu month of Shrabon. The Dalu women keep fast on that day and offer milk to snakes.

Dol-Jatra: Dol-Jatra or the festival of colour is observed by the Dalu people of the study village and it is dedicated to Lord Sri Krishna. The villagers specially the male folk, they do kirtans and the song of holi is sung. The small children they sprays water mixed with colour with one another. The young boys and girls also enjoy this festival of colour. The women folk prepare Laru (sweet balls) made of rice in this occasion.

Krishna Janmastami: Krishna Janmastami is celebrated by the Dalus in the month of Assamese calendar Bhadro. It is an annual celebration of the birth of Hindu deity Krishna. On this occasion people staying up until midnight, the time when Krishna is believed to have been born, and people gather for devotional songs.

Crises rites: Birth represents an important transition for a Dalu family in which the new member of Dalu society is being born. For a month from the birth of a child all the members of the father's lineage are in a state of ritual impurity. After one month, a purificatory ceremony is held; the baby has to shave their hair by a barber followed with a bath of the child and mother. This custom is known as 'khawri' in Dalu. There after the mother of the child worships the sun; the whole house is purified by sprinkling holy water (sona rupa pani). Normally, the close paternal and maternal kin of the baby with one or two neighbors attend voluntarily.

The Annaprasan is being followed by the purificatory ceremony, when the baby attains 6-7 months old. The first morsel is put into its mouth by its maternal uncle.

A girl when she attains puberty, she is supposed to enter into a new state of life. The girl remains in a state of ritual impurity for a period of five days. During these periods she avoids her usual meal and takes only fruit, gram soaked in water and milk. On the fifth day in the morning the purificatory

ceremony usually called 'tuloni' begins. The village priest conducts the ritual by chanting matras in which the girl herself participates. After the ritual, the girl is given a ceremonial bath by her mother or the elder sister or her aunt. By sprinkling sona rupa pani she is then considered as purified.

The funeral system of the Dalus is same as the other Hindus. On the death of a Dalu, the death body has to be cremated with the participation of the Dafa members and community members. They contribute firewood at the time of funeral pyre. The 'Mukhagni' the main ritual is performed by the son. In case of absence of son, the son of the brother's or sister's can perform the ritual. And after 12th day, i.e. on the 13th day the 'shraddha' is observed.

CONCLUSION:

Lastly I would say that Dalu is a lesser known community to the academic world, but like any other, it contributes to the ethnic diversity of the region. Dalu has its own distinct culture and tradition, and this paper is an attempt to throw some light on this community.



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