

An extinct marriage practice of the Ravidas community of Barak Valley

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Summary:

Along with people from other communities, people from the Ravidas community also came to Cachar district as chalani workers at various times since 1855. The people of the Ravidas population are mainly 'Nishads' or 'Proto Australoids'. They are untouchables, dalits, backward communities. So they live in mud houses far away from the locality, so that the people of other castes do not have any inconvenience. The language spoken by the Ravidas community is 'Bhojpuri'. Just as the Ravidas community has a distinct language, their social system, judicial system, various marriage rituals are all distinct. In fact, their society stands on some traditional principles and rules. There was a custom in the marriage culture of the Ravidas community, which has largely disappeared today. Our original report will discuss that secret ethos at length.

Keywords:

Folklore, population, plantation workers, tanners, marriage, judicial system, community, lost.

Main Discussion:

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About thirty years ago, a man named Shuklal Ravidas was involved in agricultural work in our house. I used to call him Shuklal Kaka. Shuklal uncle and his community played the role of wedding musicians. One day when the topic of marriage came up, he said, there is a lot of difference in terms of rules in your marriage and our marriage. Incidentally, he said, a virgin goat is sacrificed in our marriage. When he told me when and how to give, my whole body tingled. At present, that ethos has almost disappeared. While raising the subject of that mysterious lokachar peeking in the corner of the mind, I have met many people of Ravidas community, talked about the subject of marriage, but almost everyone hides it. They say, it doesn't work anymore these days. With the passage of time, especially because of their close relationship with people of other communities, is this culture extinct today? Our search for an answer to this question is the starting point of this article.

Barak Valley is a marginal town in Assam. Former Cachar district surrounded by rivers, canals, bill-haor, hills and mountains. "On August 14, 1832, the British Government took over the administration of the state of Cachar by a public proclamation, and by then a new era had dawned in the history of Cachar.¹ Covering many square miles of dense jungle, the district is bordered by

Nagao and Naga Hills on the north, Manipur State on the east, Lusai Hills on the south, Srimant District and Jaintia Hills on the west. The wide area of Cachar district is very suitable for setting up tea plantations; That is why the British took the initiative to establish tea gardens in Cachar district along with other districts of Assam. It is to be noted that 'the first tea garden was established in Cachar in 1855.' But local employees did not want to stay within the confines of the restrictive, regulatory framework. So they quit the job of gardener. As soon as the tea plantations were established, the British realized the labor shortage, so a large number of unskilled laborers were recruited from various states of India (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, United Pradesh, Orissa and tribal areas of West Bengal) through arkathi (brokers). Among these workers are people of various language groups. "From 1859 to 1870, Arkathirai was the main tool of labor recruitment. From 1870, the system of 'Sardari' was also introduced and both systems were active in parallel till 1915. Surma-Barak's Free Labor Recruitment was also licensed in 1873 as a legal management of labor recruitment. "3

Unskilled consignment workers from various states of India were subjected to exploitation-rule-torture. There is a vivid example of that in Edgar Saheb's account of his journey to Cachar. In 1863, Civil Sergeant Edgar Cha wrote about the oppression of workers, "If the task of daily work was not fulfilled, cases such as whipping were common and common."4

(2)

Along with people from other communities, people from the Ravidas community also came to Cachar district as chalani laborers at various times since 1855. One thing to note, the garden workers had to suffer from rule-exploitation-torture. Moreover, they did not get proper wages. Hence, during the period 1921-22, all over Assam and East Bengal, as a result of the struggle created by the tea workers demanding higher wages, the plantation workers left the plantations en masse. In this context, Arup Vaishya Mahashay said, 'Initially, a large part of the laborers in plantations belonged to the Hindi-speaking Chamar community. These workers were brought from Uttar Pradesh only four or five years ago and as a result their political rights consciousness was comparatively higher than others and they had not reached the level of complete subjugation after spending long time under the exploitative machinery of tea plantations like other tea workers. More than half of the Chargola Valley laborers who left Bagan returned to Basti and Gorakhpur districts of Uttar Pradesh."5

As a result of this movement, many plantation workers reached their native land or left this world forever. Notably, three to four male garden workers are crushed by the regime-exploitation process and at one point it becomes difficult to sustain their own existence. In the pre-independence and post-independence period, many plantation workers crossed the threshold of subjugation in the tea plantations and returned to independent life. But they cannot go to their native land because their native land is Cachar district. Because two or three men adopted them in this district, today they are independent. Political rights awareness was much higher among the Ravidas community than other plantation workers. So in groups the people of Rabidas

community returned to independent life from the subjugated life of the garden. They started living in groups by building houses on some uncultivated land adjacent to the tea plantation or on some abandoned high hill of the zamindar. But being clustered in a certain territory becomes a major obstacle in their way of livelihood. In order to earn a living, people belonging to the Hindu religion have to do agriculture along with the household work in their homes. Thus continued their hard life struggle. They are untouchables, dalits, backward communities or communities. So they live in mud houses far away from the locality, so that the people of other castes do not have any inconvenience. The language spoken by the Ravidas community is 'Bhojpuri'. Also known as Bhojpuri, Devanagari, Nagari, Bhutnagari or Deshwali languages in particular regions. The very rich 'Bhojpuri' vernacular, the language they speak, is the main medium of cultural exchange. This language is their identity. Despite the pressure of the environment, their folk language 'Bhojpuri' is still not extinct in Barak Valley.

The people of the Ravidas population are mainly Nishads or Proto Australoids. Niharranjan Roy's comments in this context, "Chandal or Charal, Muchi (leather worker), Dulia (Dolbahi), Keora, Malla, Dhibar etc. are of the late stage."⁶ Their original abode is in undivided Bengal, Bihar, Odisha's Dwarbhanga, Mozaffarpur, Ballia, Chapra, Are, Kanauj, Patna, Munger, Gazipur, Basti, Gorakhpur. They are the original inhabitants of India, belonging to the original Austrian community. They are Dalits, the so-called very Belongs to the lower Nishad group.

GEO opined that the Ravidas (Chamars) community originated from the five uncolored tribes of Dom, Kanjar, Habura, Kol and Jayasyar. W. BRIGGS. "Got and sub-caste names show that many Chamars have sprung from the Dom, the Kanjar, the Habura, the Kol, the Jaiswar, and other casteless tribes."⁷ Incidentally, those who live at the lowest level of the caste structure are known as Antyas. According to Atri (199) Antyajas have seven divisions. Tanners are also in that category. "Rajak, Charmkar, Knot, Burud, Kaivarta, Med and Vill."⁸

Again, in the description of Maharishi Manu, we can know that tanners are hybrid species. They are called "Shankaras of Shudra men and Kshatriya women (Manu-4/218)."⁹ We find mention of two types of tanners in the works of Maharishi Manu, and we also learn what their occupations might be. " Karabar and Dhigban. The first is probably the profession of people who skin and make leather from animal carcasses. secondly those who work in leather, such as cobblers."¹⁰ Be that as it may, they do not have the same status everywhere. In some regions they are known as 'chamars', in others as 'cobblers', in others as Ravidas, Rishidas, Rishis etc. We know, Most of the tanners in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are Ravidas Panthi Although the Charmakars or Chamars are lowly educated, they are not untouchables. We know these words from Vedic literature. Tanners, like other indigenous castes, also claim antiquity. "Vedic literature mentions lower vrttis like Charmasva, Chandal, Paushkas, Bapta, Vidalkar, Basapalpuli, etc., but it is not mentioned that these vrtti holders are untouchable."¹¹

Division in gotras-

Kashyap, Jatap, Dhusia (Magaiya), Guria, Dhar, Dohar, Jayasuriya, Tanti, Saraki, Chunihar etc. gotras. Gnanalal Ravidas of Cachar district (Clever House - GP) says, 'Ravidas were formerly divided into many gotras; Currently there are only Kashyap, Jatop, Dhusia, Guriyara. But the Kuri (sub-tribes) are seven - Suryavanshi, Nuna, Dashrah, Dhulia (Dhusia), Satyanami, Gazipuria, Regor Koljia.' It is the Dhusia (Magaiya) caste who make shoes from animal skins and play drums at weddings. These are the Chamars or Mochis of the Barak Valley. The name of Chamar is associated with the dead bodies of cattle. They are called after the death of cattle. They came and cremated the dead animal. Sometimes they not only skin the dead cattle but also eat the meat. When I learned about thirty years ago from Phulanti Ravidas that they eat the flesh of dead animals, I did not believe it. But today we have come to know the proof of these words, through the book The Chamars. "The Chamar's very name connects him with the carcasses of cattle. Besides, he not only removes the skins from the cattle that have died, but also he eats the flesh."¹²

When people from Ravidas community used to come to our house to work, my grandmother used to say, they are untouchables, they are Chamars, they cremate dead animals, skin them. Drums are made from that skin. And they also eat the flesh of that dead animal. So don't associate with them much. Incidentally,

A gentle lady named Phulanti Ravidas used to come to our house and do the outdoor activities. We used to call her Kaki. One day that lady came to our house with a big heavy load on her head. As soon as he came, he said to my mother, "Baji (mother-in-law) I will not work today." I have to go home early. Mother then said, "Okay, come tomorrow." I followed him. What's on your mind aunt? He said, baby you stand back you will not come near me. It is a dead goat. I said, what do you do with this dead goat? He said, I will peel this goat after taking it home. With that bark, your uncle will make dolk's dakna. And we will all eat the meat. I got up and said, eat the meat of the dead goat. He replied, We can eat the meat of dead animals from one to five days.

(3)

In this context, Dhaka Civil Surgeon James Wyse, MD, in his book 'Races Castes and Trades' said, "Chamars and Rishis make shoes"¹³

Amlendu Guha in his book 'Planter Raj to Swaraj' mentioned the Ravidas community as Chamar, "It appears that a considerable proportion of plantation labor there were Hindi-speaking non-tribals (mainly Chamar by Caste) who came from the Uttar Pradesh districts." ¹⁴

Incidentally, two uneducated people from the Muchi community (Chiridan Muchi and Kalicharan Muchi) were elected as Members of the Legislative Council (MLC) in 1930 as members of the

Assam Congress Committee. "The Sylhet District Congress Committee, however, had put the diarchy to ridicule by getting two unlettered Cobblers, Chirtan Muchi and Kalicharn Muchi, returned to the Assam Council, in 1930, from the South Sylhet and Sunamganj Constituencies, to sit with the Rai Bahadurs. and Khan Sahebs¹⁵ On the other hand, Gajendra Chandra Malakar says, "Chiridan Ravidas won the election and was elected as a member of the Assam Legislative Council (MLC)."¹⁶

(4)

The Ravidas community is named after the original religious guru Sant Ravidasji. Saint Ravidas is sometimes called Ruhidas, Raudas, Rishi, but basically he is the same as a person. Ravidass were sometimes derogatorily called chamars or cobblers because of their involvement in leather work. Nowadays this word is much lost. The Rabidas consider this term very disrespectful. Like other Dalit communities, Ravidas also have their own social culture. This Dalit community is basically a small ethnic group, who have converted to Hinduism from different groups but have their own distinct language. Nagri, Bhojpuria. Two decades ago, even though the Ravidas community had its own social system, poverty, illiteracy, and the culture of the surrounding communities are on the way to extinction day by day. But now a days the Ravidas are trying hard to preserve their culture as the education rate among the community has increased tremendously.

The Rabidas population is a 'Nishad' or 'Petro-Australoid' class of population. They are Harijans, their deities are Dih (village deity), Sheetala, Parameswari, Shiva Narayana, etc. In terms of Puja Parvans- Vritiya Puja, Gadi Puja, Chhata Puja, Diwali Puja, Bhoot Puja, Janmashtami, Surya Puja, Pushara (Poush Parvan), Padma Maiya (Mansa Puja), Banashakti, Shivratri, Basanti, Holia (Fagua, Dol Utsav), Naomi (Ramanavami) etc. observes The main religious festival of Rabidas is Surya Puja or Chhata Puja.

Marriage: According to the social norms of the Rabidas community, it is best to marry between the three sub-tribes of the Barak Valley: Gazipuria, Suryavanshi, Dasarah. Again, marriages are also done between the three sub-gotras of Satyanami, Dhusia and Nona among the Rabidas community, this marriage is Adham Jutak. This marriage is concluded with the consent of the head of the society. In the community of Rabida, there is no marriage within one's own clan and clan, but this marriage practice is prevalent in the society. At present there are seven types of marriage customs practiced among the Rabidar community in the Barak Valley:

- 1) Social marriage.
- 2) Emotional love.

- 3) Strong coercion.
- 4) Sanga (in case of marriage with widowed or deserted girl).
- 5) Buying a son-in-law with a gift.
- 6) Child marriage.
- 7) Twin marriage. This marriage is a little interesting, as it is the marriage of twin sons with twin daughters on the same day.

Polygamy is not practiced among the Rabidas community. But if the first marriage breaks down for any reason, the second marriage can be done. In that case, the people of the society should be fed. In cases of divorce, the guilty parties are often financially penalized by summoning guardians. Again, if you change your religion and marry without the permission of the society, you will be fined, even ostracized or kept in solitary confinement. Dowry (jewellery/mohar/tilak) was prevalent among the Ravidas community. At present they are more inclined towards dowry system than before.

Among the Rabidas community marriages are completed within one to three days. A one-day wedding is called an Ek Mangra (day) wedding. Similarly, a two-day wedding is called two mangra, a three-day wedding is called three mangra. In fact, only those who are financially weak organize a one-day wedding, this wedding is also called 'Hazm' wedding. Within a day there will be discussions, engagements, betrothals, marriages. Everything depends on the importance of society in this marriage. With the cooperation of both parties, the marriage is performed at the bride's house with the chadhari (mukhiya), mahant (pundit) and some of the groom's relatives. Incidentally, a Samajpati is elected with approximately 50/55 houses, he is called Chadhari or Mukhiya. Again, in the Ravidas community, any one who does the priestly work through study, is called Mahant or Pandit. The Mukhiya and Mahanta are of immense importance in the social system of the Rabidas community.

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There was a custom in the marriage culture of the Ravidas community, which has largely disappeared today. That custom was celebrated at the groom's house. On the day of the marriage, at noon (the pre-coital moment i.e. a virgin goat is selected in advance.) a very healthy virgin goat is sacrificed in front of their house deity (village deity) Dih, Sheetala, Parameswari Devi in great secrecy. This sacrificial process was performed by the groom himself, groom's father, uncle, jathya, younger brother, elder brother or sister's husband. The virgin goat is sacrificed in a well in front of the household deities in the room where the bridegroom will stay. Then the skin is

quickly removed and the meat is taken out. Then the head of the virgin goat, the skin, the pulse and the ashes are buried in a hole inside the house. Then the presence of pits is removed by coating with dung water. Then the meat will be cooked and eaten by your own people. Then the groom gets dressed up and leaves for the in-laws' home on horseback.

The place of worship of the Ravidas community is their bedroom, but they make a place of worship (gadighar, dhamghar) with a chowk on one side. Again, on the day of Mangalacharan in the girl's house, a young goat and a virgin goat are sacrificed with five drops of Siddur on the ground before the house deity. Then the sacrificed head should be kept in front of Goddess Shita. The meat will be cooked and eaten by the relatives of the bridegroom and the bride along with alcohol and meat. In the field survey, I found out that the custom of drinking wine (daru) in social and religious ceremonies is still there among the Ravidas community.

During the field survey, I came to know that many people hide this culture, saying that such culture was not prevalent in our tribe. Those who are outside the 7 Kuris (sub-tribes) or those who wish to marry in the old way, follow this practice or folklore. Even today, virgin goats are sacrificed on the occasion of marriage, but not inside the house but very secretly outside the house. And very soon the sacrificial blood is removed with water. Leaving the meat, the skin, bones, etc. are floated in water. Near relatives and others who are present, and those who like it, eat that meat. Many of the earlier rules are now reduced. But the evidence that they adhere to that ethos is what we have come to know through fieldwork. The Chamars in Geo.W. Briggs brings up the subject of goat sacrifice before Parameswari Devi on the occasion of marriage in the Ravidas community. "Then, in some places, a goat or ram is sacrificed to Parameshwari Devi. The flesh of the slaughtered animal is cooked for the marriage feast." 17

We find the mention of the virgin animal sacrifice used in Laukik Deva Puja in the book 'Manav Savyatay Kumari Boli', "Though there is an image of virgin sacrifice, the image of wife-animal slaughter is almost non-existent in our country. Kalikapurana generally expresses an opinion against wife-animal slaughter, but it is relaxed in the case of many sacrifices. In secular deity worship, the sacrifice of women and animals is prescribed." 18 In fact, some customs derived from the essence of primitive instincts are still prevalent among them. In fact, it can be assumed that such customs were introduced to expand its control and rights over the body of women. Maybe such a religious faith arose in them, that faith has been ingrained in their lives. As we know, 'Culture is the mirror of society' so it can be said, "The more the individualism prevails in the realm of culture, the more the subculture flourishes." 19 Of course, there is no end to diversity in people and in social life, so in reality, people cannot apply their will power in an absolute way, so they get involved in the world of an invisible strategy. They then try to welcome the bride in a new rhythm by destroying the balance of nature. Poverty had a link with discrimination- deprivation and untouchability surrounding this Dalit community of Barak Valley. Their socio-economic status is very poor. Due to the dominance of patriarchy, women were married off at a very young age.

Dowry is a big issue in marriage, be it poor or rich. Again caste difference is also considered as an important factor in marriage. Women have no choice in marriage.

Just as the Ravidas community has a distinct language, their social system, judicial system, various marriage rituals are all distinct. In fact, their society stands on some traditional principles and rules. Many strands of ethnic and social heritage exist among them. They are not the original inhabitants of the said valley. They are brought from different parts of India for various tasks in tea gardens. They have been neglected time and time again, their presence in reading is very little. Moreover, they also spend a lot of money on the need-unnecessary worship, food and drink arrangements with Parban, guest entertainment, dance and music entertainment. Children had to help with family work from childhood. They never had to go to school. They were used from a very early age as extra labor in the field or other productive work. They gave young children in marriage to control the means of production and improve the economic system.

Although they have much to be proud of in terms of their own culture, language and social system, they are far behind due to poverty and lack of education. Their family structure is patriarchal. In a patriarchal society, property or lineage is passed from father to son. Although earlier there were patterns of joint families among them, now they are transforming into single families, unable to compete with their own identity and culture.

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