



The Surjapuri Yogi Community : A Case Study In Islampur Subdivision Of Uttar Dinajpur District

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Abstract: Every nation living in India has its own history. The existence of any nation in the world survives in the history of the nation. Surjapuri Yogi community has a distinct history like other nation living in India. The present work attempts a detailed study of the Surjapuri Yogi Community in the Uttar Dinajpur District with special reference to the Islampur sub-division. The present Islampur sub-division was part of the Surjapur Pargana during the Mughal period. The language spoken by the natives of this Surjapur Pargana is known as 'Surjapuri Language'. The term 'Surjapuri' has been associated with them for Positional and Linguistic reasons. The Yogi community living throughout the India and present days of Bangladesh have the same origin, but Linguistic and Cultural differences can be observed. There are different views about the origin of the Yogi community. They consider themselves 'Originating from Shiva' and belonging to the 'Shiva Gotra'. According to conventional wisdom, over time they forget the secret of their origin and continue to be neglected in society. Later, they gave themselves a higher social status through various social reform movements and scriptural evidence. The Surjapuri Yogi Community has also played an important role in preserving the traditional culture of India. During the British period, many people of the Surjapuri Yogi community joined the Indian National Congress Party. Many people of the Surjapuri Yogi community risked their lives and engaged in conspiracies against the British rule. The contribution of the Surjapuri Yogi community to the Indian freedom movement were undeniable.

Keywords: Surjapuri, Yogi, Freedom Movement, Peasant, Vidhubhushan Nath, Zamindar etc.

Introduction

According to the Surjapuri Yogi Society, " It is the Brahmins who take the name of yogi to attain Moksha (Salvation)". The Yogi community considers itself 'Brahmin', the first Varna of the Rig-Veda. There are different opinions about the origin of the Yogi community. According to Agamsamhita -" Origin of yogi eleventh Rudras from God, among these eleventh Rudras, Mahayogi is the main one. Bindu Nath, son of Mahayogi, Adinath, son of Bindu Nath, And Adinath is the organator of Rudrabamsa. Gaurkshanath, Minnath, Chayanath, Satyanath etc. were born in the lineage of Bindu Nath. This Rudrabamsa is probably the Anadi(Shiva) Gotra of Yogis". It is mentioned in the twenty two chapter of Chandraditya Paramagam that -" Suryavati, the daughter of a Suryabamsa king, got a son named Yognath with the blessings of Mahadev Shiva through penance. Yognath's wife Surati gave birth to sixteen sons including Adinath, Minnath, Satyanath etc.. All came to be known as ' Yogi' as they sprang from Yognath. According to Briddhashatatap Samhita -" All use 'Nath' at the end of the name as they derive from Shiva or Nath and being born to a Brahmin daughter, they observe tennight impurity at

birth and death". According to Mahaviratatantra - " Lord Shiva says to Parvati - From me originates the Yogibansa, this nation is the best of all". There is a description in the Gauraksha Samhita - " Yogivarna originates from Shivapatni (wife of Shiva), they are Siddhas(expert), Shiva Gotra, Their men are called 'Nath' and their women are called 'Debi'. According to the Samveda, Kriyakarma(conventional ritual) will be performed after death, buried in the ground facing North. Their impurity is tendays. Annapinda(Cereal) should be offered for salvation of manes. They have right in Vedic rituals".

The north-eastern part of the undivided Purnea district belonged to the Surjapur Pargana. Although, the current Surjapuri language and culture originated much earlier, yet during the Mughal period, Surjapur Pargana was formed with the north-eastern part of the undivided Purnea district. This Surjapur Pargana was under the Subah of Bengal and the Sarkar of Tajpur. The eastern part of the Mahananda river was under the Tajpur Sarkar. According to Francis Buchanan's account, the Surjapur Pargana was formed within 14 and 15 lakhs of bigahs or 5,00000 acres. L.S.S.O' Malley in his Gazetteer gave the area of Surjapur Pargana as 729(4,66,560 acres) square miles. It is known from the Gazetteer of L.S.S. O' Malley that - " According to its chronicles, Saiyad Khan Dastur did good service under the emperor Humayun in the war against Sher Shah and was rewarded in A.H.962, i e., 1545 A.D., by the grant of a Sanad conferring on him, together with the title of kanungo, the Zamindari of Surjapur, which was formerly held by a Hindu Raja named Sukhdeo". Many people of Surjapur Pargana believe that- " There is a very ancient village called 'Surjapur' in Chakulia police station the present-days North Dinajpur district. The idea of 'Surjapur Pargana' was born from this village ". On 1st November, 1956, on the recommendations of the 'State Re-organisation Commission' this Surjapuri nations with an area of 759 square miles were included in West Bengal from Purnea district. Thakurganj, Islampur, Chopra, Kishanganj, Goal Pokhar and Karandighi police stations belonged to Surjapur Pargana. Above mentioned places were included in the boundary of Transferred Area. These areas were formed as Islampur Subdivision, 1st April, 1992 . This Surjapuri Yogi community was one of the Surjapuri community, whose had their own Language and Script. The language of the Surjapur Pargana was 'Surjapuri Language' and the script was 'Kaithi'. The Surjapuri Language survives today but the Kaithi script is not used. In 2011, a survey by an organisation called "TASO"(TRANSFERRED AREA SURJAPUR ORGANISATION) revealed that, 3,95,138 people of the present Islampur subdivision registered Surjapuri Language as their mother tongue. As Surjapur Pargana is their birthland and their communication language is 'Surjapuri Language', they prefer to call themselves ' Surjapuri Yogi community'. In addition to Islampur subdivision (North Dinajpur), Bihar(Kishanganj, Purnea, Katihar, Araria), and several parts of Bangladesh and Nepal are inhabited by Surjapuri speaking Yogi community.

Yogis Social Reform Movement

Later, the Yogi community split into different factions. Social cohesion begins to break down. They started engaging themselves in various occupations in order to earn a living. Many people were involved themselves in lower level of work. Being engaged in lower level occupations for a long time, they forgot their real identity. Radha Govinda Nath said about the 'Bangiya Yogijati' that - " The Yogi are ignorant of their own caste". According to Francis Buchanan - "Yogis acted as Priests". Besides, according to the proverb of North-East Bengal - Yogis were Shankara's(Shiva) disciples. Later, the Yogi community became alcoholic and Shankar expelled them from the Nation. The people of the Yogi community continued to be oppressed and neglected by the upper castes. Although the Rigveda mentions-" Members of the same family were engaged in different occupation". The scriptures state that, a person of one Varna can be considered another varna, if the qualities of that Varna are fulfilled. Such as - Vishwamitra Muni was born in the Kshatriya clan and considered a Brahmin. A group of people belonging to the Yogi community engaged in textile work and produced cloth and yarn. They were known as 'Tanti' in Society. A group of people from the Yogi community were vagabonds. They are known as 'Jat yogi'. Sannyasiyogis used to spend their days worshipping Shiva. Apart from the above categories, there are many other categories, which were formed based on their work. A few people of the Yogi community used to make lime by burning Oysters and Snails, and sold it to earn money. They are known as 'Chuni Yogi or Chunati Yogi". A group of people engaged in agriculture or in short whose livelihood depends on agriculture. They are known as 'Halua Yogi'. Another name for plough is Haal. Perhaps the name 'Halua' is derived from this word 'Haal'.

Yogis were backward in terms of social, economical and educational activities. The upper caste Hindus looked down upon them. In the first decade of the 20th century, they started the unification movement across Bengal and Assam. After a long investigation it is found that, the Yogis were of high caste. The Yogis believed that, they were a part of the Brahmin community. When Ballal Sen introduced 'Kulin Pratha'(Caste System), they lost their Paita(Sacred thread) and became Shudras. Several reformers of the Yogi community felt the need to take up the sacred thread and started a movement to redefine their position in society. With the active initiative of Vishnu Chandra Nath, the movement spread over North Bengal as well. The yogis of North Bengal convened a meeting at Dinajpur in 1893 AD to prove their superiority. Paramhansa Dev Pratipala Swami Maharaj, the religious Guru of the Yogis, proved through various scriptural evidence that - " The Yogis were Brahmins". As a result, the enthusiasm of the Yogis of North Bengal to adopt the sacred thread became strong. 'Yogi Hitaishini Sabha' was formed in 1901 AD. In this Sabha, it was decided that, the caste name would be 'Yogi', the male members of this community would use the title 'Nath or Debnath' and the women would use the title 'Debi'. Leaders such as - Krishna Chandra, Mohini Mohan, Vishnu Chandra Nath took significant roles in the initiation of the Yogi Social Reform Movement. In 1904, the monthly magazine 'Yogi Shakha' was published to establish communication between the Yogis of different districts. In 1932, the Yogis were listed as scheduled caste. As a result, a tension started in the Yogi Community. Eventually the Yogis were dropped out from the list of schedule Caste. During the British period, when various castes demanded to be include in the scheduled castes and schedule tribes for privileges, the Yogis demanded their higher recognition. But after independence yogis were given OBC status by Indian Government. It can be undoubtly said that, the people of Surjapuri yogi community also joined these movement.

Contributions of the Surjapuri Yogi Community in Freedom Movement

The British occupied the undivided Purnea district in 1770 AD, removing the Muslims rulers. Many Zamindars, Jotdars, Tahsildars and other influential people of this area patronized the British. The oppression of the British on the one hand and the oppression of the influential people of the area on the other hand made the life of the poor people miserable. The common people of the area were looking for a platform to protest against the British rule. In 1925 and 1927 AD, Mahatma Gandhi came to Kishanganj twice and held meeting. " Mahatma Gandhi visited Purnea in 1925 and had addressed crowded meetings at various places including Kishanganj, Bishunpur, Araria and Purnea etc. At Bishunpur in Dhamdaha P.-S. there was a large gathering and the people had presented a substantial purse for the Deshabandhu Memorial Fund. Mahatma Gandhi's second tour from the 11th January, 1927, was in connection with the collection of money for Charkha and Khadi". As a result, many people of this area were attracted by Gandhiji's speech and joined the Congress Party. Hence, from 1925 and 1927 AD, the base form of the Congress Party in this area became strong. Later, many Congress Leaders visited the area repeatedly and held meeting with Surjapuri People. Anath Kanta Bose of Kishanganj was the Congress President of Purnea district. Many Surjapuri people, irrespective of caste, creed and caste, joined the Anti-British activities. Many Surjapuri people of this area created obstacles in the way of British rule. During the British period, a prominent Congress leaders in the present-days of the Islampur Subdivision was Vidhu Bhushan Nath of Nandoi Village. Vidhu Bhushan Nath did not tolerate injustice and lies. When the common men were oppressed and exploited, he would rush to remedy it. Vidhu Bhushan Nath was a Congress leader, Freedom fighter and also peasant leader. Once a time Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan came to the city of Islampur. Mohammad Ali and Saukat Ali held a meeting in Damodarkhuri village. With the arrival of such a National level leaders, the common people of the area started to involve themselves in Anti-British activities.

During the British period , the Independence Movement of the present Islampur Subdivision was centered in Kishanganj. On March 12, 1930, Gandhiji started his "Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha". India's Civil Disobedience Movement started through this Satyagraha. Many people of Surjapuri participated in this movement. The contributions of the "Surjapuri Yogi Community" like other Surjapuri castes to the redress against injustice and India's Freedom Movement were undeniable. Vidhu Bhushan Nath used to organise secret Anti-British meetings in different villages of Islampur Subdivision. At that time, Vidhu Bhushan Nath of the Nandoi Village and Lachhu Nath of Khunia village led the Surjapuri Yogi Community. Satinath Bhaduri the author of 'Jagri Novel' used to come Vidhu Bhushan Nath's House and plan Anti-British. Vidhu Bhushan Nath was in close contact with Shri Pati Joadar, Anath Kanta Bose and Khagendra Nath Mandal. In 1937 AD, Vidhu Bhushan Nath attacked Chopra police station with several people and looted weapons. Vidhu Bhushan Nath used to go from village to village with many local youths and hold Anti-British Procession. Lachhu Nath played a key

role in creating village to village Anti-British organisation in Chopra police station to drive the British out of India. Vidhu Bhushan Nath used to encourage the local Tantis to make cloth from the thread. The members of his house also used to make clothes. Surjapuri people like Pradhan Chandra Singha, Andharu Singha, Khagendra Nath Mandal, Gera Singha, Abdul Qaimuddin etc. had played an active role in Islampur Subdivision. Many Surjapuri Rajbanshis and Muslims participated in this Movement and strengthened the movement. In 1942, when Gandhiji called for the 'Quit British India Movement', a volcano erupted in Anti-British activities across the country. Prominent Congress leaders were arrested and imprisoned by the British in the Midnight of August 8. Yet the British could not stop the Quit India Movement. Every man in India considered himself a leader and led his own area. The Surjapuri people and the Surjapuri Yogi Community were no exception. Many Surjapuri people were arrested and imprisoned for a long time. "When in August, 1942, there was a mass arrest of the leaders throughout India including Gandhiji and an outbreak of a violent lawlessness against the constituted authority, Purnea district was also the scene of intense activities in which the different sections of the people had participated. The student community and Congress workers throughout the district, mill and factory hands of Katihar and Kishanganj took the lead in the upsurge". District Congress President Anath Kanta Bose and other Congress leaders including Lachhu Nath of Khunia village were imprisoned for a long time during this Movement. Vidhu Bhushan Nath of Nandoi Village gave a fiery speech against the British Government at a meeting in Sonapur of Chopra police station. The British Government announced of his arresting order. Under his leadership, a large crowd threw down several sleepers on the railway line from Islampur to Toyedpur. The British Government announced a reward of 500 rupees and a price of Rs 1000 on his head for anyone who could catch him and handed over to the British police. He was eventually caught and spent two years in Kishanganj, Purnea and Alipur Jails. Tabal Nath and Pathak Nath, two members of the Surjapuri Yogi Community, always encouraged Vidhu Bhushan Nath and supported the Indian Freedom Movement. Lachhu Nath of Khunia village joined the Quit India Movement with the vow of 'Do or Die'. Lachhu Nath held Anti-British Meetings, Marches, Picketings and strikes with revolutionaries, such as Naku Mohalia of Chutiyakhori, Horimahan Malakar of Dalua Saraswati, Hurmat of Toteswari, Kantha Singha of Kamargachh. Since the Freedom Movement of this area was centered in Kishanganj, many Surjapuri people (also included Surjapuri Yogi Community) gathered in Kishanganj Town and took out a procession and called a Hartal. Many Surjapuri people from Kishanganj and present days of Islampur Subdivision took down the British flag from Kishanganj court and hoisted the flag of Indian National Congress at that place. "Almost simultaneously there were large processions, Hartal and demonstrations at various places in the district from the 11th August, 1942. The Congress flag was forcibly hoisted on the court building at Kishanganj".

Bataidar Movement was going on in Surjapuri Pargana and Islampur Subdivision since long ago. The common Peasants here were exploited and oppressed greatly by the Britishers, Zamindars, Jotdars and Tahsildars etc. Vidhu Bhushan Nath led the Peasant Movements in Islampur Area. In 1936, Zamindar P.C. Lal detained two peasant in his Kacharibari in Jogtagaon village. Vidhu Bhushan Nath then very bravely negotiated with the Zamindar and freed the two peasant. Vidhu Bhushan Nath would stand by every exploited and oppressed Peasants and tell them to revolt. As a result, the Peasants of this area fearlessly rebelled against their oppression and exploitation. In 1938-1939 AD, there were two terrible Peasants revolt in Sonapur and Bedbari in Islampur Subdivision. In May, 1942, Satinath Bhaduri wrote a letter to Vidhu Bhushan Nath that -"No Peasants leader should bow down to the tyranny of the Zamindars and file a case against Zamindars in Court". Then Vidhu Bhushan Nath stood by the peasant leader with the help of Andharu Singha of Atgharia village. When the Tebhaga Movement started in Dinajpur i.e. Bengal in 1946, also its influence was felt in Islampur Subdivision. Vidhu Bhushan Nath led a large Peasants Movement in Islampur against the Zamindars, Jotdars and Tahsildars with many Surjapuri Peasants. At that time, there were organised a large Peasant Movement under the leadership of Bacha Munshi in Chopra police station.

Folklore and Folk Culture of Surjapuri Yogi Community

The culture of the Surjapuri Hindu community in the present Islampur subdivision was rich. Among the other Surjapuri communities, the Surjapuri Yogi Community was engaged in the cultures of Surjapuri. The Surjapuri Yogi Community considers themselves had originated from 'Lord Shiva' and identifies themselves as belonging to the 'Shiva Gotra'. According to Surjapuri Yogi Community -"In the beginning Brahmins took the name of yogi to attain Moksha (Salvation)". As they were originally Brahmins-"So they performed the role of priest in Human ceremonies". Many people of the Surjapuri Yogi Community practiced "Tantra Sadhana". Many people of the Surjapuri Yogi Community played the role of

the 'Guru' and had many disciples. The main deities of people of surjapuri yogi community are - Lord Shiva, Bishahari, Sheetla , Sri Krishna etc.. Many people of the Surjapuri Yogi community used to spin yarn and make cloth. As a result, they came to be known as 'Tanti' in society. Many surjapuri Rajbanshi used to spin yarn and make cloth. Many people of the Surjapuri Yogi Community was involved in agriculture, whose known as 'Halua Yogi'. Several rituals are observed from birth to death of a child. Which is very similar to other Surjapuri communities. But those are special procedures for burial of dead bodies, which differ from other Surjapuri communities. They placed the dead body in Yoga posture and buried it in the ground facing north. People of the Surjapuri Yogi Community of the Malkhunda village in Goalpokhar-1 block of the present-days of Islampur subdivision do not bury dead bodies in Yogasana(Yoga Posture). According to the conventional wisdom of the Surjapuri Yogi Society of this village -"When a man was placing the dead body in Yoga Posture in the Samadhi, the dead body grabbed the man's hand. After this incident, the dead body is not buried in yoga posture". Like other Surjapuri Hindu communities, the Surjapuri Yogi Community has occupied a larger space in various rituals. It can be observed in various customs during birth, death and marriage ceremonies. 'Gariguri or Sora Sora', 'Cow worship', and 'Dung worship' etc. are performed to get more crops.

The people of the Surjapuri Yogi Community played the role of holders and carriers of Indian cultures. They played an unforgettable role in the Freedom Movement of India. These Surjapuri Yogis and Surjapuri Rajbanshis were well versed in performing classical drama. People of the Surjapuri Yogi Community are living in the present villages of Islampur Subdivision - Matikhunda, Durgapur, Thakurganj, Ramganj, Khunia, Nandoi, Islampur, Dalkhola, Surjapur, Rudely, Malkhunda etc. 'Panchali Palagan' was organised in the above villages of Islampur Subdivision. The team that could sing well 'Panchali Palagan' was rewarded. The people of this Surjapuri Yogi community have become carriers of Indian culture through their Panchali Palagan. Which is still seen in some villages. Malkhunda village was one of the classical drama theatres in the present-days of Islampur subdivision. Many Surjapuri Yogi Community and Surjapuri Rajbanshi Community of this Malkhunda village used to perform classical dramas together since the British period. During the British period, classical theatre group called "Malkhunda Rajdhari Opera Party(Ramayana)" was formed under the leadership of Patan Lal Debnath. Patan Lal Debnath, Ramdhan Singha, Baikuntha Singha, Rajkeshor Singha, Ratan Lal Singha, Jagomohan Debnath, Shyam Charan Debnath, Kanailal Debnath, Satish Debnath, Keshav Lal Singha, Marich Singha and others were included in this drama troupe. They portrayed every character of Ramayana skillfully. Many Muslims used to invite them for classical drama. There were a close relationship between the Surjapuri Yogi Community and Surjapuri Rajbanshi Community. The people of this Surjapuri Rajbanshi and Surjapuri Yogi community also struggled together in the Indian Independence Movement.

Conclusion

The Surjapuri Yogi Community has a unique place in the history of Islampur Subdivision. When discussing the contribution of the Surjapuri people to the Indian Freedom Movement, the context of the Surjapuri Yogi Community is inevitable. The Surjapuri Yogi Community has also played an important role in preserving the traditional culture of India. Vidhu Bhushan Nath's Patriotism and Philanthropic activities will help the future generations of the Surjapuri Yogis to be come proper citizens. The Surjapuri Yogi Community will be Shine like a bright star in the upcoming history of the Surjapuri Community.

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