

CONSTRUCTION OF SHILPKAR IDENTITY IN COLONIAL UTTARAKHAND

SUMMARY of THESIS

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

An identity is what “I am” or “we are”, “he is” or “they are” in general sense of the term. But it is widely stated that the terms “I” and “we” similarly “he” and “they” is neither independent/autonomous social product nor remain fixed forever. In the same way one’s identity is constructed through the processes of interaction, and daily engagement both with local and global society. These processes of construction get widely influenced by the social and cultural institutional arrangements of the society like caste, religion and ethnicity, class, political party, state and the like. Hence, the process of identity construction gets negotiated both with the localized conditions, historical experiences and inter connections with wider society. It is a complex and dynamic process through which individual collective self gets constructed, reformed and rejuvenated. Therefore, the summations of identity represent the collective self. Generally speaking, human beings are born in society and societal conditions widely shape the identity.

In the *symbolic-interactionist* theories the issues of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ are frequently used. To them ‘self reflects society’, i.e., ‘society shapes self which shapes social behaviours. Society however is not a homogeneous undifferentiated identity. It also has eclectic dimension. Hence the *structural symbolic-interactionist* visualizes societies as ‘highly differentiated yet organized systems of interactions and relationships encompassing a wide variety of crosscutting lines based on social class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion and more’. Here ‘self’ must be seen as ‘multifaceted, as comprised of a variety of parts that are sometimes interdependent and sometimes independent of other parts, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes conflicting

and that are organized in multiple ways. Self is conceptualized as sets of discrete identities or internalized role designations. It is also argued that identity varies in their salience. That a given identity can be invoked in a variety of situations or it 'can be defined as differential probability'. Thus, choice between or among behaviours expressive of particular roles will reflect the relative location of the identities associated with those roles.

Hall argues that there is no automatic connection between various discourses of identity, namely, class, gender, race, age, etc. as they can be articulated in different ways. In this connection, the issue of multiple identities as propagated by several social scientists is highly relevant. To Barker and Galasinski 'we may reflect on the multiple identities of the contemporary subject, which is the weaving of the patterns of identity from the discourses of race, gender, etc. We can thus conceive of people as operating across and within multiple subject positions constituted by the intersections of discourses of race, gender, age, nation, class, etc. Thus there is an element of plasticity in the formation of identity. For Hall, it is the very plasticity of identity that makes its cultural and political significance, for the shifting and changing character of identities chronicles the way that get transformed over time and as a result, they tend to be subjective construction of mainly their objectively fixed phenomena.

In India there has been a long tradition of intellectual reconstruction of Dalit identity. Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar contributed in their own way for this process. During medieval time, Bhakti movement questioned caste hierarchy, restrictions in places of worship. This is the reason why Bhakti movement became popular among Shudra and lower castes. Identity construction among Dalits got evolved historically over the period. Bhakti saints opposed caste distinctions and asserted equality before

God. Many lower castes and Dalits constructed an identity which was against the Brahmanical one. After Bhakti movement, 'Adi' movements played an important role in the formation of Dalit identity. In 1920s and 1930s mobilization of lower castes took place under varying leadership with different ideologies. Adi movements objective was to bring the original inhabitant's argument to the fore as Adi means original inhabitant. Adi dharma in Punjab, Adi Hindu in Uttar Pradesh and Hyderabad, Adi Dravida, Adi-Andhra and Adi-Karnataka in South India are case in point.

In the same way Shilpakars in Uttarakhand tried to construct their own positive identity. Before we understand the need and necessity of constructing identity by Shilpakars, we need to understand the composition of society in Uttarakhand. Theoretical division of caste which prevailed in India did not exist in Uttarakhand. Khsatriya caste was absent in south as well as in eastern India. Kumaon Province is situated between the north latitudes of 28°-14'-45" and 30'-5. and the east longitudes of 76°-6-30" and 80°-58'-15. To its east lies Nepal in the west, lies the District of Garhwal; in the north, lies Tibet; and in the south, lie the plains of Pilibhit, Bareilly and Moradabad. Uttarakhand which is a part of the central Himalayan region is divided into two regions; one is Kumaon region and another one is Gharwal region. Two regions have their own rich traditional culture. Caste system in the Hills of Uttar Pradesh is different from the four-fold caste system model. The social structure of Kumaon and garhwal roughly divided into three broad class: Brahmins, Khasiyas (Rajputs), and Doms (Shilpkars).

In the same way caste system in Uttarakhand is different in the sense that the society was not divided into four-fold varna system as was thought earlier but it was

only three-fold stratification. Doms in Uttarakhand were numerically the largest group of different castes. There are no similarities between Doms in Hills and the Doms of plains of Uttar Pradesh. But most of the time, it was assumed that Doms in Hills and Plains are the same. Besides, some artisan communities among Doms emerged powerful economically and wanted to differentiate themselves from the Doms.

Objectives of the Study

- To know why Shilpkars wanted to construct new identity
- To understand various methods and means through which this identity was constructed.
- To study impact of Shilpkar identity on the people
- To examine whether Shilpkars were included from the areas where they were excluded earlier.
- To understand the efforts of Shilpkars to gain social mobility.

Assumptions of the study

- All sub-castes who were providing professional and menial services were clubbed together under Dom category.
- Uttarakhand society underwent remarkable changes after the Colonial Government was established.
- After getting western education some of the Dom sub-castes got the wind of changes of equality, honour and respect.

- Some of the sub-castes of the Doms wanted to change Dom identity which connotes negativity, humility, poverty, illiteracy and shame to something positive like Shilpakar which is filled with positivity, self-respect and equality.
- Artisanal castes among Doms used census as a means to construct this new identity along with increasing their educational, professional, Governmental and political opportunities and cultural symbols in the society.

Scope of the Study

There have been numerous studies on construction of identity by lower castes across India. The present study is concerned about the construction of identity by the Doms who spread across Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. However, there is a whale of difference between Doms of plains and Doms of Hills. Therefore, the present study is confined to the efforts for the construction of positive identity by the Doms of Uttarakhand.

Review of Literature

There exists plenty of literature on the Dalit communities of India. While Dalit communities of India have been the subjects of research and study for pretty long time, much of the studies on caste communities have been done from sociological, anthropological, cultural or historical perspective. While some scholars have tried to romanticize them, others have tried to look at them as curious anthropological type. Studies have also been conducted with regard to modernization, political socialization and socio-economic transformation of the caste communities. Recently, a great deal has been written on the need for bringing the caste of this Country into the mainstream of national life. But, a review of the available literature

reveals that Shilpakars of Uttarakhand made conscious efforts to construct a separate identity themselves.

Shantan Singh Negi 2014, in his article, the Dola Palki Movement: Dalit struggle for social justice in Uttarakhand in 20th century writes about the efforts of Shilpakars to lead marriage processions along with doala palki during colonial period. Before the advent of colonial power, dola palki was used only by the so-called upper castes and never by the Doms. There were lot of objections, hindrances and violence against the use of dola palki. In many instances, Shilapakr baratis were man-handled, beaten and their valuables were stolen. In many cases, they had to resort to court cases. But in spite of that Shilpakars continued to fight for their honour.

Vasudha Pande (2013), in her occasional paper, Stratification in Kumaon Circa 1815-1930 argues that social system of Uttarakhand is different from that of mainland India. She discussed all castes which exist in Uttrakhand and their status which changed over the period. Indigenous castes and migrant castes to Uttrakhand hills from ancient times to colonial period have been analyzed. How Brahamn, Kshtriya, and Doms both local and migrant castes evolved over the period has been discussed. She opined that most Doms have been treated as unclean precisely because their professions in one way or the other involved the use of cow hides. But this is not borne by the fact some of the professions of Doms did not involve use of any cow skin.

Chaman lal Pradyot, Praveen Kumar Bhatt, Arun Kumar Kukshal 2012, in their work Uttrakhandke Shilpakar they divided their book in to three parts. first part *Shilp and Shilpkar*. The work discusses about varnashram system. It argues that Shilpkars were the indigenous people of Uttrakhand they were influenced by

Ayarsamaj. In the second part *Shilpkaron ke Vividh Aayam* , they gave depiction of their Oral folklores, traditional occupation, their struggle for social equality, and historic struggle against *Dola- Palki*. In the last part, namely *Samsamayik Sandarbh* authors dealt with Shilpkar society, literature, social structure and the kind of benefits shilpkar community were getting through government policies. Shilpakars involvement with politics was also discussed.

M.P.Joshi (ed), Suresh Chandra Tamta , V. Bahuguna, Piyush Bhatt(Asst. ed.) 2011 work on *Madhya Himalaya Ki Anusuchit Avam Pichhadai Jatiyan – Parampara Shilp Aur Udyam*- looks at the traditional occupation of shilpkars and how they are struggling to pursue their traditional occupation in the time of industrialization. The author analyses the techniques and methods which are used for making copper and other type of utensils.

Suresh Chand Tamta , 2007 in his work entitled *Vartman Atit – Madhya Himalaya Ka Shilp, Shilpkar Avam Puratatva* gave vivid description about different occupation of Shilpkars. His work is based on survey methods, he talks about various means and methods which are used by Shilpkar community for livelihood. This work also talks about various indigenous medicinal practices, methods and instruments which Shilpkar community is following for health care.

Naval Viyogi , M. Anwar Ansari, 2010, work *History of the later Harappans and Shilpkar movement, Vol II*, brings out the salient features of the Harrappan civilization. It says that the inhabitants of Indus valley were prosperous. The existence of towns and buildings are evidence of the prosperity of the Indus valley. They tried to argue that Shilpkars who emerged in Kumaon were basically the authors of Indus valley civilization. But the evidence does not support this kind of proposition. In

addition, it also talks about the Katyuris of Uttarakhand, how Khasas and Kols of Uttarakhand, how Shilpkars were exploited economically, how Arya samaj tried to reform them, the policy of the British towards Shilpkars, the movement of Shilpkars for self-respect, congress efforts for eradication of untouchability have been discussed in this work.

Anil, K. Joshi 2001 in his article on *Dalit reform movement in British Kumaon* discusses the condition of shilpkars before the advent of the British. Then it tries to explain conditions which prompted Show the consciousness for honour and equality emerged with the Shilpkars. He argues that introduction of education and some humiliating experiences of Shilpakars during world wars, emergence of vernacular newspapers brought consciousness to Shilapars. It was a sort of social awakening for the Shilpkars. With new enlightenment, Shilpkars fought for equality and honour.

Ajay, S. Rawat in one of the occasional papers, *History and growth of forestry in Central Himalaya (1815-1947)* writes about various conditions existing in forest in Uttarakhand. Different classes of forests and forest acts brought by the British were discussed. People faced a lot of problems as a result of these forest laws for example getting grazing grounds, firewood, access to minor forest produce. Forest panchayats also were also established to deal with these kinds of issues. Some reserved forests were de-reserved in order to allot land to the Shilapcars both for cultivation and for residential areas in Uttarakhand during colonial period. Amar Farooqui in the work, *Colonial forest policy in Uttarakhand 1890-1928* also discussed the forest policy which the British introduced and also the resistance by the people to these new regulations.

Mahesh C.Regmi, (1999) in his work, *Imperial Gorkha: An account of Gorkha rule in Kumaon (1791-1815)* talks about Gorkha rule in Kumaon until 1815. It consists of seven chapters on areas like political, military and economic history. It is a critique of Gorkha rule on Kumaon society. He argues that by and large Gorkha rule was exploitative and resented by Kumaonis. He points out that Dharmadhikari under Gorkhas played an important role in the polity and society. Various atrocities committed by Gorkhas including excessive revenue demands. He also describes land revenue system and administrative structure and the army.

John Leavitt, (1992) in his work, *Cultural Holism in the Anthropology of South Asia: The challenge of Regional Traditions* suggests Kumaon society cannot be reduced to the label of residual nor to the variation of great tradition. Two examples that support his argument are patterning of time and patterning of divinity.

Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C.Fanger and Charles W.Brown (ed,) 1990 work, *Himalaya: Past and Present*, consists of twenty chapters. First ten chapters talk about political and commercial interests of the British. The next ten chapters discusses the settlement of Khasas in ancient period, various myths associated with vansavalis of Kumaon, economic condition during colonial time, interpretation of caste system and land resources along with crops in Kumaon.

K.S. Valdiay (1988) in his edited work, *Kumaon: Land and People*, discussed various issues related to Kumaon society. The prevailing social structure in Kumaon in prehistoric period, various social groups which existed, process of migration, difference between indigenous groups and migrants, caste subdivisions among the people and the role and status of women in Kumaon society were discussed in this work.

George Weston Briggs (1953) in his work, *The Doms And Their Near relations*, the author talks about various legends regarding the origin of the Doms, various groups among them, the social organization among them and their struggle for existence, Birth and marriage customs, Disposal of the dead and other domestic customs, folk magic, worship of Great and Lesser spirits, priests and celebration of various festivals were discussed. One important thing to notice in this work is that G.W.Briggs says that Doms of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are different in various aspects.

James Kennedy (1885), *Life and Work in Benares and Kumaon, 1839-1877*, was basically a missionary. He travelled to Benares and to Kumaon hills and stayed. He observed people in Kumaon and their economy, culture and their language. He described the society of Kumaon at that point of time. How was society divided into different castes and how Doms lived in Kumon society has been dealt very clearly by James. His was eye witness account of the society and different castes of Kumaon.

H. C. Upreti 1980, in his work, *social organization of a Migrant group: A sociological study of Hill Migrants from Kumaon region in the city of Jaipur*, describes the social organization of the hill migrants to the Jaipur city. But the authors describe about Shilpakars history, society, economy. The factors back at home which propel migration to other cities have been analyzed in this work.

Allen C. Fanger's Ph. D thesis (1980) is divided into two sections. The first section discussed diachronic analysis of Kumaon society focusing on patterns of change in Kumaon social stratification. The second part tried to analyze Bargaon village in a synchronic way. He tried to analyze the organizational structure of village society with dynamics and change perspective. He discussed on caste structure, caste

interaction including food and economic exchange, and the process of Sanskritization. He also considered labour processes, property relations and the development of cash economy and employment migration.

R.D.Sanwal 1979 worked on *Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon* lead the way in that it concise field work insights with an assimilation of sociological processes. In selecting the field work areas he goes beyond the micro village level to compose intensive study of three carefully selected villages along with the fieldwork in rural market centres, the cantonment of Ranikhet and the town of Alomar .The selection of areas gives the study a greater dimension and also takes into account variants which might be dominant at the purely village level.

James M. Sebring (1972) in his article, *The Formation of New Castes: A Probable Case from North India*, argued that there is a possibility of a formation of a new caste within the caste system. He tried to demonstrate that emergence of Shilpakar Brahmins is a case in point. When upper caste Hindus refused to perform birth, death and other domestic ceremonies, Shilpakars themselves formed a priestly class as Shilpakar Brahamans in order to take care of priestly activities among Shilpakars.

Gerald D.Berreman (1963) wrote a book entitled *Hindu of the Himalayas* which is basically an anthropological work. Berreman's work is located in the tradition of village studies, social stratification, mainly kinship and caste, studies of social dynamics and change. This work attempts to broaden the topic on village studies with regional focus.

Methodology and Sources

In this research Historical method was followed. Primary data included census reports, archival records, Annual Administrative reports, Gazetteers, News Papers, Proceedings of Legislative Assembly, Secondary data was taken from reference books, Journals, Magazines and websites. Other available standard sources of data were also utilized for the study.

Organization of the work

The work has been organized into six chapters which are discussed below:

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

It basically introduces the subject of identity. Why people want to construct new identity. Once they decided to construct it, what are the way and means through which they construct this new identity? What identity people want? Is it personal or group identity? Why movements emerge around identity, objectives of the research, assumptions, methodology, sources and different works which are reviewed in the work are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DOMS IN UTTARAKHAND

This chapters describes historical background of uttarakhand society. Uttarakhand society did not have four-fold varna system which was prevalent in other parts of India. It basically consisted of three groups namely: Brahmin, Kshatriya and Doms. The first two are numerically small but occupied all positions of power and land was occupied mostly by these two groups. Doms were the largest numerically

but were confined to menial services like cultivation, tending the cattle and other professions.

Chapter 3: IDENTITY, DOMINATION AND EXCLUSION

This chapter discusses the power structure in the society, exclusion of Doms from various spheres of life and deprivation of lower castes from natural resources. It also describes various ways and means which so called upper castes adopted just in order to keep the Doms who were in majority. Most Doms were service castes and have been referred to as the indigenous communities who were defeated by the invaders from the earliest times. resentment of the depressed castes against their exclusion from social, political and economic areas.

Chapter 4: IMPACT OF GURKHA AND COLONIAL RULE ON KUMAON SOCIETY

This chapter discusses occupation of Kumaon region by the Gurkhas. Once the Gurkhas established their rule, they did not want to continue the caste privileges which earlier regimes followed. Preference of certain castes for royal, revenue and other positions was no longer followed. As a result, the castes which dominated in earlier regimes lost their importance gradually. Some changes gradually started taking place in the social structure. This is very important precisely because, the Doms who were treated as menial castes got better way to improve their position.

Chapter 5: CONSTRUCTION OF SHILPKAR IDENTITY

This chapter describes how colonial education was introduced in the Kumaon Hills. The western education brought a sort of renaissance to Kumaon in general and

Doms in particular. Once Doms got educated, there was no turning back for them. They started thinking in terms of freedom, equality and fraternity from different oppressions. The British education policy which treated all castes as equal in terms of getting education came as a boon to the Doms. Some of the educated Doms, particularly professional castes, wanted to construct a positive identity and also improve their social status. They set up their own schools including night schools, and demanded reservations in education and employment and tried to construct their identity of Shilpkar through census. As a result of their efforts, the word Dom for certain castes had been replaced with the word Shilpkar in the census.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

This chapter sums up research findings as conclusion chapter. The social structure in the Kumaon society namely three fold unlike other parts of India, the influx of different castes in to Kumoan and the contradictions between the indigenous and migrant castes, the domination of certain castes in the social, political and economic spheres, the position of Doms who were basically service castes and how they realized their status and measures they took in order to construct a positive identity for themselves have been summed up in the conclusion.