

## **Badias in Transition**

The Badias alias Shershabadias though belong to the Islamic religion has had a traditional occupation of castration. Agriculture was also practised by them. They were engaged in cattle trade. Employment in the military force before and at the time of Mughals can not be ignored. But now-a-days their traditional occupation has almost been disappeared. Many a people have lost their landed property either because of the imposition of land ceiling act or to maintain the families they had to sell out the property. Number of families have been increased by the natural process of population growth and by the division of family. Ultimately most of the Badias have been transformed into marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. Income from the agricultural sources has become less as they do not respond to modern innovation in agriculture. Traditional method of cultivation of the Badias is considered scientific but it fails to sustain the growing population. The Badias also suffer from recurring floods in their localities because usually they live near low marshy land and on the banks of rivers. In search of work mainly they had to migrate from their old habitations.

Another factor of migration is the attitude of the people. The Badias considered themselves as the descendants of military force of Sher Shah. They are stout and strong. They can easily defeat any person with whom they involve

in dispute mainly on the issue of land possession. From this attitude they go forward to fight against landed gentry. But the administrative backing do not go in their favour. Sometimes they have been branded as a gang involved in dacoity and similar other offenses to get rid of harassment from the Police department they decide to leave their residences. In Bihar the Badias have formed an association to fight against the vindictive attitude towards their society.

On the issue of migration the softer side of their psyche also plays an important role. It is ~~argued~~ <sup>learned</sup> that in slightest difficulty they decide to migrate and they possess this habit of frequent changing of their residences. Therefore they have imprints of living in about four thousands of villages in West Bengal, Bihar, Nepal and Bhutan. Their settlements are mainly restricted to the villages. In towns of Malda and Murshidabad few Badias live because of their engagement in various professional/services like teaching in colleges and schools, practising law in the court etc.

In the field of economy diversification of occupation is noticed. Apart from the professionals and intellectuals a number of Badias are working in the field of trade and business, masonry, carpentry etc. Many of them have gone outside the state of West Bengal for working in industries or any unorganized sectors. Arbi is their lingua-franca.

Majority of the people are educationally backward. Forty three percent people of selected villages under study are literates. Female literacy rate is much lower than their male counterparts. Their learning is restricted in Maktabas and Madrasas only. Literates are mostly educate in the formal standard of class IV. But it would also be kept in mind that some of them are higher educated having the degrees of M.A., B.ED., L.L.B, etc. Poets are also found among the Badias. Some of them have acquired national and international fame.

For changes in the economy and educational spheres transformation in other aspects of life of the Badia community has also been occurred. In the traditional food habit they have a special item called kalai ruti or chapati made from kalai da (black gram). Normally it is prepared with a mixture of one-fourth quantity of kalai atta (flour) and three-fourth quantity of rice atta. But now-a-days to make it more delicious the quantities of the ingredients have just been reversed. In the well-to-do families the second matter is applied because it is unaffordable for the ordinary people. To most of the rural people rice with fried jute leaves is a regular menu during the particular season of jute cultivation. On the other hand well off families are used to take fish regularly and meat and even polao (fried rice) during socio-religious occasions.

In dress pattern change is remarkable. Traditionally the Badia males are used to wear a lungi with a vest or half shirt. A napkin or gamcha is placed over their shoulders. But now-a-days the affluent old Badia people even residing in rural areas are using towels instead of gamcha. The younger generations have brought a revolution in dress pattern. They are using full pants and dressed

showing suited-booted with a fancy hair cut. The traditional white cap called fez is only noticed during congregational prayers.

Social organisations of the Badias is in the phase of transition. The Badias have been divided into three major sections. The dominant one is the Shersabadias who claim to be direct descendants of the military personnel of Sher Shah. They live in Malda and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal as well as in Rajsahi district of Bangladesh. In another group known as Penchi Badias live in Malda district along with the Shershabadias. Some times they demand that they are Ashrafs (Great Muslims). They are also found in Shibganj police station areas of Bangladesh. They belong to Hanafi majhab. They have a difference with the Shershabadias in language and customs or habits. The third group generally termed as Badia only who are again subdivided into Chakaiah Badia, Jogia Badia and Nengtykhola Badias. Chakaiah Badias are found mostly in Kaliachowk police station and Itahar police station areas of Malda and North Dinajpur districts respectively. In Coochbehar district presents of Chakaiah Badia is observed alongwith Jogia Badia (Samad: 1991). Chakaiah Badias are involved in making cart wheels. Jogia Badia is again known as Pakhdhara Badias as they mostly engaged in hunting birds. Nengtykhola Badias are solely living on agriculture. They work in a paddy field wearing a short piece of cloth locally called as nengty or underwear.

Badia family and kinship system is undergoing change. Not so earlier a joint family with more than thirty individuals are found because of their joint

property holding but now-a-days the size of a family has been reduced to three members even. Owing to diversification of occupation this has become possible. The unit which was joined earlier called as a parivar has now become a bangso or lineage. In many areas, still now, a member of the Badia community is identified with a paribar, though he has his own family of nuclear type or a joint type, either patrilineal or fraternal, of say ten to fifteen members. On the one hand jointness has been reduced and on the other kinship network has been extended. Earlier to keep the property within themselves marriage between the kins in the form of parallel cousin marriage and cross cousin marriage has been preferred. Now-a-days the Badia people do not have the zeal to parallel cousin marriage. Incidence of cross cousin marriage has also been reduced. It is often thought that marriage between the kins creates some problems in their families like barrenness which often leads to divorce. Avoidance of kin marriages cuts across the economic condition of the families. The poor families who have little or no landed property in their possession do think that selection of a bride outside the lineage makes no difference. Only as a remnant of tradition they have established marital relationship with their kin. The endogamy factors of the Badias also forces them to select the brides from their relatives.

Contrary to the situation the well-to-do families mostly discarded the practice of preferential kin marriages. They are conscious of their own status in the eyes of other people with whom they have interaction at various levels. In a case study of a rich paribar (lineage) of Baingachi village of Malda district it has

been found that two marriage alliances have been made between kin out of total 22 marriages occurrences. After the name of Muhammad Ali Biswas the lineage or paribar or the khandan is popularly known as Biswas Paribar or Biswas Khandan. Muhammad Biswas had 200 bighas of land in his possession. His third son was married to the daughter of his second wife's sister. The couple had no issue upto four years of marriage. Then they opted ~~for~~<sup>for</sup> talaq or dissolution of marriage. The other case of cross cousin marriage happened in the third descending generation of Muhammad Biswas. His first son's fourth son married a girl who is the daughter of the groom's half-maternal uncle.

Barring this two cases of kin marriages all the marriage alliances held outside the patrilineage (khandan or paribar). Naturally the Biswas paribar has large number of affinal kins (Atimiya/Mehman). They have a large kinship relations among whom non-Badias and non-Ahl-e-Hadit people also exists.

There are ten families (ghar) in Biswas paribar/khandan at present. Out of ten families only one family is of joint type and rest nine are of nuclear types.

Rate of divorce has been lowered among the Badias and also the practice of polygamy. A stereotype is that the Indian Muslims are more polygynous than the Hindus. Facts do not support this notion. Before 1940s rate of polygyny among the Muslims were higher than that of the Hindus. Since 1941<sup>1/2</sup> a gradual decrease in the rate of polygyny among the Muslims is noticed. Comparative figures on incidence of polygyny among the Hindus and Muslims at different Censuses are as follows:

Table No. X.1.

## Incidence of Polygyny among Hindus and Muslims

Category	1931-1940	1941 - 1950	1951 - 1960	1961 - 1970
Hindu	6.79%	7.15%	5.06%	5.80%
Muslim	7.29%	7.06%	4.31%	5.73%

(Source --- Dube:1990)

Among the Badias in the studied settlements it is recorded that incidence of polygyny is only 1.63 percent.

In regard to inheritance of property it is observed that the Badias make some adjustment with their female inheritors. It does not always follow the rules of Shariah. To keep good relation with other brothers some sort of adjustments in sharing of property is well accepted by the sisters. According to the Shariah laws son's widow and her wards would be deprived of the share (Mujlimiras) if deceased father distribute his properties during his lifetime. In the studied area it has been observed that the widow received a share from her father-in-law after the death of her husband.

Changes in the traditional pattern of Jamat/Paich is also observed. Paich or Jamat <sup>was</sup> meant for looking after the religious aspects only. A mosque oriented life of the Badias has become secular with the introduction of Panchayati Raj institution. Leaders of the traditional panchayat, in many cases, have occupied the position of formal panchayat. In the structure of the traditional panchayat some changes have also been noticed. It is significant to note that the common people go to the panchayat members in their difficulties and not to the morol or

sardar of the paich. Ultimately the function of paich leaders remain confined to the religious life and development of mosque.

Purdah system among the Badias is almost turned down. Among the poor families the females compelled to go to the agricultural fields as well as to the near by urban places for earning wages. Among the well-to-do families it is felt that they would remain be backward if their women do not go outside. In this section girls or women are not always escorted by males when they go outside. But performance of Namaj five times a day is maintained by the Badia married woman (except working ladies) though their male counterparts do not always bother to follow this religious prescriptions.

Habits of drinking liquor and gambling, though forbidden by Islam, have slowly stepped into the Badia society. The elders council called paich or jamat take serious action against such cases but as a form of occupational vice such habits have made rooms.

### Observation

The Badias were the army personnel of Sher Shah at the initial stage of their settlement in Indian soil. Castration <sup>was</sup> supposed to be one of their traditional occupations. At present castration is done by <sup>hardly</sup> ~~a~~ <sup>members</sup> ~~of the~~ <sup>of this</sup> group. They are now considered as a good agricultural people.

At the early phase most of the Badias were settled in some places of Bihar. Gradually they migrated to various districts of Bihar and West Bengal. In West Bengal their main concentration is noticed in Murshidabad and Malda



districts. A good number of Badias are also settled in North Dinajpur and Darjiling districts. Main reason for their migration to these latter districts is economic.

They are mainly settled in low marshy land wherefrom they can easily draw water to irrigate their cultivable land. This sort of land is also available at a cheaper rate. Apart from agriculture the Badias are engaged in various other occupations. Masonry and carpentry are the two economic pursuits where the Badias have begun to stride.

In the field of literacy, the Badias have failed to reach the national average. But some of them have already achieved the highest degree of formal education. Few of them are working as teachers in schools and colleges. Advocates and Physicians are also reported to be there among the Badias.

The changes in economic and educational spheres have brought about some social changes in Badia community. Kinship system and type of family are also being changed. Change is also observed in the outlook of the community. Political participation of women has now been experienced by the Badias.