

Aspects of Material Culture

Dwellings

In the areas under study the Badias live in the houses locally called as *ghar*. These houses are looked like hutment. Top of the hutment is thatched with straw sloped through two sides (*do-chala*) or sometimes four sides (*char-chala*). The walls of these huts are made up of mud and bamboo strips. These types of houses are called *kutch* houses. *Pucca* houses with brick walls and concrete roof are rarely found. Few houses are there with brick walls and roofed with corrugated tin. These huts are mainly stretched through lanes and bye lanes forming a lineal pattern in the two sides of the roads. A cluster of houses is noticed where the families have formed into a number of nuclear families breaking joint ones. But they prefer to settle lineally, and, therefore, the settlement is stretched longitudinally with high density.

Badia houses are fenced with bamboo strips or jute sticks in such a way that outsiders would fail to peep in through the houses. There is an open area called *uthan* in many houses. Sometimes three or four domiciles share an *uthan*. In such cases the households are settled around the open area. But in most cases an *uthan* is used by a single household and is surrounded by various

rooms of that particular household. These rooms are used for living, cooking, keeping crops and domestic animals.

The open area, walls and floors are besmeared with cow dung after sweeping by broomsticks. The rubbish as well as cow dung from the cow shed and fowl sty collected in the morning in a worn-out basket and thrown into a rubbish heap or a pit on the side of the main road. Sometimes the rubbish heap is seen in the kitchen-garden because these are used as manure. Badias also make cow dung cake and use them as fuel for cooking.

Kitchen is not always confined to a room. A hearth is made on the courtyard or sometimes in the uthan. Fuel and fire wood for cooking are kept by the side of the hearth. A room specially used for kitchen is found in well-to-do families only.

Guest room is an out house of the Badias. Just at the entrance they make a room where guests are entertained and the aged people of the household live. It is normally isolated from the other rooms of the household. A cot covered with mat is placed in the guest room. Wooden chairs and tables are also kept in the guest room.

Living room is situated opposite to the entrance and/or guest room. Water containers and grain reservoirs known as kuthis are kept in the courtyard by the side of the living room. Wooden cot covered with home-stitched clothes (kantha) are placed in the living room with some essential furniture like alna, cupboards etc. A trunk made up of tin is also noticed in the living room. Utensils are also kept in the living room in absence of separate kitchen.

Domestic Articles

The Badias prefer to use utensils like thala, bati, glass, gamla, pik-dani, kalsi, etc. made up of mainly bell-metal. A jug or badna is a must in their household. Now-a-days use of steel plates and other utensils of plastic and stainless steel are used in vogue.

Other equipment and implements are scattered in the courtyard and are stuck from the notches of the walls/ceilings of the households. Wooden husking lever is also found in some families.

Domestic Animals

Cows, buffaloes and goats are the important livestock of the Badias. These are kept with high care specially in Darjeeling and North Dinajpur districts because of theft menace. So cow shed is built strong enough and well protected in most of the Badia households.

Food and Drinks

Rice is the staple food for the Badias. Along with rice they take pulses, vegetables and fish as an ordinary daily meal. Meat / beef is taken occasionally in the average Badia families. During social occasions and festivals they take Polao(fried rice), Simui and beef. Kalai ruti / uti or the chapati made up of kalai dal (black gram) is a kind of special dish found among the Badias. Usually the Bengalis prefer to take chapati made from atta or wheat flour but the Badias prepare chapati mixing the dust of black gram with rice dust. Three-fourth of atta or rice dust is mixed with one-fourth amount of kalai atta for making ordinary kalai ruti/ uti. Most of the Badias are used to take kalai ruti with green chilies.

Daily Consumption of Food

Sometimes the kalai ruti is consumed with roasted brinjal (fruit of egg plant) and paste of garlic. This is normally taken at night. Breakfast is known as lahari/ lahar pani by the Badias. In the morning the Badias prefer to take chapati made from rice atta called chitua ruti/ chitiya. Water is poured with rice powder and the thickened mixture (manda) is placed on the tawa to prepare chitua ruti/ chitiya. It is taken along with milk and jiggery (molasses) or sugar. Stale rice is also taken in the morning.

Vegetables and tender jute leaves are often taken by many Badias along with green chillies. Major meals are taken two times a day and a light tiffin is taken in the morning only. With the help of pumpkin and kalai they prepare a delicious small cake locally known as bari. These baris are prepared only in winter. During winter season Pituli or rice ball is also made by the Badias and consumed with molasses. The Badias, therefore, are used to take both hot and sweet dishes. Occasional sweet dishes are called Adharasa or Malpoa and Aikhyar khir. Aikhyar khir is prepared from rice powder and molasses or sugar.

All these are the traditional food habits of the Badias. Now-a-days a lot of changes have occurred even among the Badias of poor families living in rural areas. They have developed the habit of taking tea. In the morning many Badias take biscuits and breads along with tea. Stale rice is taken by the daily labourers at noon. Kalai ruti has been replaced by chapati of wheat flour though once Badia was synonymous with kalai ruti. Traditional dishes were prepared in earthen cookerries but now-a-days stainless still and bell metal are used

extensively. They consider that food items prepared in bell metal is good for health.

Occasional Consumption of Food

Apart from the regular dishes the Badias have their own or indigenous diet charts prescribed for the ailing persons including pregnant and lactating mothers. For example the pituli prepared with atta and molasses mixed with ginger is offered to the mothers after delivery. This is considered delicious as well as nutritious item of food.

Habits of drinking liquor is rarely found in Badia society. Some of them have a taste of it occasionally. Khaini is profoundly chewed by them.

Dress and Ornaments

It has been observed that the Badias living in the settlements under study lead their life with austier garbs. The males normally wear lungi. Napkin (gamchha) is used by them traditionally. They feel comfortable wearing lungi and gamchha. These are also considered helpful for them as most of them are engaged in agriculture or similar type of hard labour. Nevertheless they realize that it is hygienic as well as of religious importance to wear lungi and gamchha. Drops of urine may come in contact with the trousers but not with the lungi. Hence they have no restriction to read namaj with the same dress. This is not possible if they wear trousers all the time. The trousers become polluted with the drop of urine and, therefore, is forbidden. Hence they enjoy the utility of lungi to its full extent. Young boys wear pajamas, half pant/ full pant and shirts. Vests and underwear are infrequently used by them.

Maulovi tries to maintain a distinctiveness from the common people wearing white pajama and punjabi with a cap (fez). This does not mean that he

has discarded the habit of wearing lungi. But one thing is strictly followed by the Maulovis that they change their dresses before performing namaj.

Females in Badia society normally wear saree. Young females prefer to wear bright coloured saree while the aged and widows wear light coloured sarees. Before marriage they use churidar/ saloar kamij and saree. Frocks, pants and ghagra are used by girls of tender age. Use of borkha is rarely found among the Badias. Married females have a tradition to cover their faces with the saree (ghomta) so that an outsider is unable to see their face.

Badia women normally stay at home with minimum ornaments and adornments. They use bangles of glass or plastics, ear ring (pasha) and nose pin made up of silver. Economic condition has a direct relation with the use of ornaments. Solvent Badia women do have a craze for wearing ornaments of gold. Otherwise they are satisfied with silver ornaments. However they prefer to use following items while they set out for an outing or some visitors are expected to come in some social occasions :

1. Tikli and Sithyapati --- a rare type of ornament used by aristocrat ladies on their forehead by the sides of the line of bifurcation of hair (sithi).
2. Hasuli and Tabij ---- these are kinds of locket of cylindrical shape. Either a piece of large size or a number of small pieces tied with black or red thread are worn on neck.
3. Makri, Pasha and Dul ---- these are different types of ear rings.
4. Lulkibali and Lakmachi ---- various types of nose pins.
5. Baju, Tora, Anantabala and Gabful ---- different types of armlets used by Badia women.

6. Bangles ---- golden, silver and bronze bangles are used by them.
7. Rings ---- both silver and golden rings are found to use by males and females.
8. Mal, Atbanki and Jaltaran ---- a pair of these ornaments are used by Badia women on legs over the ankles.

A remarkable thing is noticed in this context. They avoid using figurative ornaments. It is probably because of non-acceptance of idol in Islamic principle. Tattooing is also not found in their body.

Games & Sports

Children and youths in Badia society play a number of games and sports such as football, kabadi, gadi etc. Competition on these sports are organised at the village level. Inter-village and inter-club tournaments on football have also been organized in some areas. Apart from these recognized sports the children pass their leisure time playing lukochuri, dang guli, kana machhi, buri chhoya, ekka-dokka and marble. Marshal arts like wrestling and archery have also been practised by some youths. Swimming (hellu) is rarely practised by them. Girls of tender age do engage in jhullu or merry ring hanged from the branches of tall and old plants.

Domestic Activities

Adult Badia males are normally engaged in various gainful employment while the young and women perform the household activities. Agricultural work has also been performed by some Badia women in addition to their domestic work. Bidi rolling has developed as a household industry in many families specially those who have migrated from Murshidabad district. The children below the age of 15 years help in household activities. They look after their younger

brothers and sisters, carry meals for their parents as and when work in the agricultural field and look after the cattle. Concept of leisure time is absent among the Badia women. The Badia males do roam here and there and go to market place without any business but the females do not have such time to spend. They keep themselves engaged in any sort of work even stitching clothes or preparation of broom sticks in between the heavy duties of household chores.

Badia women enjoy stitching nice clothes (kantha) with the help of dhaga and worn out sarees. They also make hand fans with palm leaves. Badia males are found engaged in preparing earthen wares, handicrafts of jute, wood and bamboo. They prepare kuthi from bamboo and mud in which they keep the crops throughout the year.

Personal Appearances and Cleanliness

Generally the Badia people living in rural areas do take bath in ponds and streams. Both males and females take a dip and change their clothes on the bank of pond/ stream. Infrequent use of soap is noticed among them but they smear mustard oil (mainly the males) on their body. Shaving beard and mustache is done by themselves. It is also noticed during fieldwork that Badia people do cut head hair of the members of their own community. They feel that the application of mustard oil keep their skin out of disease. Rate of infestation of worm is high and the people mostly move bare footed. Females have lice on their head.

The Badias have the habit of throwing the refuse in and around their houses. The waste materials collected from cow shed and fowl sty are heaped or thrown into a particular pit. Cow dung is converted to dung cake which is used as

fuel. Drainage and sanitation have not so developed in their locality as it is found in the settlements under study.

Faiths and Fears.

By tradition the Badias do not believe in any of occult practices. Generally they do not suffer from superstitions but some sorts of such beliefs and practices are found in the studied areas. They try to avoid taking meals sitting on the door with a fear that such type of activity will lead to economic hardship in their family. The children put the little finger of right arm on mouth and the little finger of left arm on the navel seeing a chamellion.

Filthy words are highly used by them but those are restricted to their community members only. Elderly persons consider the use of filthy words as an act against their religion. Therefore, they utter "tobah" on hearing such words.

Hand fan is struck on the earth whenever it touches the body of an ailing person. Broomstick is also hanged on the door of the atur ghar expecting the avoidance of evil spirits.

Observation

In the studied areas it has been found that the Badias are mostly living in thatched houses. Pucca houses with brick walls and concrete roof are rarely found. The walls of the thatched houses are mainly made up of mud supported with bamboo splits as and when necessary. Many houses are found, specially in Darjiling district, having no mud walls. The sides of the rooms are built either with splitted bamboo or simply with jute sticks. The Badia houses are arranged lineally on both sides of roads. The settlements have normally developed by the side of a river or stream.

Badias do keep buffaloes and cows in their households.

Domesticated animals have an economic value to them as these are helpful for agriculture and transportation.

Rice is the staple food of the Badias. They are also found taking kalai-ruti (chapati made from black gram). As an ordinary meal they take rice with vegetables, pulses and fish. Meat and polao (fried rice) are occasional dishes for the Badias. A major section of the Badias are found taking simply rice with dal or fried jute leaves at noon. When economic condition permits they prepare delicious dishes like simui, malpoa, pituli (sweet rice ball) etc. Alcoholism is extremely limited in Badia society. The utensils used by the Badias are mainly of stainless steel and bell-metal.

Regarding dress and ornaments, it has been noticed that the Badia males and females mostly wear lungi and saree respectively. Younger generation use pant and saloar-kamij. Use of white cap (fez) is occasionally noticed. Badia women are found wearing various ornaments made of silver on their nose and ears.

Badias do prepare many equipments and furnitures as a part of their handicrafts. They make kuthi (container of grains) with bamboo splits by themselves. Badia women are found engaged in stitching clothes (kantha) as an activity of their pastime.

Some sort of superstitious activities are performed by the Badias in the settlements under study. They think that such activities are helpful for economic prosperity and betterment of their body and mind.