

Chapter-6

MATERIAL CULTURE

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CHAPTER-6

MATERIAL CULTURE

The Dhimal material culture, like many other indigenous communities having contact with cities, industries or even with other communities, supposed to make some deviation from traditional material culture of their own. Even there is considerable variation within the Dhimal population because of education, economy as well as access over new amenities. Women may be regarded as great saviour of traditional material culture than their men counterpart. Age may have been categorized as another component as the older take care of their material culture much more than younger generation of the society.

6.1: House (Sa) Type:

Traditional:

To understand the traditional house pattern of Dhimal, Hodgson's monograph (1847) may be regarded as most ancient of all the study. He (Hodgson) stated, "A house is from 12 to 16 cubits long by 8 to 12 wide. A smaller house of the same sort is erected opposite for the cattle, and if the family be large, two other domiciles like the first are built on the other sides, so as to enclose an open quadrangle or yard. The houses are made of jungle grass secured within and without by a trellis-work of strips of bamboo (pasing). The roof has a high and somewhat bulging pitch and a considerable projection beyond the walls. It also is made of wild grass, softer than that which forms the walls. There is only one division of the interior which separates the cooking and the sleeping portions of the house, which has no chimney or window and but one door" (1847: 185-186). Overall he suggests that Dhimal build and furnish their own house without any aid

of craftsmen. Some old Dhimal opined that use of window or lock in household is a contemporary phenomenon; they had no such thing to construct the houses.

Contemporary:

Some of the old Dhimal recalls the object; even, now a day, many of the Dhimal have some impression on their houses. The recent traditional houses also comprises of bamboo, wild grass, straw and cow dung. The wall is made up of bamboo (*pasing*) structure with wild grass within it, and plastered with cow dung after mixing with mud. The roof of the house is generally made up of straw and with two or four slopped. The arched single door without lock is about 6' × 2' in diameter. The wall of the house may have some sketches like deer, peacock, elephant, hen etc. as well as varieties of flower and leaf, made up of mud. The wall has been coloured with red, white and black colour made up of mud. In front of house a small portion supposed to construct as 'verandah' and is of 1' × 3' high.

Some houses with high bamboo platform may have seen. The house is constructed upon bamboo platform with *Sal* tree as pillar and bamboo (*pasing*), straw (*nara*), wild grass (*jharbariko ghasea*) and cow dung (*chhan*) as raw material like previous. A small wooden ladder is placed before the entrance of the house. To minimize the moistness of the floor they use mixture of soil and cow dung over wild grass or straw, placed over floor and used to change every year before rain.

When the family became large they used to construct some other house facing towards the same courtyard for day to day interaction. The main dwelling unit (*Sa*) is used by 'head of the family' (*Sako Puring*) and his spouse. Beside main dwelling house and other dwelling house (whenever necessary), a separate kitchen (*Om Gaka Sa*), cowshed (*Gwali sa*) and sometime with poultry may also been constructed; and the kitchen basically is of traditional type. In all cases a separate 'worship place' may be seen within or outside the main dwelling house, and believed to be the place of household deity *Sakodir*.

However, in recent times, other type of houses with technology of other communities as well as modern houses of brick with tin roof may also have seen.

Before construction of the house, the place has been sanctified by *mantra* in the night of 'Poila Boisakh' (1st day of Bengali calendar) by *Ojha* or even the person

himself. Special care has been given to leave a site if it is '*dir-ko-dama*' (thorough fare of God) or holy place of God. A small earthen pitcher filled with water (*Chi*) and banana leaf, and tied with a red cloth, has been placed for as long as one year. They believe that it has the power to tie evil soul within it.

6.2: Furniture (*Vantakunta*) and other Household Belongings (*Sa ko jinis*):

Traditional:

Hodgson (1847) had identified a very few home made, simplest possible form of furniture within Dhimal household consisting of "a rare bed stead, some sleeping-mats, a stool or two, and some swinging-shelves. Household utensils are a few earthen vessels for carrying and holding water, some metallic cooking, eating and drinking pots, and a couple of knives, to which we must add the spinning, weaving, dyeing and brewing apparatus of women" (1847:186). Overall, he opined that furniture was very scanty. Most of them were simplest possible form and home made. Hodgson added "There are none of iron nor of copper; all are of brass or other mixed metals that are metallic..... Baskets of bamboo and ropes of grass are abundant and of homemade". However Hodgson stated that some iron implements, used after hafting which they used to purchase abroad for agricultural or domestic uses. Regmi (1991) in his study on Nepal (on Dhimal) find out large earthen pots where they used to kept their cloths, and supposed to purchased from pot-makers through barter exchange.

Contemporary:

Many of the traditional household furniture have been replaced by non-traditional one, though even now a day one can find bamboo scaffold beside bedstead (*Khat*). If it is bamboo scaffold (*chancla*) then *khosla* (made of straw) may have been placed on *chancla* following *dhokra* (coarse cloth made of jute) and handloom made bed sheet called '*bona*'. Sometime '*patia*' (fine mat) and '*dhokra*' have also used for sitting purposes. '*Binda*' is another seat made of twisted straw. '*Dai-su*' mainly '*bona*' in nature has been used as rocking cradle even today. *Buknaiti* is another type of cloth,

used for child bearing, after placing baby on back and binding the two end of the cloth tightly.

Dhimal, even now a day, used '*jauli*' (traditional bag made of jute) for marketing, after placing it on stick. They are using a room or part of the room with earthen pots (*Bhanda*) to store water. The fieldwork has not been identified any other from of traditional furniture and household equipments, for the rest the Dhimals have to rely on other from of non-traditional objects.

6.3: Dress (*Dhaba*) and Ornaments (*Gahana*):

Traditional:

The Dhimal, irrespective of sex, as per Hodgson, "wear cotton only, woolen is unknown even in the shape of blankets." The female vest, he stated, " is 3½ feet wide by 7 long, deep red, with a broad worked margin of cheque pattern and of white and yellow colures, besides the ground red-above and below" (1847:187), called '*Bonha*' and differs from Bodo clothes only in material, in case of Bodo it is of silk and for Dhimal it is cotton.

The men dress of Dhimal, as per Hodgson, consists of two parts -an upper portion called '*Pataka*', which is equivalent to Hindu *Chadar* or *toga*, and is 9 to 10 cubits by 3; and the lower portion called '*Dhari*', which is 6 cubits by 2, and is "equivalent to the Hindu *Dhoti*, and after being passed between the legs is folded several times round the hips, and the end simply tucked in behind" (1847:187). The whole is called '*Dhaba*' in Dhimal language.

Dhimal do not cover their head, except some cases when "the men choose to take off their upper vest and fold it round the head to be rid of it".

"Shoes are not in use", but according to Hodgson "a sort of sandals or sole-covers, called *Yapthong vel Champhoi*, sometimes are, and are made of wood by the people themselves" (1847:187).

"Ornaments are rare, even amongst the women, who, however, wear small silver rings in their ears and noses also, and heavy bracelets of mixed metal on their wrists", he added (1847:187).

Contemporary:

The Dhimal men have adopted cultural trait of others much more in respect of dress than their women counterpart. Now-a-days most of them used to wear shirt pant instead of *dhoti* (loin cloth) and '*askot*' (upper garment). Even use of '*tapre*', traditional black cap with red border, has been lost long before present. The men folk sometimes wear turban called '*dhari-ko-poghri*', which is nothing but a white towel. Women wear *Shari*, though for young girl frock or *salwar-kamij* is not unusual. However in daily life women used to wear single piece of '*Shari*' or sometimes '*daka bona*', the traditional dress for women. Men and women usually dressed traditionally during festival or dance performance.

Dhimal women are fond of ornaments specially silver ornaments. They used '*chandrahar*' at neck '*sidban*' for the head, '*kankon*' as ear rings, '*pochi*' for nose, *takamala* as necklace, '*bashpatari*' for whole upper arm and '*jhurikharu*' for lower arm. Sometimes they used to wear gold as ear rings called '*jatisona*'. They have used ornaments around ankle and pair of ring for fingers. However they avoid using ornaments for waist. Children of both sexes above six or seven years used to wear silver made '*matha*' around the wrist of both hands. In all cases engravings of different object specially of fishes may have seen, which has identified their affection towards fish. Beside ornaments, the Dhimals, specially women folk are fond of to get tattooed on both the hands.

6.4: Food (*Chaka jinis*) and Drinks (*Amka jinis*):**Traditional:**

"Rice is the chief article, wheat or barely unknown even by name. *Ghiu* or clarified butter is likewise totally unused and unnamed, and oil is very sparingly consumed for food. Salt, chilies, vegetables, plenty of rice, varied sometimes with maize or millet, and fish or flesh every second day with a liberal allowance of beer". this is the statement of Hodgson (1847) as traditional food and drinks of Dhimal of this region (1847:187-188). "They have abundance of swine and of poultry, and not a few

goats, ducks and pigeons, but no sheep nor buffalos, and cows are scare” (1847:188). This domestic animals might fulfill their needs of flesh, so “they have less need to turn hunters”, Hodgson added. “Milk is little used, but not eschewed..... they may eat all animals, tame or wild, save oxen, dogs, cats, land and water tortoises, mongooses, civets, porcupine, hares, monitors of enormous size, wild hogs, deer of all sorts, rhinoceros, and wild buffaloes are amongst the wild animals they pursue for their flesh, and altogether they are abundantly provided with meat”, Hodgson described (1847:188).

The monograph also stated that they (Dhimal) had used abundance of fermented liquor made of rice or millet and called ‘*Yu*’. The process of making ‘*Yu*’ in Hodgson’s word is “the grain is boiled; the root of a plant called *Agaichito* is mixed with it; it is left to ferment for two days in a nearly dry state; water is then added *quantum sufficit*; the whole stands for three or four days; and the liquor is ready”.

Beside *Yu*, they freely used tobacco, but never opium and according to Hodgson “I see no reason to brand them with the name of drunkards”, the cup of drink is for “in honour of the gods at the high festival of their religion”, he added (1847:189).

Contemporary:

The food habit of Dhimal has not been changed so as other form of material culture like house, dress, ornaments, hunting, agricultural implements as so on. Even now-a-days they prefer meat and fish over vegetables, consume less milk or milk products, sparingly consumed oil or turmeric for preparation of food.

Sometime they prefer to prepare fish (*Haiyu*) and meat (*Beha*) by conventional methods. Any type of fish after collecting from near by river roasted over a fire and consumed after mixed with salt and chilies. Meat, as of fish has been roasted over fire, served after cutting it in small pieces and mixed with salt and chilies. They prefer to consume the preparation with traditional liquor ‘*Yu*’, which is also a ceremonial drink during worship, marriage ceremony or even during funeral. In many cases they used to roast meat directly after penetrate it to a rod. They prefer to consume swine, poultry (fowl and ducks), iguana, pigeon, goat, hare, civet, deer, wild-cat, peacock and variety of tortoise called ‘*dura*’. Even they used the shell of ‘*dura*’ as frying pan to prepare food, specially in jungle during hunting time. They don’t consume cow, dog, sheep, buffalos

or even monkey in their food items. Sometimes Dhimal men may find with hubble-bubble (*Hooka*) to cherish the same (see photograph).

Beside meat and fish, they consume varieties of plant food (*Sar*) in their day-to-day dishes. '*Leosar*' is such a liquid prepared after filtration of water on sun dried roasted trunk of banana tree. They cooked sun dried leaves of jute plant, meat and fish of different types as well as vegetables of different varieties with '*leosar*' but without oil and spices. Now-a-days they used to cook with oil, turmeric, coriander, cumin, ginger, onion or even garlic but without cassia leaf or fragrant spices.

There are no such restriction of food to Dhimal society except beef, dog, cat, monkey, elephant, beer and tiger. However, for pregnant women, consumption of liquor, bitter and tea are strictly prohibited.

6.5: Gathering (*Jompaka*) , Hunting (*Manka*) and Fishing (*Jaula*):

Traditional:

Little has been written about their gathering, hunting and fishing activities by scholars of pre-independence period, though Dhimal have been claiming themselves as good hunter and fisherman as well. However, the Hodgson's monographs (1847, 1849) indirectly support their claim as he (Hodgson) stated "... fish or flesh every second day, constitute, however, a meal which the poor Hindu might envy, washed down as it is with a liberal allowance of beer" (1847:188). The plenty of fishes near by environment and domestic animals had not encouraged Dhimals to go for hunting. "They have the less need to turn hunters in that their domestic animals must supply them amply with flesh" (1847:188). Fish of all sorts, land and water tortoises, mongooses, civets, porcupines, hares, monitors, wild hogs, deer, rhinoceros, buffalos had been hunted by Dhimals (Hodgson, 1847).

However, the monograph or other writings had no trace of hunting or fishing material or technologies used or adopted by them.

Contemporary:

Now-a-days Dhimals are good fisherman; fishing seems to be a hobby for them. They have their own knowledge and technologies for fishing near by shallow water of river. Fish as per Dhimal vocabulary termed as '*haya*'. They have all four types of fishing technology: fishing by weapons, by traps, by nets, by poisoning except by engaging tamed animals for fishing purposes.

For fishing they have to rely on different types of trap ('*So*' in Dhimal language). Among them '*banga*', '*thusi*' and '*chanche*' is of great important. *Banga* (see photograph) is operated such a way that two people is to engaged to pull the trap and another is to press it firmly. '*Thusi*' is another type of trap. made of jute. and used for fishing on big river after build a dyke by stone. Among fishing by net '*bhauri jale*' and '*lathi jale*' frequently used by them. They used to get fish by hook (by rod and line) also, which as per Dhimal vocabulary termed as '*balsi*.' Sometimes they used spade (*Kodal*) as fishing weapon to dig for crab.

Hunting seems to be another hobby or now-a-days a ritual activities, since the forest have been destroyed and hunting of most of the animals is banned by the Government. They have to go for *Dudhia* hills, near Mechi river of Nepal, once in a year (at *Chaitra Sankranti*) for ceremonial hunting. Every family has to take part with bow (*Dhaumuk*) and arrow (*Tir*), spear (*Khapor*) as well as catapult which have been sanctified by *mantra* by the '*dhami*'. Wild-cock, iguana, rabbit or even peacock has been seized by them during hunting. The ceremonial hunting has been followed by a feast within jungle.

Beside hunting and fishing, for day to day life, they supposed to collect firewood from nearby environment for cooking and other activities, fruits and vegetables as foods, medicinal and other plants or part of it for treatment and preparation of drink.

6.6: Agriculture (*Choika Moika*) and Animal Husbandry (*Gwal*):

Traditional:

Hodgson stated," the agricultural implements are an axe to fell the forest trees, a strong bill or bill-hook to clear the under wood and also to dig the earth, a spade for rare

but more effectual digging and lastly a dibble for sowing seed” (1847:180). The Dhimal nomenclature of axe is ‘*Duphe*’ and made up of iron as head bought from plains and haft being made at home. The bill termed as ‘*Ghongoi*’ is, as per Hodgson, jack of all work, made up of iron and purchased from Kocch marts. The spade is similar to plain’s ‘*kodal*’ (no nomenclature as per Dhimal vocabulary) and also bought from others. The *dibble* is a wooden staff about four feet long, made by the people themselves. It is like a stout walking-staff sharpened at the lower end, Hodgson added.

The process started with clearing the forest, with axes and bills and afterwards by fire, which supposed to done every second year. The ashes could be used as manure. Some additional digging process was needed to clear the undergrowth of trees.

Then, they might prefer to sow the seeds by a dibbler and sower. Hodgson stated that “the former of whom, walking erect, perforates the soil in quincunxes by sharp strokes of his pointed staff, so as to make a series of holes from one to two inches deep, and about a span apart; whilst the later, following the dibbler, and furnished with a basket of mixed seeds, drops four to six seeds into each hole, and covers them at the same time” (1847:181).

Again as per Hodgson, “Dhimal has abundance of domestic animals, and is, moreover, at liberty to eat the flesh of all save the cow; whereas the peasant of the plains has few, and of those only the goat that he can eat” (1847:188).

Contemporary:

They have shifted from simple axe dependent shifting cultivation (*okaiteng thingka*) to plough dependent settled cultivation (*halea choika moika*) by plough (*Hal*). Even different part of it (plough) identified by different names as per Dhimal vocabulary; these are- *Phali* (Ploughshare), *Jongol* (yoke), *Nangol* (shaft), *Muthi* (handle) and *Moi* (Harrow). However, their wooden homemade plough has been replaced by metal bladed plough which they have purchased from local market, and fixed manually with home made wooden frame of the plough. Generally the whole areas of grazing land have been ploughed by oxen and labeled by a harrow. However, in case of small piece of land or ‘*delki*’ land (wet and sticky land), they used to dig it with a spade (*Kodal*) instead of ploughing. They set up a ridge of earth around the piece of land to hold the rainwater. They used to dig canal from near by river to agricultural field

to fetch the river water. Even sometime, tractor is found in nearby field for ploughing the hard and wide field.

The paddy cultivation is the main traditional livelihood among Dhimals. Rice (*Om*) is the staple food, which is cultivated in almost all the fields. After ploughing, farmland manure is distributed uniformly few weeks before sowing. The seed is sown immediately at the time of monsoon showers by broadcasting the seed, sowing the seed behind the plough or drilling. The form of sowing may be termed as line sowing.

Groundwater irrigation is hardly economically feasible for paddy cultivation, due to high operation costs. To some extent, it is surface water irrigation, unless weather conditions and the topography are favourable. Therefore, in most cases, it is rain water dependent cultivation.

The whole process of agriculture is associated with some religious observances, which are described later on within the present chapter.

Almost every household have a landscape called Kitchen garden (*Sar bari*) which seems to be seasonally used mainly for vegetables, which again used for cooking. In some cases some herbal plants may also find in kitchen garden for flavour or medicinal use.

Animal husbandry is common and found in almost all household of the society. It consists of cow (and bullocks for agriculture), pigs, goats and different poultry bird including fowls, goose, pigeons and so on. Separate sheds or rooms are used in all the dwellings for keeping the livestock.

6.7: Musical Instruments (*Leika beika*):

No data has been found on Hodgson's (or other pre-independence Scholars) writing regarding musical instruments of the Dhimals. However, even now-a-day, they used to dance with some of their traditional musical instruments; among them *Dhake*, *Chonga-Merdong*, *Urni*, *Tunjai* are of great important.

Dhake is a holy musical instrument frequently used during worship and festivals. The body is made of *Gamhari* wood with lather of goat to cover right side and lather of deer to cover left side. The leather of goat supposed to use for light sound and leather of

deer for deep sound. However in recent days, because of non availability of lather of deer, they have to use lather of goat for both.

To make *Chonga-Merdong* they supposed to collect a piece of thick bamboo. They used to make hole over it and try to close it by thin slice of bamboo. It can work even by slapping over it.

For *Urni* the hard brown shell of coconut used to cut into two pieces. Any piece then fixed with a bamboo handle and open side of the shell covered with lather. A small piece of wood placed at the end of bamboo handle; from where a wire used to pull up to the end of the shell. The instrument can play only after continuous rubbing by the bow of that musical instrument.

Tunjai is nothing but an instrument made of some bit of stick fit with a wooden frame. One can play it by striking on it by bare hand.

Beside these, they remember the name of *Nagra* and *Nagri*, two sacred musical instruments they heard about it but never observed.

Some instruments of neighbouring communities may also found during such programmes, these are flute, harmonium and *Serenja*, a kind of one-stringed musical instrument of neighbouring Rajbansi community.

6.8: Findings:

Regarding material culture they have changed a lot. Their traditional house with bamboo and jungle grass is somewhat changed with some rural technologies; however, some traditional houses with finishing by mud and coloured by mud may seen even today. Traditional household furniture and objects has been replaced by modern ones much more than other items. Utensils made of bamboo, wood, grass and brass in some extent is replaced by metals specially iron. They have changed their dress a lot except in some occasions, when some of them. specially female, wear some sort of traditional dress. Otherwise female traditional dress '*bonha*' made of cotton, has replaced by *sari* and in some cases traditional single piece of cloth *daka bona* for daily life. Men dress has changed more; traditional loin cloth *dhoti* and upper garment *ascot* have drastically replaced by today's shirt pant. However, Dhimals, specially female folk, have changed

their choice to rare use of ornaments (as per Hodgson) to variety of silver ornaments all over the body.

The change of food habit is not so severe as previous; even now-a-days they prefer meat and fish over vegetables, consume less milk or milk products, sparingly consumed oil or turmeric for preparation of food. They also consumed traditional fermented liquor *Yu*, made of rice or millet.

They have made a marked advancement in respect of agriculture; from simple axe dependent shifting cultivation to settled agriculture with metal bladed plough. However, for hunting and fishing, they somewhat rely on traditional implements with some modifications. Hunting supposed to loose its importance and became a ritual one over decades.