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Temple and Occupational Specialization: Identity of Brahmin and Sevayat in Puri, Odisha, India

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Abstract:
Human as Homo hierarchic us, is conceived to have stratified into hierarchy, either through Varna or caste system. This paper deals with the identity of Brahmin including the priestly castes as well as servicing castes who have occupational specializations in the temple of Lord Jagannath in Puri, Odisha. Here fieldwork has been conducted to investigate the determinants of perceived social status of Brahmins and Sevayats and to see how this perception shapes their identity. The work has been done both in Puri city and Dandamukundapur village under Puri district in Odisha. Occupational specializations in connection with priestly and other temple related activities contribute to the development of new forms of social identities. It brings to the fore the role of sacred centre in the formation of particular identity of the castes in general and Brahmin in particular.

Keywords: Social identity, Brahmin, Sevayat, Homo hierarchicus, Varna, Caste, Occupational specialization.

1. Introduction

Identity is sometimes used to refer to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together in a unified whole. The term "social identity" refers specifically to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships. Although most people are members of many different groups, only some of those groups are meaningful in terms of how we define ourselves. In these cases, our self-definition is shared with other people who also claim that categorical membership, for example, as a woman, as a Muslim, as a marathon runner, or as a democrat (Deaux,2001). Hierarchy can be defined as the principle by which the element of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole, it being understood that in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole, and that the ranking will thus be religious in nature. Once hierarchy has been isolated as purely a matter of religious values, it naturally remains to be seen how it is connected with power, and how authority is to be defined (Dumont,2009).

In the theory of *Varnas* one finds that status and power are differentiated, just as the general consideration of hierarchy seemed to require. This fact is older than the castes, and it is fundamental to them in the sense that it is only once this differentiation has been made that hierarchy can manifest itself in a pure form. The origin or occurrence of hierarchy in Indian society traces to the purity and impurity concepts of religion.

It is said that "*Brahma Janati Brahmana*". It means, those people who knows Brahma meaning the supreme self or the creative aspect of the universal consciousness or God.

The term Brahmin in caste system comes from the term Brahmana in Varna system in Vedic period. There is a 'Shloka' or couplet in Rik Veda about the Varna system that say Brahmin or Brahmana originated from the mouth of Lord Brahma, the creator god of the universe. Kshatriya originated from the hands of Lord Brahma, Vaisya originated from the thigh of Lord Brahma. Shudra originated from the feet of Lord Brahma (Purush Sukta,10th Mandal,90[th]Sukta) (**c**.f. Bandyopadhyay, 2013:179). In Gita, it is said that the activities of Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudras are distributed on the basis of their characteristics(Gita,41st Couplet,18th Chapter).It has also added that cessation, continence, religious austerities, forgiveness, simplicity, knowledge, knowledge of eternity and theism are the characteristic features of a Brahmin(Gita,42nd Couplet,18th Chapter)(Bhaktivedanta, 2011: 548).With reference to these ancient Sanskrit texts, it can be said that the Varna system was created on the basis of the activities of the people in the society. It is said that there are four categories of Brahmin in the society as one very old Brahmin Sevayat in Puri informed. They are: UttamBhiksukaVipra,MadhyamaKusikarika,AdhamaVanijyaVipra,SwadharanVipra.It means, the Brahmins who survive their life through begging from door to door, are pure Brahmins. The Brahmins who survive their life through practicing agriculture, are mid-level Brahmins. The Brahmins who survive their life through Business, are impure Brahmins. And the Brahmins who survive their life through priestly activities or Jajmani practice, are ordinary Brahmins. This categorization of the Brahmins speaks a volume about the occupational diversification the Brahmins could follow. So, when we see the case of the Sevayat Brahmins Puri, it fits well to the prevalent conceptualization of the Brahmins in the studied area and its structural implication is not lost sight of.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

This paper is mainly concerned about the identity or social status of Brahmin caste including the priestly castes, that is shaped by the occupational specialization in the temple. Here fieldwork has been conducted to investigate the determinants of perceived social status of Brahmins at Puri in Odisha, India. The work has been done both in Puri city and Dandamukundapur village under Puri district in Odisha. There is no temple of special repute in Dandamukundapur. Puri is one of the greatest temple towns in India. Therefore, the importance of temple is quite manifest in Puri, on the other hand temple plays no role in providing any occupational benefit to the Brahmins in Dandamukundapur. However same Utkal Brahmins are found both in Puri and in Dandamukundapur. In the paper attempt has been made to understand how the temple services in Puri have contributed to the formation of particular social status which ultimately helps in the building of identity of different groups of Brahmin.

2. Literature Review

To understand caste in India we must explain the particularity of this mode of stratification, while avoiding an essentialism that isolates caste from other social forms. Stratification appeared in India long before an emic model of caste. Yet in contemporary India, I found actors concerned to place themselves in a rank order, even in ephemeral situations. I outline an Indian concept of the individual, characterized by relative immunity of the self to the social sphere, and argue that this immunity acts as a shield to keep ranking apart from the self(Lyche,2015).

The paper namely 'The Burden of Caste on Social Identity in India' uses the World Values Survey to investigate the determinants of perceived social status in India. Caste is still the largest determinant, yet not the only one, as income, education and occupation are all relevant factors. However, only unlikely improvements in those economic attributes could offset the burden of being from a low caste or tribe on perceived social rank. This study is part of the literature that shows how the internalization of prejudice and long-lasting discrimination may have impaired individuals' self-esteem. The results stress the need to account for self-depreciation when assessing the efficiency of affirmative action policies(Bros,2014).

2.1. Jagannath Temple at Puri

Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath is one of the four celebrated religious centres of Hindus, situated on the shores of Bay of Bengal. SriKsetra is not only famous for Sri Purusottama/ Jagannath, but also for the great temple, which attracts pilgrims and visitors throughout the world. (Orissa review,2006, page 129)

There are different views on the date and builder of Sri Purusottama/Jagannath Temple (Vimana and Jagamohana) i) According to some Puranas (Starting from Skanda Purana) the builder was Indradyumna, the king of Malava. ii) The Temple Chronicle, Madala Panji mentions king Yayati to be the builder of a temple of 38 Hata height which became dilapidated. The present temple was built by Anangabhima deva in place of delapidated temple of Yayati. According to Ganga Vamsanucharitam Champu and Raja vamsavalis, Anangabhima II was the builder of this great temple. iii) With the discovery of Ganga copper plate grants Manmohan Chakraborty, on the basis of a particular verse credited Anantavarmana Chodaganga as the builder of the Vimana and Jagamohana. This view of Mr. Chakraborty is accepted by most of the present day scholars. iv) Dr. S. N. Rajguru was of the opinion that Chodaganga started the construction of the great temple, but it was completed by Anangabhima II and the temple was consecrated by Anangabhima III. (Orissa review, 2006, page 129)

2.2. Traditional Occupation of the Brahmins of Jagannath Temple, Puri

There are two major divisions among Brahmins related to Jagannath temple of Puri. They are as follows-

2.2.1. Muktimandap Brahmin of the Temple

The Muktimandap is the 'Yajnavedi' used as a platform for performing Vedic sacrifice during inauguration programme of Lord Jagannath temple by lord Brahma in ancient time. The Muktimandap Brahmins do not perform the seva puja of Lord Jagannath. But they maintain the 'rule of record' of the temple for sevapuja. They term themselves as the representatives of Lord Jagannath. They are mainly the committee members of temple administration from the ancient time. They give 'Diksha' to the sevak Brahmins of the temple. They have right to recruit any sevak Brahmin or rusticate any sevak Brahmin for their activity. They have right to make the temple calendar, 'MadalaPanji' for ritual performance in the temple or in all over the Odisha. They are given reputation by the sevak Brahmins. Even an elder sevak Brahmin touch the feet of a little Muktimandapbrahmin. Most of the Muktimandap Brahmins have 'Mishra' surname. But the Muktimandap Brahmin does not have any right to seat on the 'Ratnavedi' of Lord Jagannath.

2.2.2. The Sebaks or Sevayets (attendant) of the Temple

The Sevak Brahmin means the servant of Lord Jagannath, as Lord Jaganath is not only the god but the king of Puri. These sevak Brahmins take sacred thread from Muktimandap Brahmin by taking 'Diksha'(initiation). Then they have to get marry, through which they are eligible for taking part in ritual performance in the temple, as it is believed that without getting married no one can have full body(*PurnaAnga*). Without having married one can only have half part of body(*ArdhaAnga*). No one can worship Lord Jagannath without 'PurnaAngo'.

Many types of Sevas(services) are being employed for the services and worship of Jagannath. As per tradition they are divided into thirty-six categories. Besides the deities on ratnavedi the deities of other temples within the temple premises are worshipped by them.

Each sevak has a different duty to perform. Sebahs are different for all of the sebaits inside the temple. There is no system to pay salaries to the sebahs for their services. They receive specific quantities of mahaprasad known as 'Kheyi' and that is their remuneration.

There are forty types of sebakass we found during the study. Such are as follows- 'Pujapanda', 'Shringrari', 'Patrihari', 'Khuntia', 'Kotari', 'Mahasvar', 'Svar', 'Muduli', 'Daitaputi', 'Chinra', 'Mahavoi' and 'Maharana'.

Roles behind every sebas are different as well as specific for each type of sevakas and a continuity is seen among the sebas i.e. the work of puja panda is to conduct puja and he have the permission to touch 'Ratnavedi', whereas the Khuntia helps the Pujapanda by serving the required utensils to perform the ritual as well as puja of the trinity of 'Ratnavedi'. Their caste is Brahmin. Next is the Shringari who only decorate the god and goddess by putting dress on the structure.

Most of the sevakas are Brahmin Sebaks and few of them are Sudras and one type of sebak is Khatriya. Their interrelations are hierarchically placed. These hierarchical relations are reflected in their marriage system and other aspects of their life.

2.3. Hierarchy among the Sevayets of Lord Jagannath Temple

The sevayats are as mentioned earlier also belong to non-Brahmin castes. It is interesting that three castes except the Vaishayas are found among the Sevayat. Why the Vaisyas are not represented in the order may be inquired into with the insight from some of the studies on the issue (Baylay, 1983; Babb,1998; Cort, 2004; Gupta,2011). It is said that the Vaisyas wanted to maintain distance from the Brahminical or Khsahtriya hierarchy because of their perceived notion of origin and behavioural practices. The merchant's castes favours vegetarianism and abhors animal sacrifice. By way of their vocation, they practice more 'pure' kind of services. Again this segment of the caste got more aligned with the Jainism and Buddhism. This might have created a rift between them and the Brahmins who practically used to manage the temple organization. Thus the Vaisyas have not been included in the sevayats of the Jagannath temple in Puri. One may espy an element of struggle for power in this arrangement. The sevayat who are by caste Sudra prefer to call themselves Sudrasevayat when asked about their caste status. In the following table the categories of sevayat have been shown.

Sr. No	Sevayets	Clan	Caste or Occupational Group	Function or Seva
1	Rajaseva	Bamdev	Khsatriya	First and foremost, sebayet of Lord Jagannath
2	Rajguru	Kashyap, bharadwaj	Brahmin	Supervising the sevas According to *Madala Panji*
3	Pujapanda	Parasar, kashyap, bharadwaj, dalvansh	Sebayet Brahmin	Primary priest of temple
4	Shringari	Kashyap. Bharadwaj	SringariSebayet	Decorates 'shringar' for all the three lords
5	Khuntia	Mudra kolloya, kushnathroya, katyayan, Parasar, kashyap, bharadwaj, dalvansh	Sebayet Brahmin	Clapping during sleep of Jagannath and also helping on supplying flowers to priest
6	Mudrasevak	kashyap, bharadwaj,	Sebayet Brahmin	Security during sleep of Lord Jagannath
7	Pratihari	Mandabasya, goutam, bochorosi, bharadwaj	Sebayet Brahmin	Engaged in protecting door of "Sayankhakshya"
8	Suar/ Mahasuar	Kounanasya, padii, dikshita	Subuddhi Brahmin	Supervises the works of other Suarsebayets
9	Biriajogania	Parasar, kashyap, bharadwaj	Sebayet Brahmin	Supplies 'Pan' to lord
10	Doyanmali	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Supplies various flower girdle
11	Dorji	Basasya	Sudrasebayet	Prepares cloths and other clothing materials
12	Kothasuansia	Nagasya, basasya	Sudrasebayet	Helps disposing all the 'bhog' and builds the stairs of Rath
13	Lenka	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Helps accumulating all the priest during puja
14	Joganiamekkap	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Supplies clay pots during puja
15	Baidya	kashyap, bharadwaj	Sebayet Brahmin	Makes all the medicines for lord Jagannath
16	Rupakar	Bharadwaj	Sebayet Brahmin	Makes different idols in temples
17	Karatia	Bagosya	Sudrasebayet	Cuts all the woods needed for bhog making
18	Rathobhoi	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	They are the makers of iron parts of 'Rath'

19	Rosodwarasuddhapaika	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Arranges every detail during breakfast and dinner of lord Jagannath
20	Mekkap	Bagosya, Sankha	Sudrasebayet	Protectors of 'Bhandar' of ornaments
21	Suarbaru	Parasar, kashyap, bharadwaj	Sebayet Brahmin	Arranges all the proper dishes
22	Patribaru	Katyayan	Sebayet Brahmin	Arranges 'dhup' 'dwip' and clay pots
23	Mudali	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Opens the chandanndwar at morning
24	Doitapati	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Engaged on worshipping lord Jagannath during 'Snanpurnima'
25	Rosa kathabogapania	-	-	-
26	Paniaapta	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Collects water from the well of the temple for cooking
27	Anasarasuddhasuara	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Cleans particular places for puja
28	Duttamahapatra/ talichumahapatra	Nagasya, basasya	Sudrasebayet	Protects 'chammudwar' and 'joy bijoydwar'
29	Ghatuari	Bagosya	Sudrasebayet	Prepares 'chandan' for shringar
30	Hadapnayek	Bagosya	Sudrasebayet	Engaged on making 'Pan'
31	Bimanbaru	Parasar, kashyap, bharadwaj	Sudrasebayet	They hoiest the 'Biman' & 'palki'
32	Pradhani	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Informs all the priest about the puja ritual
33	Chattarolar	Nagasya, basasya	Sudrasebayet	Sacred religious barber and hoists the torch inside the sanctum of lord Jagannath
34	Darpania	Bagosya	Sudrasebayet	-
35	Mahabhoi	Sankha	Sudrasebayet	Supervises the quality and making of milk, ghee, curd etc.
36	Thalia	Sankha	Sudrasebayet	Helps mahasuarasebayet
37	Chakra bihuri	Nagasya	Behra	Engaged on a particular ritual making light and way for lord Jagannath
38	Badhei	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Makes 'rath'
39	Rana	Nagasya	Sudrasebayet	Makes girdle with different flowers
40	Paricha	Kashyap, bharadwaj	Sudrasebayet	Maintain necessary things and materials for puja
41	Bania	Sankha	Sudrasebayet	Makes necessary ornaments

Table 1: Sevayets of Puri: Caste, Clan, Functions and Hierarchy

The hierarchical system has been found among the sevayets of lord Jagannath in one way to be based on their *Seva* (service to the god). According to their caste and community sevayets are mainly of three types- Kshatriya sevayets, Brahmin sevayets and Sudrasevayets. In the place of caste hierarchy, Kshatriya sevayets have occupied the top most position in this hierarchy, as the maharaja and his descendants are included in this section.

The Sevayet brahmin come next to the Khsatriyasevayat. The Brahmin sevayetsare however considered more close to lord Jagannath. The Brahmins are againof two types- one of them are engaged in the ritual performances except the *Seva* to the lord. These Brahmins are called Purohit Brahmin. They occupy a vital position among the Kshatriya and Brahmin sevayets. Another class is Brahmin sevayets who are engaged mainly in the Seva of lord Jagannath. These sevayets Brahmins are the leading *pandas* who occupy a prestigious position as they have closer contact with the lord. so, it can be said that sevayet Brahmin plays a ritually important role and they represent a higher class than the Sudrasevayets.

The Sudrasevayets are also engaged in the *Seva* of the lord Jagannath, but less close to the lord. Sudrasevayets mainly perform as the helping hand of Brahmin sevayets. As a result, they occupy the minimum position in the hierarchical system. They are not allowed to perform the main rituals of worshiping the lord jagannath. A linear diagram of caste hierarchy mentioned as follows-

    i. MuktimandapBrahamin
    ii. Kshatriya>Rajguru>Pujapanda>Shringari>Khuntia, Pratihari, Suar, Mahasuar>Sudrasevayets ->Darpania, thalia, muduli, doyanmali

Caste hierarchy has been maintained in various aspects. There are social institutions, like marriages. There are many rules and obligations in choosing mates for marriages among the various castes. Such rules distinctly maintain the caste hierarchy in the society. For example, an individual of Brahmin sevayets can only marry with another from the same caste hierarchy. Kshatriya sevayets can marry both Brahmin and Kshatriya sevayets. The sudrasevayets can only marry another sudrasevayets. Those Brahmins are hierarchically inferior, can marry a sudra, a Brahmin sebak can also marry a Brahmin who is not a sebak. They are not allowed to offer seva to Jagannath or even touch him. They occupy a place beside temple called Muktipot. Sudrasebaks are also not allowed to touch the Jagannath. But 'DuttaMahapatra' who are sudra are allowed to touch the Jagannath as they are painters who paint the

Jagannath sculpture. After the paint the idols are purified by giving a bath by the Darpanisebaks. Sudras are usually not invited in their marriage ceremonies or other ceremonies by the Brahmans. But there are exceptions with regard to Pradhan, Swine, Muduly and Barik who perform duties in the temple as sevayats. Therefore, working as sevayat adds higher status to the Sudras. On the other hand, Brahmins are those people who offer puja in sebak Brahmins house and conducts rituals of marriage, birth, death ceremonies. So they are hierarchically superior at the time of those ceremonies. Brahmin sebaks could take any food or water from sudrasebayaks. So the idiom of social relation in the hierarchically ordered social system in the Puri with regard to the Sevayats is determined by their services to the Lord Jagannath. Here actually two types of hierarchical orders emerge. One is social ritual hierarchy; another is sevayat hierarchy. In the ritual hierarchy the Mukitimandap Brahmins (and also the other Brahmins who perform ritual services in the houses of Jajman) is at the top of the ladder. On the Sevayat hierarchy the Khsatriya Rajsevakas occupy top position. But there are no such hierarchicaldi visions among the Brahmins in the rural area namely Dandamukundapur of Puridistrict in Odisha.

2.4. Role of Temple in Identity Formation

Jagannath temple plays an important role in the formation of the identity of the Brahmins attached with the temple. As the Muktimandap Brahmins are treated as the representatives of Lord Jagannath, they have a reputation among all the Brahmin hamlets as well as all the local people of Puri. The yearly calendar of Lord Jagannath temple as well as of Odisha, namely the 'MadalaPanji' is processed by these Muktimandap Brahmins. Here a reputed place of Muktimandap Brahmins has been made through the several decades. They have the right to initiate (providing *Diksha*) the sevayet Brahmins of the temple. By this initiation they are treated as the Master(*Guru*) to the sevayet Brahmins. Now let come to the sevayet Brahmins. The brahmins of the temple as well as the local people of Puri claimed that they are at supreme place among all the people of Odisha, due to be the part of the Jagannath temple. Here it is noticed that a new form of Brahmin caste namely the sevayet Brahmin has been emerged due to the participation in the temple. They consider themselves not as a Brahmin but as sevayetbrahmin. They are invited by common pepole of Odisha to take part in programmes like opening of temple, inauguration of a new business venture as a special guest. Therefore, these multifarious involvements in the socio-religious life have been possible because of their association as sevayat in the temple. Thus Jagannath temple bestows these Brahmins an identity which may be called institution –induced identity.

3. Conclusion

To come to conclusion of this paper, it is to notice that a new identity comes to be disclosed that is institutionalized identity. It means the Brahmins of Lord Jagannath temple get a higher social status through having a special identity in Puri region as well as in Odisha. But the Brahmins of Dandamukundapur village do not have such special status in the society, as there is no such major temple having a worldwide fame in the surrounded area and they are not related with this kind of famous temple. The Brahmins of this villages are basically dependent upon the *Jajmani* system or the other occupations like teaching, agriculture. intersectionality is also seen among the Brahmins of Jagannath temple. Intersectionality is a term introduced by critical legal theorists to refer to the specific conditions that exist when one holds two or more social statuses(Deaux,2001). The Muktimandap Brahmins of Lord Jagannath temple have a special importance to the people of Puri. Besides it they are also possessing Mastership to the sevayet Brahmins of the temple. Even the sevaks of this temple consider themselves as sevayet Brahmin but not a pure Brahmin like the Muktimandap Brahmins of the temple. So here also the concept of 'Pure and impure' termed by Louis Dumont, the sociologist is seen properly, as the sevayets Brahmins declared that they get opportunity to participate in seva in the temple through only being initiated as sevayet brahmins by the Muktimandap brahmins of the temple. There is also a hierarchy maintained by them through the purity and impurity. Gender identity is somehow noticed here, as the females of the *Pandas* do not have any right to take higher education or they do not get permission to go outside their home.

Taking cue from Levi-Strauss, Gupta (2011) has tried to analyze the hierarchic system of caste with regard to their 'transmorphing' instead of transformation. He wrote:

"It is Levi-Strauss who taught us in brilliant prose that unless we see alternative possibilities of that which is given and favoured, we will be insensitive to other logical equals." (Gupta: 35:2011)

While dealing with the concept of trans-morphation, Gupta (ibid) stresses that the substantial changes occur in trans-morphation instead of exchange of signs only. Thus we get various versions of models: Brahmin model, hyper Brahmin model, the warrior model, and the pre-Brahmin model. These models have emerged contingently and have been contextualized following a structural order of hierarchy. It is not always that the Brahmins top the hierarchy of the aspirational model. This transmorphing principle may be seen in the management of ritual activities in the caste and adivasi groups in India. Among the Dom caste of West Bengal, one will find their own priest called Dom Pandit. He wears a copper bracelet on their upper arm to indicate higher status and with it he cannot make the ritual offering. So, the model of hierarchy remains in vogue, the replacement takes place in the substance level. This kind of replacement is contingent upon the context and of course possible. The hierarchy of the sevayat which is headed by a Khsatriya also reflects the similar structural principle. The emergence of sevayat Brahmins as a separate category is therefore structurally possible and explainable.

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