

Mal Paharia

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CHAPTER - I

Sub Headings of the Ethnographic Report will be in the following manner

1. Introduction (Present demography, Origin, Migration, History etc).
Present demography of the Mal Paharia

Origin – A non-Aryan tribe inhabiting the Ramgarh Hills in the Santal Parganas and parts of the Government Estate known as the Damini-Koh (“skirts of the hills”). They are supposed to be the Hinduised section of the Males or Sauria Paharias, their near neighbours.

They are divided into two sub-tribes, the Mal Paharia and the Kumar or Komar-Bhag, the latter being the more Hinduised of the two. Each sub-tribe is divided into a large number of exogamous septs of the usual totemistic character.

They are also known to be the inhabitants of Bihar and Orissa. They believe that they have originated from a cow called “Kamdhenu”. This community is known as Mal Paharia because they were hill dwellers.

2. Linguistic affinity -

3. Physical features

1. Material culture -

2. Occupation (Economy, Livelihood, pattern)- The Mal Paharias cultivate by jhuming, and live on the precarious crops thus grown, on jungle roots and the fruits of their hunting. They are for the most part wretchedly poor, but are gradually taking to regular cultivation especially at the foot of the hills. They also cut and sell thatching and sabai grass.

They emigrate in small numbers and make useful labourers when treated well. They also supplement their earning by selling forest products such as firewood, bamboos. In the bari or kitchen garden maize is sown in the field.

3. Food habit

4. Village life (type of village) – The Manjhi or the village headman is the actual guardian of the village who is assisted by the Paramanik and the Gorait. The Paramanik supervises the work assigned by the Manjhi and also officiates at the meeting of the village council if the Manjhi is absent. Originally Manjhi is selected by the villagers. On the death of the Manjhi his eldest son inherits the office of the Manjhi. The post of Goriat is hereditary.

5. Dress & Ornaments

6. Art and Craft

7. Social organization (Society, Clan system) – Clan is absent from among the Mal Pahariyas. But there are family divisions, namely Dehri, Grihi, Layab, Manjhiye, Laya and Pujar. The division of the clan does not determine marriage alliances. These divisions are not a clan division but occupational divisions. Their family is nuclear. They have no clan organization hence the matrimonial alliance is determined by their kinship system which is classificatory in character. Descent and inheritance are determined by the father's lineage. Village council or Panchayat is presided over by the Manjhi or the Pradhan who is assisted by the Gorait or Paramanik. The bigger Panchayat the Paha consist of a number of villages which ranges from three to fifty or more, is presided over by the Sardar whose post has become predatory like the Manjhi or the other office bearer. The Sardar settles inter village dispute which come under his jurisdiction and power.

8. Rites and Rituals – At the head of the Paharia religion stands the sun, to whom reverential obeisance is made morning and evening and in whose honour goats are sacrificed. Dharti Mai (Mother Earth) is held in honour, and Singhbahini who rules over tigers, snakes, scorpions and similar noxious beasts. The village Manjhi officiated as priest. There is also a whole school of vaguely defined animistic powers , chief of whom is Chordanu, a malevolent spirit, who must be propitiated at certain intervals with sacrifices and the first fruit of whatever crop is in the ground. Ancestor worship holds strong sway, and every village has its tutelary deity. The festivals are the usual aboriginal orgies, held on any and every occasion, including the chief Hindu festivals.

9. Life cycle (Birth, Marriage & Death)

Birth - During the pregnancy the women are not kept alone due to the fear of evil spirits which might attack them. Any elderly woman her mother or

mother-in-law (sas) attends on a woman at a time of delivery. The umbilical cord is cut by the new mother with new bamboo knife. The mother and the new born baby and her husband live outside the house for five days' as a period of uncleanness and avoidance is observed among the Paharias which is called "chute". After the days of chute are over the new mother goes to the dari or jharna and boils her clothes and garments in a pot kept on fire mix with the ash of the earth (Orme). There she washes her clothes and garments and bathes. Her husband also bathes and washes his clothes in the same way. But before they take their baths, the hair of the new-born babe is shaved by a barber. The husband also gets his beard shaved and new mother has her nails pared off. After the cleansing ceremony the new mother enters the hut or house. The hut or the house is cleaned and plastered with cowdung and water. She thenceforth starts cooking for the family with new earthen pots and pans.

Marriage- Marriage, as is to be expected in an aboriginal tribe which is gradually becoming Hinduised, is either infant or adult, the former being considered more respectable. A professional matchmaker (sithu) is usually employed by the bridegroom's people to find a suitable bride and after formal inspection; a bride-price is arranged. Sindurdan is the binding part of the actual ceremony. Widow marriage is permitted, though the widow is expected to marry her late husband's younger brother. Divorce is allowed on certain grounds with the permission of the caste council.

Death- The dead are usually cremated, a piece of bone being preserved to be thrown into a running stream or a deep tank. Death ceremony is performed after ten days when shaving of beards and hair is performed. That very day after the ritual offering of cooked rice and chicken's meat is made in the name of the deceased person, the agnates take their bath, after shaving and washing their beards and hair. On the 'Kaman' day, over the grave mound, a human figure of grass is made over the head of the grave and it is burnt. On the embers of the burnt figure the image of the man is made thrice and destroyed. It is an essential part of the death ceremony which signifies double burial. After this ritual a feast is given to the village brothers and kith and kin from far and near with drinking and dancing. After one year a 'bhauj' in dead persons name is given to the people. A number of goats, pigs and chickens are sacrificed to feed the guests. Drinking and dancing go on for some days when actual licentiousness prevails.

10. Political life (Customary law, Kinship)

11. Religion –. Mostly Mal Pahariya people follow 'Sarna'..'Sarna' is a form of nature worship often mistaken as a part of Hindu system of beliefs however it is not a part of Hindu pantheon. In the true sense Mal Pahariyas are not part of Hindu belief and caste system. But now Hindu gods Kali and Lakhshmi are also honoured.

12. Line of descent

13. Disposal of death - The dead body is laid to rest in the burial ground which is set apart in each village. The dead body is carried on a cot used by the deceased to the burial ground. A ditch is dug where branches of trees and leaves are placed in order over which the corpse is laid to rest and again leaves and branches of trees are laid over the dead body, and in the end the grave is filled up with earth. The belongings of the dead man, his bed, his plates and dishes are all put into the grave along with him. Over the gravemound big stones are put and his cot is put over them in a broken condition. To appease the spirit of the dead an egg or two are offered besides boiled rice and meat of chicken.

Points to be considered for the Ethnographic Study?

A. Name, Identity, Origin and History

1. Name of the community, other name, name referred by other communities, meaning associated with the name.

The name of the community is Mal Paharia. They are referred by other communities as tea garden, ex-tea garden labourers as bongali , Baganiya, Bona or Mazdoor and kuli by other communities in Assam because majority of them live in tea garden.

2. Name mentioned above are considered derogatory in any manner?

The names Kuli and Bongali are derogatory ...

3. Traditional demography.

4. History of origin of your community

5. Myth and legends, if any, associated with the origin And migration of our community

6. Any other information.

B. Habitation pattern

1. Type of village

2. Whether mixed with other communities/religious groups etc.

3. Neighborhood pattern

4. Dwelling unit Ground plan of the dwelling unit i.e. rectangular/square/oval/circular/any other.

5. Any other information.

C. Food and drink

1. Type of utensil used for preparing and serving food and Drinks.
2. Staple food.
3. Food items.
4. Drinks and types of drinks.
5. How many meals take everyday.
6. Any other information.

D. Dress and Ornaments

1. Type of dress worn by a) Adult male/ Adult female – i) head gear, ii) upper garment, iii) Lower garment. b) Male child/Female child – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment.

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2. Uniqueness of the dress pattern.
3. Type of dress worn during festivals/special occasion etc.
4. Type of dress used by the Priest, Headman and Medicine man.
5. Ornaments worn by male and female and parts of the body where worn.
6. Materials used for preparation of the ornaments.
7. Any other information.

E. Family, Clan and other Analogous division

1. Type of household
2. Where a couple does usually reside after marriage
3. Traditional practice of descent.
4. Role of family members.
5. Sub caste/sub tribes.
6. Etymological significance of name of each sub castes/sub tribes.
7. Myth and legends associated with sub castes/ sub tribes.
8. Traditional occupation of sub castes/ sub-tribes.
9. Clan/ Gotra of the community.
10. How clan regulates marriage.
11. Any other information.

F. Economic activities

1. Traditional occupation, main occupation pursued now a days and other occupation.
2. Main crops produced.
3. Months of the following activities i.e. Ploughing, sowing, weeding Y& harvesting.

4. Activities usually performed by adult male, adult female, male child, female child.
5. Magico-religious ceremonies performed during ploughing, sowing & harvesting.
6. Implements used for ploughing, sowing & harvesting.
7. Any other information.

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Fishing & Hunting

1. Where & how do you fish and how?
2. Implements used for fishing & hunting.
3. Any other information.

G. Life style

1. Beliefs associated with conception. Barrenness, prolong delivery, delivery of dead child & maternity death.
2. Restriction imposed on mother during pregnancy on – Diet, Work, Visiting any place.
3. Who provides assistance during delivery.
4. What type of instruments is used to sever umbilical cord?
5. How placenta is disposed off.
6. Duration of confinement of mother after delivery.
7. Any other information.

Marriage

1. Age of marriage
2. Type of marriage (elopement, capture, service etc)
3. Whether following practices are prevalent – Child marriage, widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, polyandry, polygyny, levirate, sororate and divorce.
4. Custom and practices associated with marriage.
5. Dowry and Bride price.
6. Any other information.

1. Beliefs associated with death.

2. Rituals performed and ritual objects used at the time of disposal of the dead body.
3. Place where dead body is disposed off.
4. Manner in which dead body is disposed off –Cremation, Infant, accident death.
5. Who prepares the site for cremation.
6. How the dead body is placed in the grave/pyre/

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7. What are the offering made to the deceased.

8. Rituals performed at the time of disposed off.
 9. Duration of pollution period.
 10. Restriction observed during pollution period.
 11. Who officiates in performing death rites?
 12. Any other information H.Religion
1. Supreme deity.
 2. How supreme deity is associated with the life of the people?
 3. When this deity is propitiated?
 4. Village deity.
 5. Clan deity
 6. Malevolent spirit
 7. Ancestor worship.
- I. Traditional system of social control 1. Traditionally recognized agency/traditional/political organization (eg Customary law, Panachayat, etc.) If yes, are there any permanent set of office bearers.
 2. Functions of traditional/political recognized agencies.
 3. Any other information.

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CHAPTER – II

Five Criteria

1. Primitive traits.
2. Distinctive culture
3. Shyness of contact with the community at large
4. Geographical isolation
5. Backwardness

Conclusion

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CHAPTER – III

Replies to the queries made by RGI/National Commission for SC/ST

CHAPTER – IV

Conclusion