



Understanding *HALUA* Brahmin Among the Brahmins of Odisha with Special Reference to Ganjam District

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Abstract: Caste has been an important social fact from antiquity to modernity. It has influenced our society to a great extent. We can say it has affected our society from womb to tomb and cradle to grave, even beyond. Caste and hierarchy both are dependant on each other. Studies on caste, hierarchy, untouchability and many more aspects has been studied by many social scientists. Neither caste is homogenous not Brahmin. Both vary from state to state in many sense from rituals to identity. This particular paper giving an idea of one particular type of Brahmins in Odisha, named as '*Halua*' Brahmin. There is a sociology behind this type of Brahmin. Their identity has been interpreted in many ways. They identify as half brahmin or as not pure brahmin. They straddle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

Keywords: Caste, Brahmin, *Halua* Brahmin, Hierarchy

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Introduction

Very few studies has been conducted among the higher caste 'Brahmins' of Odisha. As this study is based on field work, primary data were collected through focused group discussion, key informant interview, structured interview and semi-structured interviews. Apart from that, secondary data were also collected from different books and journals. The origin of Brahmin as a caste dates back to Vedic period and it is not determined by birth but by virtue of the self chosen profession but in latter Vedic period it started to be determined by birth. Generally the Brahmins of Ganjam district are of five types according to social hierarchy. From the surname one cannot make out the sub caste of Brahmin caste. Brahmins like Panda, Padhiari, Sarua, Paniari known as *Laukik* Brahmin. They were living during flourish of Buddhism. They were so called as they got influenced by Buddhism. It shows the how historically they are linked to religion whether Hinduism or Buddhism. The different markers

of identity of Brahmins may have some similarities with Halua Brahmins yet they are neither similar nor equal.

According to Veda, Brahmin is one who knows “Brahmo”, and is born from Lord Brahma’s mouth. The origin of Brahmin as a caste dates back to Vedic period and it is not determined by birth but by virtue of the self chosen profession (*swadharma*). In latter Vedic period it started to be determined by birth. The Brahmins brought from Kanyakubja established ‘Brahman Shasanas’ became known as Vedic Brahmins. They gained the highest status among Brahmins. The Balabhadra Gotra Brahmin, whose ancestors believed to be Buddhists by some historians, they gained their position below the Vaidik and Laukik Brahmins. They got appointed as cooks and other works in the temples of Puri and Bhubeneswar. Today they bear the surnames like Sahu, Padhan, Swain, Mohapatra, Mohanty and they do ploughing and cultivation (Prahraj, 2008a). The Brahmarsidesa or region of Kuru-Panchala as defined by Manu, consisting of the region of Kuru, Matsya, Panchala, and Surasena. The Kuru-Panchala region frequently referred to as the centre of Brahminical culture and learning in the older texts right since the latter Vedic period. The Place which emerged as the cultural centre of this region during the said period was Kannauj, the capital of the great North Indian Hindu empire of Harsavardhana (606 – 647 A.C) , a city which deservedly earned the designation ‘Mahodayasrih’ because of its great prosperity. Its splendour and prosperity as well its cultural and religious importance has aptly been described by Hiuen – Tsang who spent seven happy years of his life (636 – 643 A.C) in this place. It was during this period that the Brahmins living in and around Kannauj earned a reputation of being greatly learned in the traditional lore and especially well versed in the Vedic ritual. Kannauj retained its glory also under the succeeding dynasties of the Rastrakutas and the Pratiharas till 1018 -19 A.C. When it was sacked by the notorious iconoclast, the sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, hundreds of its religious shrines of both Hindu and Buddhist, were levelled to ground.

Origin of the Caste Brahmin

After the city was plundered, the temples demolished and other Hinduistic institutions destroyed, the Brahmin living in this kingdom did not have any other alternative except to migrate to other regions of India which still had the Hindu dynasty ruling. Not only there are clear indications of the migration of the Brahmins from the Madhyadesa in the regions like Gujurat, Maharastra, Bengal, Odisha and Chennai and in some regions the Brahmins have even preserved the consciousness

of having originally been '*Kanyakubjab*' (e.g in Bengal and Odisha) or 'Audieyah' (Gujurat), this exodus of the Brahmins from north is supported by a number of concrete epigraphically evidences also which record the land grants to the Brahmins from *Madhyadesa*.

Apart from such voluntary migration, it is quite probable that very often certain Brahmins in small batches or groups were invited from North India, when it was at the helm of its cultural development, to the regions where there was a shortage of the ritual experts and the priests conducting vedic sacrifices etc. Thus there is a tradition in odisha that the king Yajati of the Kesari dynasty (885 – 914 A.C) had invited ten thousand Brahmins from Kannauj to help him performing the many Asvamedha Sacrifies on the bank of the river Baitarani in his capital Jajpur (*Yajnapura*), presently in cuttack district of Odisha as there were no Sotriya Brahmins in Odisha. These Brahmins were settled in and around Jajpur where they were granted sufficient land to maintain themselves. Here they had a more important task to fulfil, namely to spread the elements of the classical North Indian culture among the people who mostly still stood outside the pale of the greater Hinduistic tradition. This process of cultural colonization running over many centuries brought about a remarkable change in the religious beliefs, thinking and social habits of the people gave impetus to new literacy creation and infused thousands of Sanskrit tatsama words in the local dialect which by and by grew to a literarily idiom. These Brahmins were known as Shavaites as they worship Lord Shiva.

With the construction of the Jagannath temple in the beginning of the 12th century by Chodoganga Dev of the Eastern Ganga dynasty, the centres of religious activities were gradually shifted to Puri. The legend of the foundation of this shrine – the *purusottama ksetra* mahatmya incorporated in the Vaisnava Khanda of the Skanda Purana tells us in unmistakable terms that Lord Jagannath was originally worshipped by the aborigines before being accepted by the upper strata of the Hinduistic society. The foundation of such a great temple as that of Jagannath required as equally large group of prists and other functionaries to discharge the manifold religious ceremonies of the temple properly. Many Brahmin villages, therefore, had to be founded a round Puri town from time to time to vouchsafe the proper functioning of the temple. These Brahmins were known as Baishnavaites as they worship Lord Bishnu avatar.

The land allotted to Brahmins to establish as Sasanas named after kings. The villagers called them as 'Mahajana' and the castes like washer man, blacksmith and barber served the Mahajana as servants. Shasana has different meaning and one of them is 'land donated by king'. Even today some evidences of the then Sasanas

are found in Cuttack and Puri districts. It is said that Anang Bheem Deva (Ganga dynasty) killed many Brahmins without knowledge during war, and to redeem from this sin, he established 450 'Brahman Shasnas' and donated vast stretches of land to them. In Puri district of Odisha there are sixteen shasanas and thirty six Karbads established by the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri (Prahraj, 2009)

Kings were usually entitling Brahmins, while encrypting any responsibility as Rajguru, Paricha, Mahapatra, Khadanga, Bishoiratna, Khadiratna, Nayak etc. It is established by noted scholars on Brahminism that there were no sub – caste among Brahmins of Odisha in the beginning; they were all known as Vedic Brahmin. Later on, under the influence of spreading Buddhism, they adopted various Non Brhaminic professions such as agriculture, trade and business where they could be assured of better income for livelihood. It came to such a pass that, in course of time, there was a dearth of Vedic Brahmins and King Jajati Keshari had to “import” ten thousand Vedic Brahmin from Kanauj. The present day Brahmins of Odisha who perform Homo and Yagyan, etc. are all their descendents and the others are largely confined to the Maths and temples. It is significant that a large number of them are found south of Rushikulya and then Ganjam district can said to be home to this class of priests who are known for their competence in various forms of rituals (Sahu & Nanda 2014).

Types of Brahmin in Ganjam District of Odisha

In undivided Ganjam district that is from Rushikulya to Banshadhara River most of Loukik Brahmins are seen. Generally the Brahmins of Ganjam district are of five types according to social hierarchy.

1. Sasani or Danua Brahmin (Vaidik)
2. Padhia Brahmin (Loukik)
3. Saraswat or Sarua Brahmin (Loukik)
4. Halua or Mastana Brahmin (Balabhadra Gotri)
5. Bhadri Brahmin

Sasani or Danua Brahmin (Vaidik)

Sasani or Danua Brahmins are Vaidika Brahmins. They perform different religious rites like marriage, house entering ceremony, thread ceremony, funeral rites and accept 'daan'. These Brahmins surnames like Mishra, Mahapatra, Acharya, Nanda,

Kar, Ghanta, Hota, Udgata, Pani, Dash, Tripathy, Rajguru etc and they follow Yajur Veda. They are found in different districts of Odisha. In Ganjam district they are mostly found in Dharakota, Khallikote, Dayanidhipur, Purusotam. In Ganjam district the Sasani Brahmins are known as Danua Brahmin.

Padhia Brahmin (Loukik)

Padhia Brahmins perform the different rites of temple. They also perform marriage, house entering ceremonies but not the funeral rites and rituals. They bear the surnames as Padhi, Panda, Nayak, Sharma, Acharya etc. In Ganjam mainly they concentrate in Chikiti and Patrapur Block.

Saraswat or Sarua Brahmin (Loukik)

They claimed to have lived in the bank of the river Saraswati and migrated to Odisha by then king Yajati Keshari for performing Aswamedha Yagna. They are Yadurvedi Brahmin. Saraswat Brahmins are a class of Brahmins who earn their livelihood by raising and selling vegetables. They bear the surnames like Dash, Acharya, Prahraj, Panda, Padhi, Brahma, Mishra, Sahu, Mahapatra, Patra, Panigrahi, Kar, Gantayata, Mahanti etc. They are seen on the Rushikulya Valley, Particularly Purusotampur, Ganja, Belaguntha, Bhanja Nagar, Dharakota and Shoroda.

Halua or Mastana Brahmin (Balabhadra Gotri)

In Ganjam district more number of Halua Brahmins are living. They are Sahu, Sabat, Panigrahi, Pradhan, Nayak, Padhi, Panda, Adhikari, Patra, Sharma, Samantaroy, Pani, Dash, Nepak, Paricha etc. By profession they are dependent on cultivation. They concentrate in Belagaon, Gandolla, Digapahandi, Patrapur, Chatrapur, Ganja, Rambha, Aska, Bhanja nagar and Goshaninuagon area of Brahmapur of Ganjam district. In the present study all the anthropometric measurements collected from Halua Brahmins of Goshaninuagon of Brahmapur, Belagaon, Gandolla areas of Ganjam.

Bhadri Brahmin

Bhadri Brahmins are generally identified by the surnames like Rath, Panigrahi, Panda, Padhy, Mahapatra, Pani, Sabat, Dash, Mahanti, Sahu. They follow Sam Veda for auspicious occasion like marriage ceremony and thread ceremony. They live in Sheragada, Badakhemundi, Aska area of Ganjam district.

Life Style of Halua Brahmins

The data for *Halua* Brahmins are collected from Belagam, Gondala, Khandra, Sikiri villages of Hinjilicut Block and Goshaninuagaon area of Brahmapur town Ganjam district, Odisha. Goshaninuagaon area of Brahmapur is urban area and Belagam, Gondala, Khandra, Sikiri villages are in rural area. More number of Halua Brahmin families are concentrated in these areas.

House Pattern: The Halua Brahmins stay both in rural areas and urban areas. In the present studied villages other caste people like other Brahmin sub groups, Benita odia, Sundi, Washer man, Barber etc are also staying. Families belonging to low castes are staying in a isolated area. The house pattern is found to be linear type and adjacent to each other. Proper ventilation is not available in these linear types of houses. The social system is quite different in urban and rural areas.

Food: Rice is the staple food for them. Mostly they take rice two times in a day. In breakfast they use to have chapatti, puri, upma, idili, etc. They prefer rice for lunch and dinner. Most of the families are non-vegetarian. They would like to have chicken, fish and mutton on three days in a week i.e. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Tube well and supply piped water is used for drinking and cooking purpose.

Dress Pattern: Usually the men put on Lungi and Dhoti and keep towel on the body. But whenever they go outside they use to wear pant and shirt. The women generally wear cotton sari with blouse and petticoat. The young girls wear shalwar kurta and boys wear formal shirt, pant, jeans and T- shirt. In rural areas most children either stay in naked body or sometimes wear pant only. Wealthy persons use gold ornaments and the less lucky use ornaments of silver or the other materials.

Language: All people speak Odia language. A few of them know Hindi and English. Most of the Brahmin families earn their livelihood from small scale business; very few are cultivators and daily labourers

Religion: They follow Hindu religion. Life cycle of a Halua Brahmin male centres round four stages such as birth, thread ceremony, marriage and death. In case of female the stages are birth, puberty, marriage and death. Birth and death are inevitable. If one does not marry, he or she cannot get the full status of a person in the society. For the first time when a girl gets puberty, they organise a function in their house to celebrate it for seven days during which the girl sit in a particular place and does not move here and there. During the period of first delivery the woman has to stay at her parent's house.

Bratopayan known as 'sacred thread ceremony' is traditionally performed to mark the point at which an individual begins the spiritual education to know the ultimate

reality. In case of boys the sacred thread ceremony is traditionally performed. The youngster is taught during the ceremony, secrets of life through Brahmapodesham (revealing the nature of life, the ultimate reality) and Gayatri Mantra. The child then becomes qualified for life as a student or Brahmachari as prescribed in the scriptures. An individual is believed to have been born twice, once in the womb of his mother and again during the Upanayanam. The hall mark of having gone through the Upanayanam ceremony is the wearing of the Yagnopaveetham (sacred thread). The wearing of Yagnopaveetham brings purity of thought, word and deed to the individual to lead a disciplined life.

Marriage: Brahmins follow caste endogamy and gotra exogamy. The marriage ceremony takes place in bride's house on the day of marriage. Cross-cousin marriage is found among the Halua Brahmin. They prefer to marry within their own sub caste. But now a days due to influence of modernization marriage outside the subgroup is permitted. Hypergamy type of marriage is accepted by the parents. The Halua Brahmin follows caste endogamy and Gotra exogamy. Patriarchal family is found among them. Father is the head of the family. The status of women is low. Dowry system is more prevalent among Halua Brahmins. Mostly nuclear family is found among the Halua Brahmins. Sometimes old parents live with the son's family.

Death is the last mark of life cycle; they cremate the body at the crematory. On the death of a person; all the lineage members observe the rituals for a period of 11 days. On 12th day, close family members meet for a ceremonial meal

Conclusion

It is true that caste system has influenced Indian Society from womb to tomb, cradle to grave, even beyond that. And it can also be said that caste never goes away (*jaati kabhi nehin jaati*). The hierarchy of caste system is very much prevalent in every state in many ways. Caste in itself, means there are differences within same caste as well. Here this study focuses how the halua bramhin is different from other Brahmins of the state of Odisha with special focus to south Odisha region. This paper would like to give a clear picture of Brahmins within Bramhins and how do they differentiate from each other. The markers of differences can be their identity and importance in Odisha. This paper can enlighten other state's caste hierarchy among the Brahmins. It also explains Brahmins as in Varna system or caste system is not homogenous.

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