

"Social Life of A Scheduled Caste" (with special reference to Nat caste in Patna District)

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Originally known as 'broken men' or 'out castes' in early India, 'depressed classes' in the British India, exterior castes in the 1931 census and 'Harijans' by Gandhi, The untouchables of Hindu society were covered under the term "scheduled castes" by the Simon commission in 1935. The same term has been retained by the framers of our constitution. Scheduled castes refer to the lowest castes of Hindu society, they suffer from the problem of untouchability.

According to the government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs Notification No. SRO 2477. A dated 29th October, 1956. The list of scheduled castes for the state of Bihar was prepared and the twenty one castes were declared as scheduled castes.

Nat is also a scheduled caste. Generally Nat caste leads to nomadic life. The main occupation of this caste is wrestling and preaching. They roam from village to village and town to town. They use to sell natural medicines (jurri-booty). But now, there, this occupation declining and they have now began to settle permanently at particular places.

Nat has divided into 591 branches. Cook has mentioned 386 branches of Hindu nats and 205 branches of muslim nats. This community is found all parts of state of Bihar. In Bihar their total population is 38615. This population is 0.046 percent of total population of Bihar.

The following tables shows district wise population of Nat caste.¹

Table No.1

District	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
West Champaran	1720	892	828	1624	96
East Champaran	1199	666	533	1126	73
Sheohar	1	1	0	1	0
Sitamarhi	23	12	11	23	0
Madhubani	236	119	117	236	0
Supaul	30	19	11	1	0
Araria	1	0	1	11	6
Kisanganj	17	6	11	60	0

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Purnea	60	26	34	0	188
Katihar	188	88	100	0	0
Madhepura	0	0	0	0	0
Saharsa	24	11	13	0	24
Darbhanga	0	0	0	0	0
Muzaffarpur	825	436	389	670	155
Gopalganj	831	441	390	802	29
Siwan	1192	600	592	1140	52
Saran	6602	3427	3175	5988	614
Vaishali	345	181	164	345	0
Samastipur	87	45	420	71	16
Begusarai	106	54	52	106	0
Khagaria	42	25	17	42	0
Bhagalpur	716	363	353	714	2
Banka	31	17	14	31	0
Munger	24	11	15	0	24
Lakhisarai	120	58	62	109	11
Sheikhpura	254	134	120	208	46
Nalanda	1996	1024	772	1866	130
Patna	3928	2079	1849	3281	647
Kaimur	1477	766	711	1467	10
Rohtas	5307	2644	2663	4818	489
Jehanabad	1808	916	902	1607	211
Aurangabad	994	508	486	922	72
Gaya	1099	566	533	977	122
Nawada	731	397	334	728	3
Jamui	57	35	22	57	0
Buxar	3046	1627	1419	3037	9
Bhojpur	3488	1782	1706	2496	992
Total	38615	19976	18639	34564	4021

Family system in Nat Community :

Family is the primary institutions which controls various aspects of the Nat community. It consists of the father, mother, children and some other members born out of the marriage bond. In Nat caste family has different forms. The single unit family and the joint unit family, single family consists of the father, mother and the children, while the joint family consists of the grand parents, uncles, cousins, nephews etc. But today joint family in Nat community is disintegration because of Industrialization, urbanization, increase in population, disintegration of their traditional occupations etc. Family of Nat caste is patrilocal.

Marriage :

Marriage is one of the most important ceremonies in Nat community. It is performed with great pomp and show in them. In Nat community marriage of mothmus system are prevailing from tradition. According to this system is given to girl. In other words, pride price is prevailing in this community without it marriage ceremonies can not performed.

Mostly Nat people are monogamous. Divorce is also prevailing in them. Widow remarriage, devar and sali marriage is also acceptable here.

Kinds of Sanskar in Nat community :

Garvadhan sanskar, Niskarman sanskar, marriage sanskar and antyesti sanskar is most important sanskars in them.

Religious belief :-'Kul' Devta is found in Nat community. They called him 'Dak'. They worship different forms of supernatural power. They worship 'Goraiya Baba' also.

They celebrated 'Kama Festival' in month of 'Bhado' and worship karma tree. On this day boys and girls organized dance and music. In month of aswin, they celebrated Jitiya. On the last day of poosh month they celebrated light festival, which is called sankranti.

Sub-castes in Hindu Nat :-Nat community is divided into various sub-castes. Sub-castes are following: Lathur, Kongarh, Goleri, Tikulhara, Rarhi, Kumhara, Lodhra, Gulgulia.

Sub-castes in Muslim Nats in Bihar :-The 50 percent population of muslim Nat spent Nomadic life. They move one place to other place with family. Some families have situated in villages. Their main occupation is agriculture, but Nomadic nat has engaged in hunting birds, buy and sell of animals, Rope-dancer, dancing monkey etc. Hunter has mentioned above occupations of muslim Nat in Bihar² Turkati, Kalandar, Bakhos etc. sub-castes are found in Muslim Nats in Bihar.³ They are veg. and non-veg. also. They like to eat rice, bread, pulse, potato, kanda and suthani also.⁴

Generally they marriage in their community late marriage are prevailing in their community.

They belief in Islam Id-ul-Joha, Sabebarat, Id-ul-Fiter, Moharram etc. are their main festivals. They also participate in Hindus festival like Holi, Dashara etc.

Problems of Nat caste :-Nat suffer from the following problems :

1. Religious problem :- Nats were subjected to various religious disabilities. They were prevented from entering temples, monasteries and cremation grounds, and were not permitted to make use of them because it was believed that these places would become impure by their touching them. In this way the Nat and other scheduled castes could Nat worship in the temple.

2. Social problems :- In the social sphere the problems of the Nat or other scheduled castes are the following:

- (i) Prevention from the use of the public roads.
- (ii) Prevention from the use of public wells.
- (iii) Prevention from entering schools.
- (iv) In marriage the scheduled castes bride and bridegroom were not allowed to sit in the palanquin.

Economic Problems :-The problems of the Nats were not restricted only to the social sphere but these extended into the economic sphere too. Due to their social disabilities they could not retain any interest

in or enthusiasm for their occupation. They did not have the permission to engage in the professions of the higher castes. And even, as it is their conventional occupations were dirty and soiled and means for earning their bread and butter were limited. Even now there is next to no education among them. They are landless and burdened with debt while poverty and famine conditions prevail among them. They live in dirty slums in which new disease are always making their life miserable. There is no medical provision for them, since the high caste doctor becomes defiled merely by touching them.

Efforts to solution of their problems :-There have been numerous governmental and non-governmental efforts towards the solution of their problems. In governmental effort is directed towards the prevention of untouchability on the one hand and improvement in the condition of the untouchables on the other. In the paragraph 46 of the Indian constitution much emphasis has been laid upon the spread of education among them and the protection of their economic interests.

Constitutional provisions :-Article 15, Article 16, Article 17, Article 29, Article 38, Article 46 has eradicated to their untouchabilities.

The untouchability offences act, 1955, The protection of civil Rights Act, 1976, article 330, 332, 335 have given safeguards to them.

Economic improvement :

- (i) Laws for escaping debt.
- (ii) Laws for defence against the tradition of slavery.
- (iii) Distribution of land to scheduled castes.
- (iv) Laws making the farmer the owner of the land.
- (v) Educational facilities, Non governmental efforts have been also play an important role in the uplift of the scheduled castes.

In spite of all the above efforts and constitutional provisions most of Nats live below the povertyline. They are derived from the development programmes. They are mostly illiterate, ignorance and victims of social and economic exploitation - Legally untouchability has been abolished by the untouchability Act, 1955 and the protection of civil Rights Act, 1976. But in real practice the problem continues and these people are the subject of discrimination and deprivations. They have little scope for social interaction with other castes, particularly in the villages. The chances of inter-caste marriage dining and participation in various social ceremonies are bleak.

References :

- 1. Census of India 2001
- 2. Hetukar Jha & Surendra Gopal : Peoples of India-Bihar, volume-XVI, Part-2, Anthropological survey of India, Sigal Books, Kalcutta, p.722.
- 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid. 5. Ibid.

