

A Brief Survey of Oral Sources on the Goals of Cachar

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In my paper presented at the IXth session of the NE I H A on 'TEA LABOURERS IN THE BARAK VALLEY', there was a reference on the classification among the Goals in Cachar. Here, an attempt is being made to find out their origin and some important facts witnessed by the old village people which can be recognised as source material for further study.¹

The village Badribasti, within the jurisdiction of Banskandi-Sonapur Gaon Panchayat is one of the oldest inhabited areas of the district of Cachar. There are the gardens of Arkatipur and Kashipur adjacent to it. Majority people of this village Badribasti came here from U. P. in connection with the Tea plantation. About 90% people of this area belonged to Hindi speaking group and have taken 'milk and cow' as their profession.

By an interview with Mr. Paresh Goala and Mr. Ram Prasad Yadav of this locality aged about 68 and 72 respectively, it was known that the grand father of Mr. Yadav named Jagarnath Yadav migrated to the Kashipur garden in pursuance of the 'Gimitia Chalan.' That old man having earned some money secured his position, and came out of the bondage of the contract. Of course, there was the liberty of a labourer to give up his work after the term of his contract was over. Sometimes they were given enough fertile land to look for other means of subsistence.² In this way Jagarnath acquired much land including the plot of his present residence. At that time the native inhabitants of the area were some Hindu people of lower caste possessing titles like 'Das', 'Namasudra' and a few Manipuri people. Gradually, he brought his son, that is the father of Ram Prasad who was a boy of about 15 to 16 years of age.

Ram Prasad heard from his father that, chaos prevailed in Cachar following the invasion of the Burmese and Manipuris and the British used to sent food-grains by Lakhipur road with the help of bullock carts etc.³

There were seven sub-castes among the goala community of Cachar. These have been originated from the place they have migrated. Such as :-

- (1) Kanuzia — Migrated from Kanuaz.
- (2) Darhore — Migrated from Dundak forest.
- (3) Krishnaoth — migrated from Kirishna river area.
- (4) Majroth — migrated from Meerut.
- (5) Gareria — no definite information has been found.
- (6) Gajroth — migrated from Gujrat.
- (7) Khatick goala — Perhaps locally used.⁴

Moreover, there are different surnames among the Hindi-speaking migrated labourers, who came directly or indirectly with tea plantation and engaged in the profession of their forefathers.

- Hazam : Those engaged in hair-dressing (Barbar).
 Kanu : Engaged in business.
 Koher : Qotter, engaged in preparing earthen utensils.
 Kurmi : O.B.C. class engaged in agriculture.
 Kairi: Culhti vator.
 Rabidas : Cobler
- Teli : Engaged in the preparation of oil.
 Mal : Engaged in fishing etc.

Panpa and Mohati are the priestly class among the Hindi speaking goalas.

Mention can be made here that, during the Dimasa rule in Cachar, people from outside were welcome to cultivate enough land. Together with this Brahmin priests others came and settled here. Thus, Sonaram Desmukhya came and settled at Udarband during Krishna Chandra, the Dimasa ruler.⁵ Similarly, Pandit Sukumar Sashtri now an oldman of 89 years and an inhabitant of Kashipur is still a priest among the Goalas, His forefathers were settled by the British to perform ecclesiastical performances in the garden. Originally, his ancestors belonged to Kashi (Benaras). His father and grand-father were teachers at Kashi-Raj's Patshala with a salary of Rs. 6/- per month. This oldman Mr. Sashtri expressed his opinion how did his father Ram Haresha Sashtri migrated and settled in the valley of Barak. One of his relatives who was engaged in some business in Burma convinced his father to go there. Accordingly, Ram Haresha Sashtri went to Rengoon and started ecclesiastical activities there. Suddenly, he happened to meet one Giridhari Mishra who insisted him to come to Cachar,

Thus Ram Haresha reached Badarpur via Chittagong. He then came to Badribasti on foot.

At that time one of his relatives, Budhiram Goala who came here in connection with the 'Girmitia Chalan' stayed in the out-garden of Kashipur. Budhiram very often used to go to Ram Haresha Sashtri. Budhiram brought Ram Haresha to the out-garden of Kashipur after a fortnight. Sashtri came and started the age-old business of his forefathers and gradually came to be symbolised as a religious guide of this area.

Suddenly, an epidemic disease among the domestic animals became apparent and huge number of cows were victimised. So, Sashtri was called to the new garden of Kahispur to perform scacrifices etc. where he stayed for over four years. Meanwhile, Mr. Talbor took the charge as Manager in the out-garden of Kashipur. He and his wife also were very fond of animals. But soon the epidemic disease created havoc in this garden too. Sashtri was then called back to his former garden. People believed that, due to his religious performances, the danger of epidemic has now been over. Sashtri was given a large land to settle in the area. Thus his son Sukumar Pandit, who was born in the year 1900, came here at Kashipur at the age of four. Since then, he resided in this area and he is till regarded as the saviour of religion of the locality. ⁶

In course of discussion, he told some of his experiences. The tea labourers who came here were rather handicapped with the contract. They were given shelter in the barracks. It was consisted of 100 *hath* in length and 16 *hath* in breadth where 24 families were to be accommodated. Again, they were given bucket, earthen utensils, blankets etc. Their remuneration was 8 to 12 paise for female and male respectively which was increased to 12 and 16 paise. The nature of punishment was also very inhuman. In course of time there was some change of attitude among the rulers. The remuneration of the labourers was increased, primary education was encouraged and all these led towards modernisation.

Notes & References

1. Interview with Ram Prasad Yadav, a well-to-do person of the village, Badribasti, Cachar.
2. J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar Under British Rule in North East India*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 197.
3. Ram Prasad Yadav, n. 1.
4. Conversation with K. P. Goala, Itkhola, Silchar.
5. Promode Ranjan Dashamukhya, *Memorandum on the opening of the new temple of Kacha-Kanti*, Udarband, 1979, p. 11.
6. Interview with Sukumar Sashtri, Kashipur, Cachar.