

Labhana Community: A Brief Study Of It's Language, Literature And Culture

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Abstract:

The present paper is an effort to represent the Labhana Society as nomadic tribe. It reflects on their traditions, folklores, rituals, customs, cultural heritage and their dialect. It is the retrospective study of their unknown history and their long past journey from the shadow of forest to the present days. It also depicts their closeness with Nature and their devotion for the sake of their own traditions, folkdance, folklores and nomadic life style. The paper covers their gradual upliftment in the modern India with other established community. The cruelty of time placed them outside the flows. Illiteracy, Old beliefs, Superstition, Unemployment and literary backwardness are the burning issues among the entire society. It is a brief introduction of Labhana's social, cultural and economic status and their ignored life style in 21st century.

Keywords: Labhana, Origin, Culture, Tradition, Migration, Folk literature

A] Introduction

Labhana Community is a multi-colored culture, it has unique cultural identity in country like India. It has various aspects and features that make it unique. Although they are not developed like other communities in India but Labhana's life seem to be full with joy and pleasure. In this particular society, people live with their holy traditions and their glorious culture. They are rare persons and kind worshipers of nature. They prefer free and liberal livings. Most of the historians argue that Labhana is a backward section of society who remained the part of Hindu culture, with the passing of several years, they formed as "Nomadic people". We see, in the country like India, a number of tribes and nomadic tribes are found. We can consider Labhana community as one of such a nomadic tribe. As per their opinions, they might be spent

several centuries in the lap of nature for tending cows in the forest area. Their past filled with the darkness of ignorance. Looked completely isolated from the flow of development. Now, in this present scenario, Labhana seems something different than other Indian sections of society. It is only because of their nomadic culture and lifestyle. However, we can mention that Labhana community is the part of Hindu Religion. Apparently they look something different than other people, but they are obviously Hindu. There are so many similarities and dissimilarities in this particular community in comparison with other nomadic tribes which we see in Indian context. Labhana culture seems different than other in the case of their language, food habits, jewellery, art, craft, an art of embroidery, folk literature, folk dance, occupation, their unique appearance and so on.

B] Origin and Background

The most difficult task regarding with this community is to search their unknown history and origin in the past. Their illiteracy had become the most difficult hurdle for them. They couldn't collect details concerning their past journey. Although they haven't any notable references regarding historical background but they have their "Oral Folk Tradition" which can be helpful for studying their past.

While referring the first approach of their origin, we can see that as per their oral history, hundreds of years ago, the great ancestors of Labhana might be arrived in the land of India. At the very beginning of their arrival, they might be settled in the region of Sindhu valleys. Afterwards, they were introduced as "Nomadic tribe" because they often migrated from place to place for their living. Also they got title like "Geerijan" because of their intimacy with nature. Eventually, Labhana placed themselves at the margin of the flow. They were defined as "Gou-paalak" and afterwards, as "Salt - Trader". A number of historians and writers often mention them as "salt trader". Basically, they were salt carriers. While referring their salt-trading, we have to mention that they were herdsmen before engaged in salt-trading. Tending cows was their part of culture. It was the part of their identity as well as the reason of emerging such a new culture. We cannot define Labhana without the context of their habits of tending cows. The concept of their existence cannot be completed without referring them as cowmen or herdsmen. Their simple and straightforward philosophy prefer to "gou - palan", "gou- seva" and "gou-rakshan". The root of their emergence is to be found in their "gou- palan", their existence as "Nomadic tribe" is concerned with their tending and serving cows. Of course, the origin of their nomadic culture is something related to cows. Labhana culture flourished as one of the glorious cultures in the lap of nature who were deeply influenced by the "Krishna Bhakti Parampara". As they believe, their ancient tradition of tending cows was their consistent devotion for Lord Krishna and his kindness for cows. They think that the holy work might be offered by Lord Krishna himself. As per their oral tradition, might be their forefathers spent their life in the region of Mathura. Might be they were greatly influenced by the life style of that particular region.



It was resulted in their identification as "Mathura Labhana" in some part of Maharashtra and Telangana. We have to consider that as per their journey in different part of India, they got different titles. Basically, Mathura Labhan is a regional adjective for this tribe which relate them close with Lord Krishna. Their life is devoted for the sake of cows and is filled with "gourashas" like "dahi, dudh, loni, and ghee". It means their life was prosperous like that region.

The second approach of their origin, relate them with the history of Banjara Community. Most of the Labhana people believed that both Labhana and Banjara Cultures might be emerged from the same clan. While supporting this belief, Banjara writers writes that Labhana and Banjara were belonged to the same clan i.e. Gour Vansh. They mention that the forefathers of Labhana and Banjara both were from Gor Vansh. They all are the descendants of Mota and Mola (mul purush). As per their writing, near about 4500 year ago, these Goras might be settled in the region of Afghanistan. Afterwards they might be moved towards Sindhu Civilization. Some Banjara writers believes that the word "Gora" is derived from Sanskrit language. "Go" means Cow and "Ra" means - protector. In simple words, Gora means "the group of people who serves cows and who are the protectors of cows." Labhana People don't have any special references which shows their historical journey. It is difficult to find out significant references in isolation of banjara because these both cultures were emerged from same context and same cultural, social and historical backgrounds. As per the passing years both communities emerged as new culture, as new society, as new tradition and as new community. Banjara writers mention that these two communities have similar historical and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the third approach about their origin found in the context of Punjab. writers from Punjab also focus on Labhana's history. Till the settlement of Labhana and Banjara in India, both Banjara and Punjabi writers mentioned same historical details of both communities but later on Banjara writers didn't write more about Labhana community. They mentioned that both are from same clan i.e. Mota and Mola. Both Punjabi and Banjara writers believes that Mota was the forefather of Labhana. As they mentioned, Mota was Forefather of his 11 sons, those were the 11 Gotras of Labhana. Here, Banjara writers mentions that Mola was their

forefather. Some Banjara Writers says that Mota and Mola was tending cows for Lord Krishna. Before thousands of years, these two brothers, Mota and Mola had separated from each other. Mota and his 11 sons began the trade of salt on the back of cows and oxes. It can be proved by "Goni" (sackcloth) which found in Labhana's house as the heritage of their salt trading. On the ground of their trade, they had known as Labhana [lun (salt) + bana (trade) = Labana, Lubhawana, Lubana, Labhana]. On the contrary, Mola began the trade of Masala items and transporting of grains. With his four sons he might be wandering in forest for their living. On this detail they had known as Banjaara [ban (forest) + jara (wanderers) = banjara, gor banjara].

Punjabi writers mention various views about the origin of Labhana. Here, we can refer mainly three views about Labhana's Origin i.e. 1) Descendants of Gour vansh, 2) Descendants of Lav maharaj and 3) Descendants of Rajput. But most of Labhana people believes that they are the Descendants of Gour Vansh.

Basically, due to the lack of significant references, we cannot come to their origin. These mythological stories and legends are derived from the Oral Literature of Labhana Community. About their Origin and background, we find a number of approaches, beliefs and contradiction in rest of Labhana Society. However, we can refer Labhana as the part of Banjara Community although their language and culture seems different in their nature.

C] The Occupation: Past and Present

At the very beginning of their arrival in the region of India, the occupation of Labhana was concerned with tending cows and oxes. As many of the writers write that Labhana's ancestor was salt carrier. While supporting this view, we can consider that their salt trading might be develop because of their habitual occupation of tending cows. If we consider that forefathers of Labhana were salt trader, it mean that they were from Vaishy Class (vani), the class of trader. It is complete contradictory issue because the footsteps of their trading could not find anywhere. We can consider them Salt Carrier who used to load salt on the back of cows and oxen and transport in rest of India.

Although all writers mention about their salt trading or carrying in the discourse of past, but it was not their original occupation, it was only the source of their livelihoods. It was just adjustment with that time. If it is true that their ancestors were trader, so how Labhana people lives in poverty? How they seems backwards in every field of this age. The government of India considers Labhana as Nomadic tribe. It is absolutely correct because their ancestors had spent thousands of years in wandering in the forest. With the arrival of British in India, there were number of medium of transporting had developed. With the developing agenda of British, the salt carrying of Labhana had came to end. Right from that time again Labhana moved towards tending cows as the source of their living. Besides tending cows, in the later phase, they involved in farming. Before their settling in the village, they used to migrate from one place to another. Approximately in the last decade of 18 th century, Labhana were settled in the south part of India. Most of Labhana families had remained in the north India, some of them moved towards Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Their journey was started from Sindhu valley to Rajasthan, then Rajasthan to North India, they wandered the region like Punjab and Haryana where they came under the influence of Shikh Philosophy. Afterwards, they moved from North to South part of India.

Now, we find drastic changes in Labhana's life style, now they are developing themselves

as farmers. They are involving themselves into education. It is changing period among Labhana community where they have acknowledged the importance of education. Now they are shaping themselves as literate class but still thousands of Labhana's life is filled with darkness of illiteracy. Even in twenty first century they quite close with their traditional life style.

D] Tanda Culture and Administration

Labhana people might be settled in villages approximately in the first or second decades of 19th century. Their nomadic culture had come to end in the pre independence era. The entire Labhana community settled in the villages in that period. Particularly, where Labhana lives, that settlement is known as "Tanda", in the past, it was known as "Malhaan" or "Ladeni". The term implies the temporary settlement. Because they often shift from place to place in search of grazing land. Broadly Labhana lives in Tanda. The word Tanda mean "a group" or we can define it as "the group of nomadic people", who had the habit of migration in the past. The Tanda Culture of Labhana Community, it is very interesting topic for discussion. It gives rise to an independent conception of society. It gives importance to unity, brotherhood and the bond of friendships among the society who belonged to same culture, origin, history and tradition.

While offering our views on Tanda Culture of Labhana Community, we can refer the term "Tanda" in the broad sense. It encompasses all Gotras, all divisions and all Labhana people at one platform. It also known as "Basti". In this Tanda Culture, the title of "Nayak" is most respected and at the height in any particular villages. Actually this title comes hereditary.

"Nayak" works as the representative of his Tanda. He play a key role in any social gathering as the representative of all males. There are one, two or more Nayakas in the village as per the population of Labhana community in that particular village. Mostly in Labhana villages, we find that Nayak has appointed as the leading figure of the village. His wife is known as "Naakan". She acts as the leader of Labhana women. In Labhana's context, Nayak has to maintain all affairs at Tanda level. It may be social, cultural, and religious. He should have the ethical knowledge (nyaay -dharam). He has to overcome all the problems at the Tanda level. Also he should arrange social, cultural and religious festivals in the village. To attend all festivals with his villagers, to lead in "folk dance", to arrange meetings, these are the general responsibilities of Nayak. He is most respected in society. The invitations like "Sangat bhandara, Dashami, Pachami and other social gatherings" comes on his credit. He has to inform all villagers by Bhat or Pandharidaar (a messenger). Also the festivals like "Teej- tyohar, traditional folk dance and Ramnaav" hold at the house of Nayak. His house is known as the center of social activities. It means his house is to be open for all.

"Karbhaari" is one of honoured title in Labhana village. Works as the responsible person in Tanda Culture. But the title "Karbhaari" found rarely among Labhanas. However, he is known as a financial treasurer at Tanda level. In any occasions or celebrations at Tanda level, he works as the treasurer. To direct Nayak in his works is vital role of Karbhaari.

"Panch Lok" is the group of an experienced person from village who often directs and advises villagers and also Nayak if he is in any trouble. They have the right to stand against Nayak if he mislead to his villagers. These are the aged common people from all Gotras and divisions of Labhana community who helps Nayak occasionally to maintain all the affairs at his village. These people acts as the supportive body for Nayak in his works. To preserve their

cultural heritage and maintain peace and fraternity among the people are the chief motives of Nayak in his village. Panchlok along with Nayak solves different issues and problems which raises in society. Nayak always prefer to overcome clashes and quarrels at his level. Labhana used to follow this system from their origin. In brief, we see the root of democratic society is to be found in Labhana culture.

"Bhat "is one of the most crucial person in Labhana's Tanda Culture. We can define him as the preserver of Labhana's historical details in the form of folk songs. He preserves all the basic information about Labhana's gotras, families, sub divisions and their historical development right from the past. He is the wanderer in nature. He visits different Labhana villages at many occasions. Besides this job, he also works as the messenger of society, who passes all details at every Labhana villages. He often invites Labhana people for performing their folk dance on the particular festivals. He summons the villagers for Chyar ki Baithak (meeting) at the home of Nayak. Also he invites people for attending Labhana festivals and social gatherings. Basically he plays a vital role in marriage institutions of Labhana community. His wife is known as "Bhatan". Labhana people offers him the gift in the form of money, golden and silver jewelries and sometimes they offers him Cows and oxen for his devoted service for society.

"Pandharidaar" is also a decisive part of Tanda Culture. His works quite different than the Bhat. His works is concerned with a single village. He works as the attendant of Nayak in any particular village. He has to play "Nangara" (Labhana's musical instrument) at various occasions at the house of Nayak. Labhana also offers him jewelries and cows on the occasions like 'Byaah' (marriages ceremony), Baduaa and Jalhanaa. His wife is known as "Mochan ".

In short, Labhana's Tanda administrative system is based on the principles of cooperation and fraternity, it make them close to each other. It encompasses all the villagers as a single family. It keep them inter related and united at one place. It stands for Brotherhood and Unity. On the other part, although there is no clashes amongs Labhanas, but this long run administrative system seems quiet discriminatory in nature which indirectly promotes to classes, divisions or the sense of superiority and Inferiority among the society.

E] Labhana Language and Literature

Language is the powerful mean of communication. It is a sophisticated system of symbols. In case of language of Labhana, we can say "Labhanaki Boli" is a kind of dialect. It was originated from the "Indo- Aryan" language group. It is influenced by various Indian languages like Hindi, Gujraati, Marwadi, and Punjabi and so on. The hybrid form of Labhana language (Labhanaki Boli) shows their nomadic nature. Their journey right from their emergence greatly affected on Labhanaki Boli. Now it seems the mixture of different languages. But more intersting thing is that Banjara's Gorboli and Labhanaki Boli are quite different than each other. If they have belonged to same clans and origin but their languages are different. Each languages has its own identity. Labhana don't have their own Script, it is their tragedy and main obstacle in the way of writing about their folk literature.

Labhana community has very old and amiable tradition of Folk literature. Oral literature is one of the most significant reference of their culture and tradition. Their Language is a mixture of various languages like Gujarati, Marwari, Banjara (Gorboli), Hindi, Punjabi and

number of regional languages as per their migration. Labhana's folk literature consists various genres— like "Ramnaav, Kanhaai, Sabat -Saki, Ghor, Geet, Badhaaw, Bani, Chukhada, Aarati and Bhet- bakhaan." All these genres of their oral literature remained unknown for the rest of Indian society. Due to their illiteracy, they couldn't preserve it. "Bhet/ Bakhaan" is the finest sad poetry of Labhana women, decorated with more embellished language and filled with pain and sorrow of one's separation. It is elegiac in nature. It is the regretful song of Labhana Women. "Raamnaav" is the lyrical in the form. It is worshipping songs addressing deity like Lord Ram,

Krishna and Balaji. "Kanhaai" is the narrative in nature. It concern with war stories in the long narrative form. It is developed in dialogue form. Most of Kanhaai are based on "Allha Khand" (History of Rajput). "Ghor" is the kind of nature song. It glorify the beauty of nature. The Ghor songs addressed the beauty of the month of Shrawana. "Bani" are chiefly biographical in nature. It covers the life story of Labhana Saints. "Choukhada" is the satirical song like epigram. It is a short but ridiculous song in nature. We see these form of folk literature in this community.

Labhana people often try to preserve their folk songs by hand overing it from generation to generation. Most of the songs has been hand overed from their ancestors. They memories and recites these verses severely and keep them as the part of their memory. Especially, Labhana women with their creativity composes folk songs while working at the farm in the lap of nature or while working at house. Most of Ladies are illiterate but genuinely they composes various songs in the oral form. These folklores delights them while performing their folk dance. Occasionally, they dances and enjoys by forgetting their agonies and sorrows. Their festivals and songs are devoted to the beauty of Nature and holy Existence of God. They feels free, they lives free and often they hopes to be free forever. While dancing and singing, they seems completely devoted. Labhana men also tries to handover their occupational skills, heritage of folk literature and folk dance to upcoming young generation with the great desires of protecting their culture in this modern age.

F] Labhana Traditions and Festivals

India is the multicultural country. It has been attraction for the world from long time. Labhana community is also known for it's multifaceted traditions. Great ancestors of Labhana left behind so many traditions and rituals in this society that has been practiced and performed by Labhana people. We can't guess what was the purpose behind the hand overing of such traditions from one generation to generation. Thousands of the years passed and it may be passes continuously but Labhana society and their beliefs is quite remained as it is. The passing time couldn't affect their closeness with such wonderful traditions. Right from the emerging of Labhana culture till in the 21st century, this charming culture has been preserving by hundreds of Labhana generations. We can consider that how they used to imitate their great ancestors. It is habbitual instinct of this particular section who often hand overs their thoughts, their cultural identity, their folk literature, their ideology, ample of traditions and customs to upcoming generation. Labhana couldn't isolated themselves from these things even in this changing era. We can study their amiable life as following:-

I. Festivals: - The month of Shrawan is the most prosperous period for this community. The month of Shrawan implicits with the grace of nature that's why it is one of holy month according

to their beliefs. Doni ,Teej, Rakhi-punam, Gokulastami, Mohicha, Dashami, Pachami, Dashraw, Dipawali, Godhan Puja, Chatti-wagya, Ram Navami, Sangat Bhandara, Badhai, Jalhano, Holi Bhaibeej, Padawa are the most celebrated festivals in this community.

II. Food Habits: Their Food habits are influenced by various regional food cultures (as per their journey in the past). They prepare “Lapasi, Khir- roti, Ghewar, Puri- galwani, Puwa, Maalfuwa, Dasami, Zol-bhat, Khandi ko zol and so on”. In daily food they prefer Dal- Rice, Roti, Dasami and so on. Labhana are vegetarians and non vegetarians in their food habits. Some of them are the most pure and vegetarians. Especially, they prefer milk and the product which prepared from milk like Ghee and cheese in their everyday's food. Their food habits relate them with the regional culture of Gokul and Mathura. They are protector of cows by nature.

III. Traditional Dresses: - The traditional attire of Labhana men and women are very attractive. Labhana women wears Nati-Kachali, Ghagara, Sadi-Polaka, and Patola while men wears Dhoti, khameej, Shela, Paghadi, Zagalya- peti. Specially, Labhana women are known for their “Chunda Culture”, this is the custom which they follows as the memory of their maternal forefathers. They combs chunda on their head. Now we see drastic changes in their appearances.

IV. Traditional Jewelleries:- Labhana are the fond of traditional jewelleries like "Kathi, Dandakadi, Bakya, Chuda, Padi, Kanda, Beed, Khetala, Tikkhi Takwaal , Zaal, Maraki , Patyo etc. Their costume make them unique and most charming. In the past there was craze among Labhana community about their traditional attire. Now also in some part of Telangana, they prefer their traditional costume.

V. Folk Dance: - Labhana's folk dance is also attraction for other society. On the various occasions, they performs their traditional folk dance. Specially men performs “Dhiro- Dhiro” and women performs “Jayo- Jayo”. They uses musical instruments like “Nangara, Zangmanjeera, Dhol” while performing folk dance in traditional attire. It is like the ballad, a dancing song. They performs dance with the melodious music of Nangara.

VI. Worships and Devotion:- Labhana People worships Lord Krishna as holy deity of their tribe. Besides this, they worships Lord Balaji and Lord Jagannath as incarnate of Lord Krishna. The ideology of Shikh Gurus is greatly impacted on Labhana. They severely visit the holy pilgrimages like Kartaarpur, Amritasar, Nanded sahib, Maa Jwala Devi Temple, Tirupati, and Jagannath Puri. Also they worships the deity like Maa Jwalamukhi, Maa Jagdamba, Maa Tulaja , their Holy Saties, Mahammai, Lord Khandoba, and Lord Shiva .

VII. Labhana Gurus: - Labhana people have the great influences of their holy Gurus .The Labhana saint tradition is quite old. There are two sects in society i.e. Saint Kalubaba bhakti parmpara and Gurusahib bhakti parampara. Labhana worships Saint Kalubav and all his great pupils as the holy guru of entire society. This sect is devoted to “Maa Jwalamukhi devi” (Maa Durga). Mahant Fatesing ji maharaj and his holy six pupils are belonged to the latter sect i.e. "Gurusahib Bhakti Parmpara". This sect is fully devoted to Shikh Guru Nanak dev and his philosophy. In short, , they are fond of arts like- an art of embroidery (bharaw), tattoo (gondano) and crocheting of sackcloth (Goni). On the religious occasions, Labhana often like to play "Choupat" (Shataranj). Labhana community has a charming tradition.

G] Conclusion

Labhana Community and its nomadic lifestyle should preserve by new generations is the intense desire of the whole community. It is tragedy of this particular community who don't have more place in History. Who don't have significant references about their historical background in last several centuries. Who don't have their own script. They are out of the stream of development. We see the references how British Government tried to uproot their nomadic culture by declaring them as Criminal tribes. Fortunately, Mother India has accepted them as her own children as son of soil, as son of forest. They are at the bottom of Education, Politics, Literature and all other fields. Their Culture, Language, Customs, Traditions and all cultural heritages come to an end. The young generation of Labhana community have little interest in developing or preserving their culture. A couple of Labhana' s families are well- settled but the entire Labhana families lives in grief of poverty, illiteracy, in search of earning sources and blind beliefs. They completely settled in the villages, indirectly became isolated from their old occupation and wild culture. Labhana parents are unable to send their daughter for learning due to their financial condition. Mostly their settlement is found near the forest area, chiefly near the meadow. Now also few families rear cows as the part of traditions. A huge number of Labhana families moved towards farming and other occupations. Their nomadic culture is come to an end with the passing of time. Also their dialects and folk songs counts the last breaths of existence. Time will spoil their identity in upcoming years. They are untouched in literature. However, in this present scenario, we find tremendous changes in Labhana community. Literacy constantly increased among Labhanas. Gradually Labhana people began to promote their community for higher education. Most of educated people tries to motivate their race on their parts. It shows their great desire for social changes. It is the social, cultural and intellectual uplifting of this tribe.

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