

Patron-Musicians: A Socio- Imperialism In Sikkim

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Abstract: *Patrons – Musicians’ relations has been discussed in a variety of context over the years in different disciplines. There are a wide range of study on patrons- musicians’ relations in Sikkim. The studies dwell on economic interaction with music between upper caste and the lower caste. In Sikkim there are mainly three musicians caste the Damai, the Badi and Gaine who directly or indirectly provide auspicious music to other castes. However, these auspicious music makers are untouchable from whom the food and water may not be accepted. The musician caste Damai are the musicians cum tailor with whom traditional way of patronage is still alive in the countryside. This study oriented on the social and traditional way of patronage among the Dalit Caste the Damai Musicians. This study is important to understand the social interaction and social transformation of Damai musician in Sikkim. Researcher visited to the remote village of Dalits in Sikkim and study the distinct culture of musician and the way of patronage. After the peasantry become weak and the influence of modern music become strong, the loop of traditional way of patronage become feeble. Because of urbanism and modern influence in music, Damai musicians change the traditional way of patronize and become the professional. The instruments like Damaha, Temko, Sahanai, Narsingha and Jhyali they only used to play for the patrons’ in all rituals accordingly in traditional way but after the education empowerment, and the caste system and untouchable means is in declining position, the Damai musicians get more opportunity to spread away. Thus, the so-called impure caste is surviving by means of music in modern ways of patronage. The lifestyle in which they are still living in remote countryside is below than the average and they are suffering from hand to mouth. Dalits or untouchable caste, from whom water may not be accepted but, plays auspicious and pure music in most of the Hindu religious festival and rituals. The orthodox society and the musician caste are still in loop, however the way of patronizing is changing, and the relation between the patron castes and the musician caste is still surviving because of auspicious and pure music among the impurity.*

Keywords: *Auspicious, Awareness, Brahmins- Chhetri, Panche Baja, Bali- Bista Pratha, Religious and Rituals, Sikkim*

1. INTRODUCTION

The relation between patrons and musicians has been discussed in a verity of context over the year in different aspects of social life relating with the sociology and economic. There are wide of studies on patron-client relation (*Balighar Bista Pratha*) or the traditional way of patronage in harvest crops between artist castes and non-castes or others. The study dwell on economic interaction between artist castes and other castes people. Among the huge racial diversity, there are mainly five occupational castes in hilly region of Sikkim such as Black Smiths (Kami), Cobbler (Sarki), Gaine (singer), Badi (prostitute) and Tailor cum Musician (*Damai*). These groups have some sort of contractual agreement with their clients

for services. There are few studies on Hindu low caste groups in Sikkim especially relating to Patron-client relationship between these musician castes. An untouchable caste *Damai*, *Gaine* and *Badi* are the traditional musicians' castes performing and practicing auspicious music among the castes or the non-castes. These so-called Dalits (untouchable) musicians or artists group are very essential in most social and ritual activities. This study is basically oriented on the social and traditional way of patronage among the Dalit Cast –the *Damai* Musicians. The study is important to understand the social interaction and social transformation of *Damai* musician in Sikkim.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of *Damai* within the traditional patronage system *Balighar Bista Pratha* which is simultaneous an economic organization and an articulation of ritual relationship between castes. Within this economic framework, Cash payment normally does not feature, but service rendered over the year are remunerated in kind, in crops and grain after each harvest, and traditional ritual gifts given on specific occasions. There are no any research conducted in such a way to study the socio-imperialism among the Musician caste and the other Castes in Sikkim. Musical Perspective and rituals and religious aspect of the traditional musician is supposed to the auspicious part of social life in Sikkim but not well recognize by the research area. Few of the study covering their economical aspect, untouchability and social discrimination are well studied. International Researcher *Carol Tingey* has studies similar pattern of research in Western Nepal. *Ramsharan Darnal, Mandira, Ghosh, Sushil Kumar Naidu* and research himself had done few research relating to the music and musical perspective of Sikkim.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted to confine this research was field study and the survey method. Data were collected from the various source of questionnaire and interview of the various local resident of the Sikkim during field Visit. Other sources of data were retained from books, research papers, journals and articles in various e-resources. The research site lies in the *Barthangand Geyzing of West-Sikkim, Pandam, Jorthang and Namche-Ravangla of South Sikkim and Pakyong, Ranipool, Rumtek, Burtuk* area of *East Sikkim* and few area of *Gangtok*. In *Rumtek*, around 34 Household of *Damai* musician caste lives in the village of slope landscape settlement of mostly *Bahun* and *Chetri* dominant population. The *Dalit Damai* populations mostly live in between the community of so-called high castes and other non-castes to assist them in various purposes. The main occupation of *Damai* is sewing clothes. Before the factory made clothes were in used the *Damai* used to stitch new clothes as well as repair old ones of their *Bista* (patrons). Among the *Dalits, Damais* are the largest community performs and practice music in traditional patronage system (*Balighar Bista Pratha*)

Caste Musician of Sikkim

When peasantry becomes fragile and weak, patrons-client ties also become weak. The influence of modern music and musical instruments, Radio, T.V and other forms of audio and video record displace the locally made instruments and traditional way of musical performance. In the past, *Damai* used to stitch clothes along with musical performance in rituals and other forms of traditional celebration and ceremony. The *Badi* used to make musical instruments such as *Madal, Khaijadi, Sahanai, Temko, Damaha, Dholaki* and other folk instruments for the musician castes or others clients. The *Gaine* are traditionally a singer caste used to sing from one house to other visiting different places. These caste people plays traditional three string wooden instrument called *Sarangi*, which is very different from

classical string instrument *Sarangi*. These musician castes have been making their livelihood through music making for patrons. However, social contour of the village are becoming blurred, its population has acquired a shifting character and lineages and families has become greatly dispersed.

There are many effects of modernization and economic liberalization upon *Dalits* and artisan caste in Sikkim. Some of these musician castes completely displaced from their traditional occupation due to the modernization. No *Gaine* can be heard singing by the house in community-spreading message of social awareness and other humor and satire of social behavior. The social messenger used to sing for patrons visiting one place to another place playing with *Sarangi* in soft and sweet melodic voice. The *Damai* musicians used to play musical melodies in almost all rituals and ceremony and occasions of higher castes or non-castes. The auspicious music maker are always in deprive and inferior social conjunction. These musician caste accepts 'Bali' (harvest grain), the traditional system of rewards. The Bali can be grains, wheat, maize, potato, uncooked rice or any crops that patrons harvest. The patronage can be either in cash or some textile gift in some especial ceremony and ritual. The *Damai* musician accepts Bali throughout the year counting the head of the patron's family.

Panch-Baja: a Message of Auspiciousness

The *Damai* plays *Panche Baja* and *Naumati Baja* in almost Hindu rituals of so-called upper castes like *Bahun* as local tongue (*Brahman* in Sanskrit), *Chettri* colloquial words to *Kshitriya* and others non-castes. The jumbo musical instrument group, *Baja* consist of five instruments such as *Damaha*, *Temko*, *Jhyali*, *Narsingha* and *Sahanai*. The combination of five different instruments called *Panche Baja* in Nepali language widely spoken in Sikkim. These instruments are either Aero-phones or Membrano-phones made of metal or wood covered with leather of goat or bull. *Naumati Baja* is also the same as *Panche Baja* but play by the nine members' artists. These traditional instruments have been playing for auspiciousness in dominant festivals and ritual of Hindu religion. Besides playing *Panche Baja* and *Naumati Baja* *Damai* also plays modern instrument of western influence called *Band Baja*, such instruments are Saxophone, Trumpet, French horn, Trombone, Tuba and Drums.

Today, almost the hills-dwellers, the *Balighar Bista Pratha* still embrace the occupational castes of *Damai*, *Kami*, *Sarki*, *Badi* and *Gaine*, although in many parts of Sikkim and North Bengal. The last group have virtually lost their traditional occupation of tanning and shoe-making, due to the influx of cheap ready-made shoes and sandals from china and India. *Damai*, *Gaine* and *Badi* too have their work taken from them by imported music and musical instruments. Consequently, they have lost their patrons and rely on cash payments for seasonal agriculture work. The relationship between caste status and occupation is by no means absolute, however, many members of the occupational castes working in capacities other than those traditionally designed for their caste, and majority of artisans improving their incomes with supplementary work such as puttering, farm laboring and other non-caste related activities. As the Hindu castes interacted with indigenous hill-dwelling peoples, the latter become absorbed into the middle rungs of the *Indo-Sikkimese* caste hierarchy, but these groups were never associated with any particular occupation means of livelihood.

There are important rituals obligations inherent in the system, including the playing of music, and central to the ritual interrelationship between castes are the Hindu beliefs concerning purity, pollution, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. An examination of ritual aspects of these patronage systems may help to explain the anomaly of how the music of an untouchable group can be propitious and indispensable to society. The other form of traditional patronage system or the privilege performance of the domestic rituals are Priest,

Barber, Bari etc. clearly the patronage systems embrace both economic activities and ritual duties performed on behalf of the patron.

Within the patron-musician caste has a ritual specialism to provide auspicious and blessing for all the religious obligations of his patron. In their capacity as musicians, *Damai* provide auspicious *Panche Baja* or *Naumati Baja* for the life-cycle rites of *Chhathi* (sixth day of child birth), *Nawaran* (11th day naming of newly born baby), *Pasni* (rice feeding) generally in sixth month of child born, *Chewar* (tonsure ceremony), *Upanayan* (sacred thread investiture ceremony) and Marriage ceremony. No musical procession for funeral or death in *Sikkimese* high caste community, *Shankha*, a traditional sacred instrument, blow by the person within the same community at the time of funeral procession with a spiritual thought of evils and devils by hearing the loud sound of *Shankha* and the divine soul proceed to heaven without any hindrance. In Sikkim, previous day of marriage, what they called *Purbangha*, the family tailor cum musician *Damai* plays *Panche Baja* or *Naumati Baja* or newly introduces Western *Band Baja* that means auspiciousness for the next day marriage. Generally, this type of musical performance is in groom side a day before marriage ceremony. As a tailor, the *Damai* also have the duty to sew new clothes for baby, youth, bride and groom of the patrons' families at the life-cycle rites of Name giving, rice feeding, Haircutting, *Upanayan*, Marriage as well as in 13th day of death purification and one-year purification of death anniversary called '*Barkhi*'.

Socio- Economical Status

Their activities as musicians and tailors place the *Damai* in both economic and rituals categories of functionary. *Damai* receive various types of prestige, some of which are payments in cash for services and other are ritually significant gifts, given to them in specific ritual contexts. Thus prestige are, crops harvest, *Bhag*(share), *Bhog*, *Dehadi*(wages), *Prasad*, *Bheti*, *Sagun* and other financial reward.

Patron- client relation is an old socio-economic institution, which has undergone several changes over the years. The musician castes are tied up with *Brahmans* and *Chettris* and other non-castes in *Balighar Bista Pratha* where these occupational castes provide services and get the wages in crops harvest (*Bali*) on annual basis. Family size and number of garments to be stitched and repair throughout the year is the basic criterion for fixing *Bali*. Playing music in many auspicious rites does not measure the *Bali* system but the harvest and other economic reward are the parts of *Balighar Bista Pratha*. The musicians other than the cast musicians are also patronage by the high-class society but this tend does not have existence in villages. In the city, highly sophisticated families organize musical concerts at their home or at any other venue. Its great privilege of musician and singer to perform at the concert organized by such highly sophisticated persons and get rewards. Classic form of music is performed in such homely concerts other than folk and modern music. Concerts other than classical music are also organized in different venue in special occasion, festival or any ritual ceremony in order to celebrate the function more enjoyably. The concerts may be of either folk patterns or modern patterns like pop, jazz etc. Generally, classic patterns are not the part of concert in Sikkim in such ceremony.

Patronage of music by means of audio video records publishing, solo concerts, television, internet web and radio broadcasting of music and song are the modern forms of patron-musician relation. This type of patronage is totally depending upon the market value of the musician or singer, struggling artist may suffer for the sponsorship. But, in the parochial village life if *Dalits* in Sikkim, the *Damai*, forever musician have an important role to play in social dynamics as a prestige enhancer' quite apart from their rituals functions and economic contribution.

In the Sikkim foothills, the main two castes who provide rituals services for Hindus are Brahmin priests and *Damai* musicians. The music provide by the *Damai* musician is auspicious even the caste is so-called impure. Thus, the condition impure and auspicious are mutually exclusive, appearing in combination in connection with events such as birth, inherent in such as *Panche Baja* and *Naumati Baja* instrument in substance such as menstrual blood, and in certain categories of people, including the *Damai* musician.

Open economic and political system provides opportunities to the musician caste people to come out from their traditional occupation. To some content, social transformation can be seen as reflection of development procedure combined with declining traditional occupation, population growth in the village and for work elsewhere. Patron-client relationship between the musician caste and other castes is decaling because of low pay system in a traditional *Balighar* system. These musician castes are now changing their profession, not exactly out of music but the mood of performance and professionalism. To survive, it is very hard for them in a traditional way of patronage so they migrated to the town and established musical band with some of the musicians of their own community. The local musicians of *Pandam district* are migrated to *Rangpo*, *Singtham*, the local town, or *Gangtok*, and perform musical intervention and charge in cash for all the musical performance according to the structure of the program or ritual ceremony. The *Damai* bands not only play traditional musical tunes but also play modern music. *Damais* musicians directly appreciate the influence of modern music by playing western instruments and melodies. The *Damai* music band performs according to the patrons' choice. They play whatever patron demand. In marriage ceremony and other rituals music of Bollywood films, music of Nepali films and other modern music patterns has been playing and this type of musical tunes are highly appreciated by the listener other than the traditional form of music. At present, the meaning of auspicious or pure is changing and the musical performance in any ritual activities are just for entertainment.

4. CONCLUSION

The deprived musician caste has been underestimated for a long back but, the scenario is changing and tailor cum musician *Damai* establishing themselves as a professional musician and providing auspicious music in ritual and occasional ceremony. The financial payment is made with mutual understanding by the both patrons and musicians, but not in traditional way of *Balighar Bista Pratha*. Individualism is becoming prominent and is signified by the growth of deregulation, the dispersal of collective solidarities and the exposure of individual to the force of the patron. With the growth of market, road network, urbanism along with music production and broadcasting companies and production house, new possibilities of music making and creation emerge as a subject. The opportunities and social inclusion at various levels improve the economical condition of musicians. Different ideas and perspectives contest to each other in the village and help to open new space for patron- musician relation in Sikkim and North Bengal.

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