



Brahmin Sasan Villages Around Puri

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Brahmins are held high in the caste system of Hindu society. They are inevitable in the priesthood of temples. Purusottamakshetra, Puri being a socio - religious and cultural centre is dotted with a number of temples of various sects with the paramount presiding deity Lord Jagannath. He combines in Him the presiding deities of all ages Satya, Tretaya, Dwapara and Kali as Nrushingha, Ram, Krishna, and Buddha respectively. Thus a wide network of Brahmins is a fundamental requisite of the worship of the lord from all Bedas and Gotras.

The legendary account of Brahmin settlement around Puri says that at the consecration of the Great Temple in 1230 A.D. by Sri Anangabhim Dev III, elite Brahmins were brought from Kanyakubja or Ujjain, bestowed them with land and other endowments for living a dignified life and dedicated to ritualistic responsibility. Six categories of duties were assigned to them - study, teaching, performing, Jagna and help in organizing Jagna, donate and to receive the donation (Adhyayana, Adhyapana, Jajana, Jaajana, Dana and Pratigraha).

Consecrations of such a Great Temple or Pratistha presuppose deployment of various categories of Brahmins for performing specific ritualistic duties in Jagna. Sixteen such Brahmins as prescribed in scripture are required for a Jagna

like Acharya, Brahma, and Charu etc. A splendid Jagna was performed in the Jagannatha temple, which is testified by the existence of Muktimandapa or the platform for salvation at the southern side of the main temple.

It has sixteen black granite pillars meant for Brahmins of Sasan villages established by Hindu king with various privileges and facilities and rent free land grants i.e. Niscara.

When the British took over the province, all persons claiming to hold properties Lakhiraj or free of payment of revenue were invited to resister their claims in the office of the collector for a settlement under the Resumption Regulation XII of 1805. Sasan villages formed an interesting feature of Puri land revenue system. These villages have been inhabited by group of Brahmins from the west who were brought to Orissa and continued to hold the villages at a Tanki or Token rent on Sanad of Raja of Khurdha or the Marathas.

Sasan villages of Brahmin settlement are also found in Jajpur, around Bhadrak, Cuttack District and in Puri District in Praganas of Lembai, Sirai, Chabisikud and Rahang. Such Sasans have been officially recognized at the last settlement. The keeper of title deed and rent receipts of Sasan villages is known as the Panigrahi (p.214-Final Report Survey and Settlement). The Sasan



Brahmins look upon themselves as proprietors rather than tenants. They are described as Lakhiraj Das. They can sale the whole or part of their property, can plant trees, build houses and exercise all ordinary proprietary rights excepting division of rent or liability.

Compensation for acquisition of land for public purposes is to be paid only to the Bajyaptidar or Lakhirajdar but not to the Zamindars. A sasan village is originally the autonomous community with revenue, judiciary and police power. No government official, unless specifically ordered by government can exercise any power in a sasan village. Each such village has a 'kotha' comparable to a Trust Board and "Mahajan Mela" comparable to Gramasabha of the modern community development theory.

The temple of Lord Jagannath is a seat of Brahminical culture. The same has been institutionalized as 'Mukti Mandapa'. In 1952 AD Govt. appointed a special officer to probe into the right of the person and institutions connected with the Great Temple. He has enlisted 24 sasan villages as given below viz;

1. Bira Harekrishnapur, 2. Bira Pratapur,
3. Bira Kishorepur, 4. Bira Ramachandrapur,
5. Bira Balabhadrapur, 6. Bira Narasinghapur,
7. Bira Govindapur, 8. Bira Purusottampur,
9. Sri Ramchandrapur, 10. Sri Mukundapur,
11. Sri Purusottampur, 12. Pratap Purusottampur,
13. Bishwanathapur, 14. Biswanathpur Samil Nuagaon,
15. Gopinathapur, 16. Damodarpur,
17. Kashijagannathapur, 18. Rai Chakradharapur,
19. Jagannatha Bidyadharapur, 20. Gokulpur,
21. Basudevpur, 22. Patajoshiapur, 23. Raigurupur and 24. Srikia Birakesharipur.

Subsequently the Brahmins of Lalitapatapur, Someswarapur, Kapileswarpur,

Pratap Ramachandrapur, Bijaya Ramachandrapur, Abhoyamukhi - Ramchandrapur and Kanhei Bidyadharapur were allowed to sit in the Muktimandap Brahmin Sabha.

Sankaracharya of Gobardhan math is the permanent president of Muktimandap. He is entitled to sit on Muktimandap on Asan or floormat which is not allowed to any other person. Ramachandra Dev, the first king of Bhoi Dynasty installed as Raja of Khurda is said to have renovated the Muktimandap with 16 pillars. He recognized 16 Brahmin villages out of which 4 were set by his predecessor Gobinda Dev who set up Biragobindapur in 2 parts or khandis. His son Managobinda Pratapa Dev called Chakra Pratap has founded Birapratappur in two segments or khandis. These khandis were treated as Sasanas. Rest 12 Sasanas founded by Ramachandra Dev are Bira Ramchandrapur 4 Sasans or khandis, Sri Ramachandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis, Pratap Ramachandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis, Bijaya Ramachandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis, Pratap Ramchandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis, Bijaya Ramachandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis or Ubhayamukhi Ramachandrapur 2 Sasans or khandis. Any village beginning with Sri or Bira is a Sasana village set up by Kings of Bhoi dynasty. Birapursottampur and Sri Purusottampur were set up by Purusottam Dev, son of Ramachandra Dev, Biranarasinghapur by Narasingha Dev son of Purusottam Dev, Bira Balabhadrapur by Balabhadra Dev, the successor of Narasingha Dev. The last Sasana near Puri is Biraharekrishnapur set up by Harekrishna Dev.

Some Sasan villages set up by queens, ministers etc. are differently named. The list of such villages has been furnished by Pandit Nilakantha Das as follows : 1. Jagannatha Bidyadharapur, 2. Basudevpur, 3. Sasan



Damodarapur, 4. Routarapur or Gopinathapur, 5. Raichakradharapur, 6. Someswarapur, 7. Biswanathapur, 8. Chandanpur.

From an inscription available from village Alagum near Sakhigopal reveal that a Brahmin from the Kadambara village of Chola country belonging to Kashyap Gotra was residing in that village. Though this village is not within the Sasan villages entitled to sit on the Muktimandap, but it was a Brahmin settlement established in the first part of the 12th century. History reveals that Bedadhyai Brahmins were brought from different regions particularly Madhya Pradesh, Srabasti, Pundrabardhan and Hastipada etc. during the time of Soma, Bhoma, Ganga and other Gajapati kings of Orissa. Such regions are towards East and North to Orissa. During the 12th century Gangas from South India annexed Orissa or Kangoda Mandal to their Dominion. The religious preacher Ramanuja propagated His Visistadwaita philosophy and established Baishnavite Monasteries. Thus Puri and periphery Sasana villages became a confluence of Eastern, Western and Sourthen culture which culminated in the establishment of the Great Temple of 'Purusottam Sri Jagannath'. Sasan Brahmins being patronised and honoured by royal power produced monumental work on literature like 'Sahitya Darpana' of Biswanatha Kabiraj and books on 'Sruti', 'Dharma Sastra' and 'Grammar'.

After the death of last independent Hindu king Mukundadev as his successors were thoroughly useless, anarchy prevailed for some years till Raja Mansingh installed Ramachandra Dev of Bhoi Dynasty on Khurda throne. He being a king of valour and foresight patronized culture and religion. His first Brahmin Sasan village was Sriramchandrapur. It was donated to a Brahmin of Kausika Gotra of Dasa Bansa. Pandit Nilakantha Dash and Acharya Harihara Dash,

two illustrious personalities of Orissa took birth under the Kausik Gotra in that village.

Besides Sasan villages established by kings by issue of Sanand, there are some other Brahmin villages known as 'Karabada'. Those are periphery villages around Sasans. Literally the word Karabada means site-fencing, 'Kara' is Site and 'Bada' is fencing. Thus such villages used to serve the periphery Sasan villages. Business activities use to be taken up in such villages. The people say that there are sixteen Sasans and 32 Karabadas. Raichakradharapur, Bhanpur, Ganeswarapur, Markandpur, Padusipur etc. are Karabada villages. Batchhasa, Kashyapa gotri Nanda, Bhatta Mishra and Goutamatreya are four categories of Samantas taken as the Rajguru of Gajapati kings. In the early days Samanta Trai or the three categories of Samanta were Batchhasa, Nanda and Bhatta. Subsequently Goutamatreya category of Kausika Gotra were added. The Karabada Brahmins also used to attend the Pushyabhiseka and Solasasan Bhoga. But they are not allowed to sit on the Muktimandap.

Almost all Sasan village follow a uniform pattern of religious practices. The orientation of villages is in most of cases East-West and in some cases North-South with houses parallel arranged facing each other. Invariably Lord Siva and Gopinatha are placed in two extremities of the habitation and Grama Devati somewhere in one or either side.

The main festival of the Sasan villages are Sitala Sasthi i.e. the marriage ceremony of Lord Siva during May-June and the Champaka Dwadasi and the marriage ceremony of Lord Gopinatha. Besides Dola Yatra, Durga Puja, Gamha Purnima, Bijaya Chaturdasi, Ashokastami, Jaulei Panchami, Rekha Panchami, Chitalagi etc. are observed in the villages throughout the year with utmost religious sanctity. On the day of



Gamhapurnami all the elderly persons of Kotha congregate and decide about the traditional share of the family called 'Pali' and 'Hakara' and resolve important problems of the Sasan villages. The 'Bali' tradition or animal sacrifice still continues in many Sasan villages before the Village Goddess 'Gramadevati' during Durga Puja. Fire work or Bana are also associated with the festivities.

All Sasana villages are integrated in the Jagannath Temple culture in ritualistic way. On Pushyabhiseka or Dehabhiseka day occurring on fullmoon day of 'Pausa' month or January, representatives of Sasan villages use to bless the Gajapati king and worship Lord Jagannath. And on 'Sunia' day occurring in Bhadraba i.e. September, Sasan Brahmins use to congregate in the palace of the Gajapati king during the celebration of commencement of the new Regnal Year. During sixteen days of Durga Puja the Sasan Brahmins are associated with worshipping of Goddess Bimala and other local Goddesses. On Rukmini Bibaha or the Marriage ceremony of Lord Sri Krishna or Sri Jagannath, Sasan Brahmins are also invited. On the 7th day of the dark fortnight of 'Karttika' month i.e. November,

Sola Sasana Bhoga or a grand offering of Mahaprasada to Lord Jagannath is held in which almost Brahmins from every Sasan village take part.

Due to introduction of progressive Land Reform, the land link services of the Brahmins has been disrupted resulting in social and religious disintegration. Withdrawal of royal patronage and social recognition has affected the Brahmin society considerably. Most of the educated young men of Sasan villages have left the villages for jobs elsewhere. In the pre-Independence, many Brahmin families left their original villages and settled in ex-Princely States being invited by the Rajas of those States. In general the number of traditional Brahmins of Sasan villages have substantially reduced, but the ritual pattern still continues thereby indicating their historical significance.

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Gobardhan Matha, Puri