

Culture, Identity and Livelihood: An Ethnographic Study of Devipujak Community of Gujarat

Abstract

Devipujak community is one of the denotified tribes of Gujarat. There are different stories about origin of the community both oral and documents. The wide prevailing myth about origin of Devipujak community is that they are created by goddess through enchantment to wake up goddess Adya Shakti from deep sleep to kill demon Amariyo Dutt. Enthoven noted that this tribe is originated from Bagri tribe who was belonging to Bagar region of old United Province. Some of the writers mentioned that they came from Caucasus Mountains situated between South Russia and Central Asia to Central and Western part of India with purpose to gain food and water for their livestock. It can be said that their existence is since ages. Devipujak community was earlier known as '*Vaghri*' which was later replaced with name Devipujak by Gujarat government through resolution SSP- 112001- Mn.148-A passed in year 2001. The other communities were using the word *Vaghri* very disrespectfully in sense of inhuman and wild. It was passed for using word Devipujak in official record. The meaning of word Devipujak is worshipper of goddess.

An ethnography method was adopted to understand various aspects pertaining to life of Devipujak community. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research study are based on Subjective Constructionist Interpretivist approach to understand existing reality of Devipujak people considering their views and perceptions. It does not believe in one reality and argues that reality differs in context. I was knowing Devipujak community since childhood as they were often visiting my home to collect old clothes and were giving us utensils in return. My family members were having good relations with them as they were visiting us at least four to five times in a year. Though I was aware about the community but was not having any knowledge about what is ex-criminal or denotified tribes. It was while pursuing master degree I became aware about the concept of ex-criminal and denotified tribes and historical injustice they have suffered by colonial government as well as society in general. I wanted to know more about this community which led me to formulated certain questions for them which are mentioned below.

1. What is social history of Devipujak community?
2. What were traditional occupations of Devipujak community and how changes have occurred in their traditional occupations over the period of time?
3. What is present socio-economic condition of Devipujaks?
4. How social organization influences life of Devipujak community?
5. What is identity of the Devipujak community for self and views for other communities as well as the perspectives of other communities towards them?

These questions led to formulate specific objectives to get answer of them. I stayed with Devipujak community for long time as a part of ethnographic field work. It contributed to enrich my understanding regarding Devipujak community with lenses of their own views towards reality of their life. I used to go almost everyday to meet them and was trying to participate in different occasions of their life to gain deeper understanding of the community. The thesis has been divided into eight chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1 Introduction
- Chapter 2 Research Methodology: Experience and Challenges of Field Work
- Chapter 3 Devipujak: Social History and Mythology
- Chapter 4 Devipujak: Tradition, Belief and Culture
- Chapter 5 Livelihood and Migration among Devipujak Community
- Chapter 6 Influence and Role of Social Panch in Devipujak Community
- Chapter 7 Devipujak: Understanding Perspective and Social Discrimination
- Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter 1 discuss about background of nomadic and denotified tribes, Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, Habitual Offender Act of 1952, Thuggee and criminalization of tribes, colonial approach towards criminal tribes, ground reality of implementation of CTA, various committees and commission established for NTDNTs, rationale to conduct study on Devipujak community. The Chapter 2 talks about research methodology including ethnography as a

method of study, research paradigm, research questions and objectives, experiences and challenges of field work, selecting particular field site, methods of data collection and ethical consideration. The chapter 3 deals with social history of Devipujak community, their origin, sub-castes among Devipujaks, historical background of Kumarkhaniya Devipujak. In chapter 4, the traditional practices of Devipujak community, their belief system and various rituals and cultural aspects are mentioned. The chapter 5 deals with traditional livelihood, adoption of new means of livelihood, migrations among the community and their way of living in cities. The chapter 6 talks about role and function of social panch in life of Devipujak community, its influence in decision making about community issues, its importance to deliver justice and details about two attended gatherings of social panch during field work. The chapter 7 deals with perspectives of Devipujak towards them, how they look towards other caste, their relations with other caste, social discrimination, illegal occupations and police atrocities. The chapter 8 deals with discussion and concluding observations as well as suggestive roadmap for welfare of Devipujak community.