

Case Study - Madhesi Dalit

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Case on Madhesi Dalit Problems

The Dusadhs of Jhinjha

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The Dusadhs of Jhinjha — A humanitarian problem
(*“Jhinjhaka Dusadhharu — Ek Manaviya Samasya”*)

Jhinjha is a small village located in the eastern part of Dhanusha district in the Janakpur zone. It takes about forty-five minutes to reach the village from the Mahinachpur station of Jayanagar-Janakpur railway, and fifteen minutes from the Khajuri station on foot.

The majority of the inhabitants of Jhinja village belong to the Dushadh community. Most of the Dushadhs have taken to theft and dacoity as their main occupation. In fact, they are the ring-leaders of the thieves and dacoits operating in the Mausai, Bel[...], Lohani, and Belagopalpur areas of the Darbhanga and Madhubani Districts of Bihar in India. That is why there is hardly anyone in the eastern Tarai who has not heard of Jhinja village.

Jhinja village has a population of between 2,000 and 3,000, comprising 318 families, of whom 208 belong to Dusadhs. The rest belong to the Muslim, Dhanak, Chamar, Bona-Berahi, Teli, and Hajim communities. Except the Muslims, who comprise about fifteen families, the others are Hindus. A Dusadh wears a necklace of beads (Kantha) if he wishes to give as theft or dacoity as his occupation through a pledge made in public. [Kantha]-wearing Dusadhs do not eat meat, and are called Dasas. Others belonging to the Dusadh community are called Paswans.

Only twenty-five percent of the Dusadhs are literate. Only one Dusadh has so far passed the intermediate examination in arts, and he is the most educated among Dusadhs. Only two Dusadhs have passed the S.L.C. examination.

Dusadhs have always been notorious as thieves and dacoits. Actually, theft and dacoity are their main occupations. Very few Dusadhs seem to have taken agriculture as their main occupation. The 208 Dusadh families of Jhinjha own a total of only fifty bighas of land. The largest holding of a Dusadh hardly exceeds six bighas. There are also Dusadhs who own not more than two katthas of land each.

The Dusadh of Jhinjha village maintain that they have been expelled to take to theft and dacoity because they have no lands for cultivation. It is not known how far the claim is true. But it is true that the Dusadhs of Jhinjha village are notorious as thieves, and dacoits. They say they have been doing so far the past two or three centuries. Some Dusadh families have been following this occupation for three to four generations. The Dusadhs of Jhinjha blame the Rana regime for having compelled them to follow such an occupation for generations. According to them, local officials during the Rana regime

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used to detain and torture the Dusadhs of Jhinjha village whenever [...] thy crime was committed nearby village. Even children were arrested and tortured, they allage. According to them, it was because of such exceeds that they took to theft and dacoity.

During the seventh and ninth day (Saptari and Navami) of the dark [forthing] of every month, Dushadhs think of nothing but theft and dacoity. They assemble groups of five or ten persuns as soon as the dark fortnight begins, in a meadow lacated near a big pond to the north of Jhinjhi village. Those who wish to bathe in the pond do so. Later, they hold discussions and decide on the place of the proposed crimes. They also discuss how to help the families of persons who are apprehended or killed while doing so. Members of their families arrive at the venue of the discussions with liquor and some foodstuffs. The liquor is prepared from palm juice. After relaxing for a few heurs, the gang leave for their respective assignments.

According to the Dusadhs engaged in theft and decoity, their area of operations is situated only across the international border. They claim that they never commit any crime inside the territory of the Kingdom of Nepal, and that they go to Assam, Manipur, or even to Licknow and New Delhi, to carry out their assignments. The claim that the Dusadhs have never operated inside Nepali territory lacks credibility, inasmuchas the inhabitants of Jhinjha themselves have admitted that as they as forty Dusadhs have been imprisoned in Nepal Jails on the charge of having committed different crimes, whereas only fifteen Dusadhs are in Jail in the Madhubani and Darbhanga jails in India.

Persons who are engaged in dacoity borrow money from money-lenders to meet their traveling expenses, as well as their maitanance expenses of their families during their absences. The money-lenders, particularly those residing at Khajuri, Thadi, Mahuwa, and Jayanagar, provide loans to them at [exorblent] rates of interest, usually 25 percent, on the ground of risk. No bond is executed at the time of advancing loans, nor is any member of the family of any dacoity recruited to repay it in the event of the latter being killed, or being released after inrpisonment. This si the reason why the money-lenders consider it risky to provide loans to dacoits, and agree to do so only after charging interest at the percent.

The same money-lenders also buy the booty brought by dacoits at very low prices. The proceeds from the sale of the booty are shared equally by the members of the gang of dacoits. However, the ringleader (Khalifa) is paid an additional ten percent. With the income, so distributed, they repay the loans they had obtained from money-lenders and spend the balance for supporting their families as well as for the [...] when they are at home.

In view of the efforts made by Sarvodaya workers, as well as by the Madhya Pradesh state government in India, to bring about a change of heart among the dacoits operating in the Chamar [ravines] and rehabilitate them, the Dusadhs of Jhinjha village also seem to have started thinking in terms of spending their life as ordinary citizens. They know that after the dacoits of Madhya Pradesh had surrendered before the Sarvidaya [porker] and the local State government, the dacoits of North Bihar had followed suit. Following this, the Bihar government had urged on Dusadh dacoits of Jhinja village also to come from across the border and surrender. The people of Jhinjhi village say that the Dusadh dacoits had, in response to that appeal, gone

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across the border and surrendered before the Indian authorities. According to their own accounts, the local Nepali administration later called upon the Dusadhs dacoits to surrender before the Nepali authorities. In response to that call, they surrendered before the Janakpur [Spnal] Commissioner in August 1973. They had put forward the following demands: (1) All criminal cases against Dusadhs should be withdrawn. (2) Lands should be allotted to dacoits to enable them to make a living. (3) Dusadhs who seek jobs should be provided with the same. (4) A school and a health center should be opened for them.

The local authorities had given assurances that their demands regarding land allotments and employment should be fulfilled. Accordingly, four Dusadhs were given jobs in the government and in educational institutions. Moreover, His Majesty's Government has not so far undertaken any specific program for the benefit of the majority of Dusadhs. According to the Dusadhs, they have, therefore, submitted a petition to the concerned organ of His Majesty's Government along with a note containing the assurances given by the local administration. No specific measures have so far been initiated for the rehabilitation of the Dusadhs of Jhinjha village. As such the Dusadhs have continued their practice of committing dacoity. Each fortnight, 150 to 200 Dusadhs leave the village for this purpose.

It is desirable to form a study team consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Home and Panchayat, the Department of Resettlement, and other concerned organs as well as a sociologist or criminologist, to study ways and means for solving the problems facing the Dusadh dacoits. The team should consider the following questions;

- (1) Whether lands should be allotted to Dusadha dacoits in the same way as to landless persons, or a special program should be implemented for their rehabilitation.
- (2) Since there is no guarantee that Dusadhs will voluntarily give up their traditional occupation of dacoity even after their rehabilitation, it should be decided whether it will be appropriate to keep them under police watch or under the surveillance of any other government agency.
- (3) What type of training can be given to Dusadh dacoits after their rehabilitation in order to enable them to know about the nation, nationalism, the Crown, and the basic principles of the Panchayat system, as well as about the development programs of HMG?
- (4) How will it be possible to make facilities (such as seeds, fertilizers, and loans) available to Dusadhs in areas in which they are resettled?

Gorkhapatra, Magh 8, 2033 (January 21, 1977).

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