CHAPTER - II

THE PROBLEMS AND METHOD OF STUDY

There is a neglect in the study of Doms in the social and cultural anthropology and sociology in India. The earliest study on Doms can be traced back to 1916 when GEORGE WESTON BRIGGS, a historian who wrote a detailed account on Doms in his book titled "The Doms and their near Relations". It is an exhaustive study on Doms. He began his study in 1937 and completed his fieldwork in 1938-39 and finally published the book in 1953. He has given a detailed account of the Doms, their structure and organization prior to independence. He has also drawn a complete cultural profile of Doms, their birth, marriage and death customs, their folk magic, their gods, their priests and their festivals.

G. R. CLARKE in his book "The outcastes, being a brief account of the Maghaya Doms" published in 1903 gives a brief descriptive account of Maghaya Doms, who are one particular type of Doms, who are also known as thieves. They are burglars by profession. This book written by an Indian Civil servant is an outcome of the need to research on these Doms because of the atrocities created by them. This book is written primarily from this perspective.

Since then no comprehensive work has been done on Doms. HARISH CHANDRA DAS in 1963 published a paper in Orissa Historical Journal titled "The Economic life of the Doms of
Barbaria” (a village in the north Balasore district of Orissa) where he describes the economic structure and sources of livelihood of Doms belonging to this area.

Recent attempts have been made by K. S. SINGH in his voluminous book “People of India Survey” (1993) on “The Scheduled Castes” where he outlines a brief description of the scheduled castes in India. He gives a brief synoptic view on Doms. His is a bird’s eye view on Doms.

The Census of 1971 “Ethnographical notes on scheduled castes of Uttar Pradesh” also provides only brief description on Doms of Uttar Pradesh. Though these Doms are widely quoted they have not been studied extensively, as can be clearly seen. Thus there is an urgent need and demand to fill in this gap.

GAIL OMVEDT in her books “Dalits and Democratic Revolution” (1994) very clearly makes an attempt to understand Ambedkar’s movement. She has taken Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnataka as her field and she makes an attempt to explain Ambedkar’s movement as his understanding for democracy, which was grounded in India’s reality – that is of caste system. She has analyzed deeply and thoroughly Ambedkar’s vision, his political and economic choices and his rejection of caste and Brahmanism and Nehruvian socialism. She clearly portrays the element of militancy, aggressiveness, defiance and isolation of these people whose position is ambiguous in the Indian Social System.

(1993) puts Ambedkar's thought in a universal paradigm and then sets that ideology in a chronologically historic perspective.

ELEANOR ZELLIOTT in her book “From untouchables to Dalits” (1996) talks of Dalits in the sense of its facticity of being oppressed. She talks of Dalits in the sense as how others see them in the social structure. Thus she uses the term Dalit structure. Thus she uses the term Dalit for those untouchables who consider themselves to be marginalized and oppressed in the present social structure.

THE PRESENT STUDY:

Very few studies have been done on Dalit Ethnography. During the past few decades the social and economic conditions of Dalit have been extensively studied to formulate policy measure and to obtain feedback on the results of developmental activities. However intensive ethnographic studies of specific Dalit community have been rarely undertaken. This tradition did exist in the past, which we find in the writings of British Ethnographers and has been continued to some extent by the Anthropological Survey of India. But most of the contemporary literature is not intensive and the Doms have particularly not been studied. People of India Survey also do not give an in-depth analysis. It gives only a synoptic view on Doms.

ETHNOGRAPHY:

It is a family of method involving direct and sustained contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter,
respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms the irreducibility of human events. HERODOTUS in The History’ says, “so far it is my eyes, my judgment and my searching that speaks these words to you”. This is essential to the ethnographic account. The understanding and representation of this experience is central to the idea of ethnography and this has to be understood both empirically and theoretically. Experience that are embedded in symbolic forms, patterns, discourses and practices which help to form it and give it shape, so then ethnography is the presentation, explanation and analysis of the culture(s) which locate(s) these experiences.

The distinguishing characteristic of ethnography is firstly the recognition of the role of theory. There should be “Theoretical informedness”, “sensitizing concepts”, “analytic points” to understand more widely the patterns of everyday life from ‘pure’ descriptive ethnography. This can be gathered and connected to other theoretical contributions, but while we do so, ethnography is strictly the reflexive understanding of contemporary society within the idea of continuity and change.

Secondly, the centrality of culture cannot be underestimated in ethnography. The importance of cultural practices has to be understood. Similarly the economic, political, juridical, ideological, institutional “levels” have to be understood through the cultural representation and practices through which they appear and are justified. The “cultural economy”, commercialized production,
distribution and consumption of cultural artifacts and products occupies an ever growing place in contemporary capitalism.

Thirdly, ethnography is a critical focus in research and writing in the broadest sense of recording and understanding lived social relations in part at least, from the point of view of how they embody, mediate and enact the operations and results of unequal power also important is how the interest and views of the powerful are often finally secured within process and practices which may seem to oppose dominant interest.

Fourthly, ethnography's main interest is in cultural policy and cultural politics. Ethnography should help in conscious policy formation to help change the social system. The aim of ethnography should be to expand the resources of knowledge and information which social actors use to understand their own position.

Thus the main task of ethnography, putting very simplistically is to make, report and evaluate direct observations of customary behavior in particular societies. Thus the main task of an ethnographer who is an anthropologist is to record and describe the culturally significant behavior of a particular society which requires a long period of intimate study and residence in a small, well defined community, knowledge of the spoken language, and the employment of a wide range of observational-techniques that include prolonged face to face contacts with members of the local group, direct participation in some of the groups activities with
more emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary or survey data. So ethnography is a discipline whose main aim is producing such cultural descriptions.

Doms is ethnographically and theoretically a very interesting and challenging question to settle. As we have seen that there is still ambiguity into tribe-caste relationships. It is still quite not clear as to how and when these tribes have turned into castes. There are several features overlapping, thus we cannot very distinctively compartmentalize, there are still gray areas, and my study aims to focus on these areas. It aims to focus on Tribe-caste continuum relationship.

My study also aims to highlight on the fact that ethnography of major tribes and scheduled castes have been done but minor ones are neglected due to the fact one, that they are dispersed two, they are diversified as we see in the case of Doms. Like the Doms of Benaras, the Dom Raja his function are quite different from the Doms of Gorakhpur who are mainly artisans, to Doms of other regions. Three, also because these tribes/scheduled castes are not occupationallly homogenous.

My study also aims to highlight that among the Doms the structural - cultural features are in between caste society and tribal customs.

Also it aims to highlight that at central or state policy level these minor tribes/scheduled castes have been neglected and marginalized because of weak support base. Thus there is need for
special policies that need to be focused on these tribes/scheduled castes who are in minority amongst the marginalized community and who are marginalized within the marginalized community. Even reservation policies aiming at marginalized community have not benefited these minorities within the minorities. And finally there are few ethnographic studies from a wholistic perspective on the Doms, and People of India Survey gives only a birds eye view about this society.

**MAIN OBJECTIVES:**

The aim of my study is

(1) To construct ethnography of Doms in the context of
   \( \sqrt{a} \) their position within caste-tribe framework of social structure.
   \( \sqrt{b} \) their cultural profile.

(2) To assess the extent of their backwardness.

(3) To formulate remedial measures for their development.

In the light of the above, following is the chapter scheme: -

**CHAPTER ONE** that is introduction gives a brief and general view of my study, and introduces the topic of my study.

**CHAPTER TWO** discusses the problems and method of study. It gives a brief review of studies done on topics similar to this study. It also talks about the problems, the methods and the limitations of my study.
CHAPTER THREE draws a theoretical profile to the study. This Chapter on approaches to ethnography discusses the different schools of thought in social anthropology and sociology.

CHAPTER FOUR draws the ethnography of Doms. I have further subdivided this chapter into two sections. In the first section I draw a brief ethnohistory of Doms talking about their antecedents and legends. In the second part I draw a structural profile of Doms in Gorakhpur district.

CHAPTER FIVE gives a brief background to the studies on Culture. It draws very briefly on several studies done on culture and their conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX gives a Cultural profiles of Doms in Gorakhpur District. I have subdivided this chapter into Material and Non material Culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN sums out the findings of my study taking our main objectives into account.

METHOD OF STUDY:

My study was focused on Domkhanas (settlement of Doms) in Gorakhpur city alone mainly the Domkhanas in Tiwaripur on Bank road in Gorakhpur and Surajkund Colony ‘D’ Block and Domingarh. Domingarh is about five to six kilometers from
Gorakhpur but now has been encompassed in the city itself due to the expansion of household settlement in Gorakhpur city.

It was mainly observational intensive study based on rapport formation with the Doms. I did face the problem of dialect but slowly I was able to get rid of this hurdle. Since the samples of my study were uneducated and illiterate I could not give a set of questionnaire to them. So I prepared a set of standard question for my in-depth focused interview. The interview that I took was unstructured keeping in mind the limitations of my study.

I also made case histories of individuals in my study, though they were very reluctant to do so. Once I was able to get rid of their fears and apprehensions regarding my study they were more comfortable in speaking to me.

There was flexibility in my approach towards my study as it involved a number of barriers, language, level of education, comprehension, understanding, and illiteracy being a few of them.

My study is backed with secondary sources like data available from government reports and archival material related to ethno - history of Doms.

These disadvantaged groups (Dalits) within the Indian hierarchical (caste based) system have been the target of exploitation and have suffered deprivation. The post-independence constitution tried to ameliorate this injustice by incorporating various measures. These positive discrimination laws were directed to establish an equalitarian society. Positive effect of these
measures can be seen, but there are still certain discrepancies in social, economic and cultural field.

Doms are one of these marginalized groups who have not benefited from these positive discriminatory measures. Even ethnographers have not paid due attention to these disadvantaged group.

My effort is to study the social cycle of Doms and develop alternative paradigms for the upliftment and integration of the Doms to the society. The aim of my study is in consonance with Ambedkar's vision of a society based on rational humanist principle. Ambedkar felt that for a further integration of Indian society and for a general feeling of oneness among its citizens the development of the marginalized was a must. Throughout his life he worked to fulfill this aim.

This ethnographic study would help analyse the problems of the Doms and come up with an alternative paradigm that could suggest policy measures. This study will go a long way in helping these marginalized groups attain their due.

LIMITATIONS:

My study faced several limitations as I faced the problem of illiteracy and uneducated sample. As a result I could not provide my sample of study with questionnaire neither was I able to conduct structured interview.

Therefore I adopted flexibility in approach. My study was based on intensive observation and rapport formation. I followed it
up with in-depth focused interview that was unstructured in nature. The problem I faced initially was that they were quite apprehensive and secretive in nature. But with time they opened up.

My study is also backed by secondary sources, that has its own limitations. The Census records of different years are not comparable in nature.