



Pasi Community: An Ancient Marshal Race

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The name Pasi is composed by two words Pa (grip) and asi (sword) implying thereby one who hold a sword in his hand or in other words a soldier. The Pasi is a marginalized community in India. Pasi refers to tapping toddy, a traditional occupation of the Pasi Community. They live in the northern India states of India. The word 'Pasi' is made up of two Hindi words- Pa+Asi. Pa means 'strong wrist and asi means 'sword'. Thus Pasi literally means as person with a strong wrists or a warrior with a sword. The fact that the Pasis were warriors, heroic, mighty and braves is fully proved by the study of their past.

According to William Crooke, the word Pasi derives from the Sanskrit word Pashika, a noose used by Pasis to climb and tap toddy, a drink obtained from palm tree. The tapping of toddy is the original occupation of the Pasi Community.

Pasi is Dravidian occupational caste mainly found in the northern region of the country. Their hereditary employment is tapping of date, Palmyra palm tree and other palm trees for their juice. They are mostly distributed over Bihar, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. A Small number of Pasi are distributed over the Terai region of Nepal. Interestingly when Pasis first entered Gujarat, they took to the job of tapping palm trees. This occupation is still followed by the Pasi people. Being the owner of the land, it was concerned about the issues related to the farmers just like the gold groups.

The Pasis of most of the north Indian states have been classified as schedule castes by the Government of India. In the 2001 Indian Census, the Pasi were recorded as being second-largest marginalized group in Uttar Pradesh. At the time, they constituted 16 percent of the marginalized population of the state and mostly inhabited the Awadh region. The 2011 Census of India for the state recorded their population as 6,522,166. According to the Ram Narayan Rawat, the Pasi, being land owners, had the same concerns as other upper communities.

Pasi's are ancient ruler of India. They are the Nagvanshi ruler so called Naga Dynasty. Pasis claim their ancestry from Bhṛighu, a Vedic sage. The Pasi community also traces their origin from Parashuram. One of the legends says that once a man was about to kill a number of cows and at the same time Parashuram was practicing austerities in the forest. On the howls of the sacred animals, he reached the place of rescue. As the cow killer was accompanied by his friends, he called loudly for saving animals. Thus Pasi, brave man came and protect cows. Thus they were named as Pasi which comes from Parashuram society.

Pasis generally avoid marriage with blood relations. In their society, widow marriage and divorce are freely allowed. They either burn or bury the dead and funeral rites are followed. Generally for a man mourning for ten days are observed. Pasi people are very religious and they worship their kul diety. Pasi community has a cast council that mainly deals with their issues. Apart from their traditional occupation of extraction of juices of palm trees, some of them also go for hunting. Pasis also mend grindstones and are engaged in agricultural activities. In some of the villages Pasis are commonly employed as watchmen in return for which they receive either a plot of land or some other consideration. Pasis were the earliest residents of the Awadh region. They believe in Hinduism and Buddhism. At present to a large extent, this caste is a commercial caste. It seems from the historical facts that they have been very important in the Awadh region. Pasi is an aboriginal race of India and mainly distributed over the northern region of the country. The traditional occupation of Pasi is the extraction of sap from palm trees.

The Pasi community was also recognized as revolutionist one, especially due to the role many Pasi figures had played during the 1857, revolt against British. These factors along with a well-built muscular body- a necessary features of a 'leader' in the countryside- put him in a position to assume the leadership role.

Indian nationalist have supported claims that there was a Pasi Kingdom that ruled what is now Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the 11th and 12th Century. The rulers of this claimed states includes Maharaja Bijli Pasi, Maharaja Lakhan Pasi, Maharaja Satan Pasi, etc. Madari Pasi was a leader of the peasant Eka movement. Makka Pasi was a soldier in the contingent of Awadh emperor Wazid Ali Shah. Uda Devi Pasi, claimed to have been a fighter, sniper, at Sikandar Bagh in the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

William Crook says that – 'According to the traditions of the Pasi Community, they ruled the Awadh Region. Their Kings used to rule Kheri, Hardoi, Sitapur, Lucknow, Sandila, Unnao etc. Ramkot, where Bangarmau city of Unnao is now located, is considered one of their main strongholds. Raja Satan Pasi ruler of Ramkot re-announced his allegiance to Kannauj and refused to pay tribute. Angered by this, Raja Jaichand sent his army heroes Allah and Udai, who attacked and destroyed Ramkot and turned it into shapeless ruins.

The Pasi caste has mainly been the ruling class of the Awadh province of North India, whose rule was in the whole Awadh till the 12th Century, which was called by the English writers (Ruler of Oudh). Later on, due to continuous invasions of Muslims and Rajputs, these people lost their rule. After that they migrated to the jungles where they started living by building small forts, they became known as rebels and warlords. After a long period of time, by the 17th-18th century, the people of Pasi Caste started giving their services in the army of Indian Kings.

Nawab Wazid Ali Shah of Awadh had his 'Pasi Paltan' which in the revolution of 1857 had safely evacuated Begum Hazrat Mahal and her son Birgis Kadra from the Residency to Nepal under the leadership of Pasi Paltan. On playing an important role in the revolution of 1857, English writer Martin Gubbins wrote on page 72 of his book (*An account of mutiny 1857*), requesting the government that 'these passions will have to be crushed mercilessly in the future'.

As a result, in 1871, the Jarayam Profession Act was imposed on 200 castes. In which the Pasi Caste was also included. Under this black law, all the properties of the Pasis were confiscated and all the youth were imprisoned, due to which the condition of Pasis became very pathetic. Some amendments were also made in this black law in 1924.

It is clear from the study of the ancient history of various district of Uttar Pradesh that the districts Faizabad, Barabanki, Bahraich, Lucknow, Rai Bareilly, Sitapur, Hardoi, Sandila, Unnao, Lakhimpur Kheri, Azamgarh, Shahjahanpur, Gorakhpur, Pratapgarh. Quotations and references are found in several books such as 'Gazetteer of the Province of Awadh' Vol. 11-H to N till the year 1877, 'Imperial Gazetteer of India 1908', 'District Gazetteer Kheri 1979', 'Unnao District Gazetteer', 'UP District Gazetteer Vol. XXXVII Lucknow by Shri B.K.C. Sharma – 1959, William Crook's book – Tribes and Castes of the North Western India, Uttar Pradesh- Gazetteer, Rae Bareilly- District Gazetteer, District Gazetteer Rampur- 1974 etc.

It is written on page 3 of District Gazetteer Rampur 1974 that, in this area decendant of ---- pasu primitive castes. They are in the form of people who have lived here since ancient times and who cleared the forest and made the rest of the vast land suitable for human habitation, leaving some parts. The most authentic and historical example regarding Pasis being a very ancient caste and native of India is found in 'Gazetteer of the Province of Awadh' Volum 11-H to M 1977 on page 204, in which it has been said that Pasi among the primitive castes. The presentation of the above examples only means that the Pasis are very ancient natives of India. They have not come to India from outside, rather they originated here.

Renowned English scholar R. B. Russell wrote in his book 'The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India' published in 1916 that 'Pasi is a Dravidian tribe, who ruled over a wide area of Awadh. Later, the Rajputs destroyed their republic and established their supremacy over them. Scholar Russell has considered the Pasis as a brave community. These things written by scholar Russell about Pasis are also confirmed by English writer William Crook's book 'Tribes and Casts of the North Western Provinces and Awadh'. Scholar William Crook has written about the bravery of the Pasis, their social, political and economic status that 'in the whole of Awadh, traditionally they were the lords or maharajas of the country.

It would not be out of place to identify this period (9th Century) that at this time the Pasis and other primitive tribes has brought the country's territory under their control. However, there is no sign of the rule of the Pasis as they disappeared due to the long interval of occupation by the descendents of the Rajputs and Muslim invaders.

Due to lack of research, there is difficulty in presenting a detailed account of the then Pasi Kings. Since there was no tradition of writing history in ancient times. For this reason, is it not possible to give description about all Pasi rulers.

Efforts to document the ancient history of Dalits have neither been made at the government level nor any historian has made any serious effort. The same two-prolonged policy has been adopted in highlighting the history of Pasi caste and getting it published. After independence, some educated people have tried to bring the glorious history of Pasi caste in front of the general public. But there is still a need for hard research, investigation, study of mounds, forts etc. in this area. The government should at least build a monument in the memory of the brave Indian Kings and their history should be embodied. An attempt is being made to present the factual position by weaving history, important evidences and facts into one thread.

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