

AN AUTO-ETHNOGRPHIC STUDY OF A FAMILIAL HOME IN BIHAR

SHUBHANGINI SINGH

Abstract

Auto-ethnography refers to the study that connects an individual's lived experiences to more general political, cultural and societal ideas through critical observation of those experiences. In other words, the research in which self-reflexively examines a group to which they belong, or their own personal experience is known as autoethnography. The term "autoethnography" was also defined as "insider ethnography" which is technically the examination of the culture of the group to which the researcher belongs. An autoethnographic study provides a one-time opportunity through which a researcher gets to know more about their culture, community and people. This research opportunity helped gain in-depth knowledge about the Bisen Rajput community.

Introduction.

Rajput is derived from the Sanskrit word "Raja-putra" which basically means son of a king. The Rajputs are basically the warrior or the fighting class. They have had a long history of a military background. There are multiple theories regarding the origin of Rajputs as a clan. According to some historians, the Rajput community came up as mixed groups including the tribals and the Shudras or the untouchables. While there are certain other historians who believe that the Rajput community originated from the farming communities.

Over time, the Rajputs founded several strong kingdoms and princely states throughout several regions of Northern and Western India, including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. These kingdoms and states were renowned for their exquisite architecture, fine arts, and rich cultures. The Rajputs had a significant impact on the development of Indian history. Some of the famous Rajput clans include Abhan, Amethiya, Bachhal, Bachhgoti, Bisen, Chandel, Chauhan, Donwar, Garg, Gaur, Gautam, Gehlot, Kaushiks, Lautamiya, Mahrar, Monas, Parihar, Pundir, Indauliya, etc.

Location: Until the 20th century, Rajputs were found ruling in the "overwhelming majority" of the princely states of Rajasthan. This is where the largest number of princely states were found. At present the Rajput population of the country is spread through much of the subcontinent, especially in north, west and central India. Rajput populations are found in the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Some are also found in Nepal.

Languages: The primary language spoken by the Rajputs is Hindi. The other languages spoken include Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Bagheli, Chattisgarhi, Kannauji, Magahi and Bundeli.

OBJECTIVES

- To find out if there exists any connection to the oral narrative of migration/settlement
- To evaluate the layout and architecture of the house to see a reflection caste or gender norms
- To discover the special religious/ customary practices that are followed by the members of the house

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are multiple articles available on auto ethnography. The ones by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E Addams and Arthur P. Bochner are particularly informative. Autoethnography is of two kinds –

- Analytic ethnography- Analytic autoethnography is concerned with more conventional types of research that focuses on "creating theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena" and favour "generalisation, detached analysis, and theory-building."
- Evocative ethnography- The focus of evocative autoethnography is on storytelling that sparks debate and stirs up feelings. According to Bochner and Ellis, the intention of evocative autoethnography is for the readers to identify with the auto ethnographer so they can turn their personal struggles into a public plight that is compelling, threatening, and culturally significant. Accounts break down the barriers that typically separate literature from social research by being written like novels or biographies.

In their book, "Evocative Ethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories", the authors Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, were the first ones to introduce autoethnography as a way of life in the human sciences and as a methodology. These world-famous scholars used multiple examples from work and emphasized on connecting emotionally and intellectually to the readers.

In the book, "The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography", the author Carolyn Ellis creates a compelling tale about a hypothetical graduate course she teaches by combining methodological guidance with her own personal experiences. You get knowledge about her pupils and their projects as well as the broad range of subjects and techniques covered by the term "autoethnography" in it.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BISEN RAJPUTS.

The Rajputs are a Hindu, warrior caste. As far as history is concerned, they have always been associated with military, ruling and land owning in the subcontinent of India.

The Bisen, also known as Visen or Vishen are a sub-caste or a sub-clan under the Rajputs. According to history, the Vishwamitra King, also known as Bisen and a sage in Hindu mythology, was the ancestor of the Bisen Rajputs. The descendants of Vishwamitra, known as the Bisen Rajputs, were a powerful and well-respected tribe over time in many areas of Northern India, particularly in the Bundelkhand region, which includes portions of modern-day Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The Bisen Rajputs are renowned for their bravery and heroism in warfare and have a long history of military skill. During the pre-colonial era, many Bisen Rajputs served in the armed forces of several Rajput kingdoms and princely republics, including the Rajputana Agency.

MIGRATION AND LANGUAGES.

MIGRATION: To get data about migration, I relied on the information I collected from my personal interviews. This data has been provided by the older members of my family. These include my grandmother Sri Shiv Kumari Devi, my uncle Mr Mithilesh Singh, my father Mr Sunil Kumar Singh and a certain distant relative who does not wish to be named.

According to the accounts given by them, the residents of the village of Dihra are not the original inhabitants of this place. According to the information that I got from the personal interviews I conducted, I got to know that the present inhabitants of the village of Dihra are originally from the state of Uttar Pradesh. My forefathers originally belonged to a place called Majhauri. Majhauri is a place in the Gorakhpur district of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

About 150 years ago, around 1870s, these people migrated from Majhauri to Chilahri which is a place near Buxar, in the state of Bihar. After spending a period of about 50-75 years in Chilahri, they migrated to a village in Bihar called Dihra around 1930s. The familial home that I am studying about in this term paper is in the village of Dihra.

LANGUAGES: To get information about the languages that were spoken by the people in the village of Dihra, with my main focus being the Bisen Rajput community, I relied on the data I collected from the personal interviews. These personal interviews were conducted, both on call and in person. According to the personal accounts shared by the people when I interviewed them, there essentially existed only one main language in the olden times. This main language varied from place to place and also from community to community. As far as the Bisen Rajput community is concerned, their main language in the village of Dihra was Bhojpuri. When we move from one place to another, it results in a few changes in the language spoken. In the same way, there were variations in the Bhojpuri language as well. The Bhojpuri spoken by the residents of the state of Uttar Pradesh varied from the Bhojpuri spoken by those belonging to the state of Bihar. The concept of a second language came much later. The main attention or focus was essentially on the regional and local languages.

The concept of Hindi as the second language came much later. Hindi is now spoken widely in the village of Dihra, but even today, Bhojpuri continues to be the main language. Hindi is basically used to converse with the younger generations

who have not spent much time in the village or those who cannot converse in Bhojpuri or those who have no idea and do not understand the language.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOUSE.

History: In the earlier, olden times, houses were mainly built from mud (called mitti in Hindi). The house that I am studying about in this paper lies in the village of Dihra in the state of Bihar. This house is built on the ground remains of one such mud house. The original house was built around the year 1950-1960s. The house, being made of mud could not survive the extreme weather conditions over the years. It was later demolished to make room for a new house which was made of bricks and cement, and which continues to exist even today. This new house, to say, was built around the year 1960-1970s.

In the olden times, houses followed a basic format or architecture. Every house had a courtyard, which is called Aangan in Hindi. The rooms were located all around this courtyard. In the earlier times, people had abundant land and they made the most of it by following this courtyard system of architecture. The houses were huge and had many rooms.

Within the courtyard or the Aangan itself, in a corner, there would be a washing area with a tap or a handpump. This is where the utensils, etc were washed. Rooms were located all around this courtyard. The guest room which is popularly called Dalaan in Bhojpuri, was located near the entrance of the house. This room was essentially meant for the guests. Apart from serving as the guest room, the Dalaan is also the place where all the important meetings or discussions would take place. The women of the house were not supposed to go to the Dalaan.

As far as the washrooms are concerned, they were generally located outside of the house premises. The basic aim behind this was to maintain "purity" and "sanctity" of the housing premises. The kitchen was usually located on the left corner of the courtyard. Even the kitchen, was considered to be a pure space and people only cooked vegetarian meals in the kitchen. The Rajputs are a non-vegetarian lot, so whenever they would want to relish some non-vegetarian food, it would be cooked outside the house premises with the help of servants. One thing that struck me the most was that in spite of all the casteism that was prevalent in the old societies, there were no separate entry- exit gates for the servants or the house helps. They would enter the house through the same gates used by the other members of the house. They were however, not allowed to talk to the women or the elders of the house. Only a few trusted servants or helps, that too, after years of dedicated service, were given the right to talk to the women or the elders.

DOES THE LAYOUT/ ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOUSE REFLECT CASTE AND, OR GENDER NORMS?

When I interviewed people for this paper, majority of them said that caste norms were not prevalent when we take the architecture of the house in consideration. I had assumed that there would be certain biases regarding the interaction of the family members with different caste groups within the house but there was nothing like that. The people in the olden times were quite liberal in this matter.

As far as gender norms are considered, the one thing that struck my attention and that seems to depict gender bias so as to say, is the fact that there were separate washrooms for the men and women in the house. These were also located on two opposite corners of the house. The men of the house could not even go near the women's washroom and vice versa. Another noticeable thing that depicts gender bias is the fact that the women of the house were not supposed to enter or go into the guest room, which is popularly called Dalaan in Bhojpuri. They were also not supposed to go the entrance of the house, called Dwaar in Bhojpuri, alone. Some male member was supposed to accompany them in case they wanted to go to the entrance.



Fig.1.



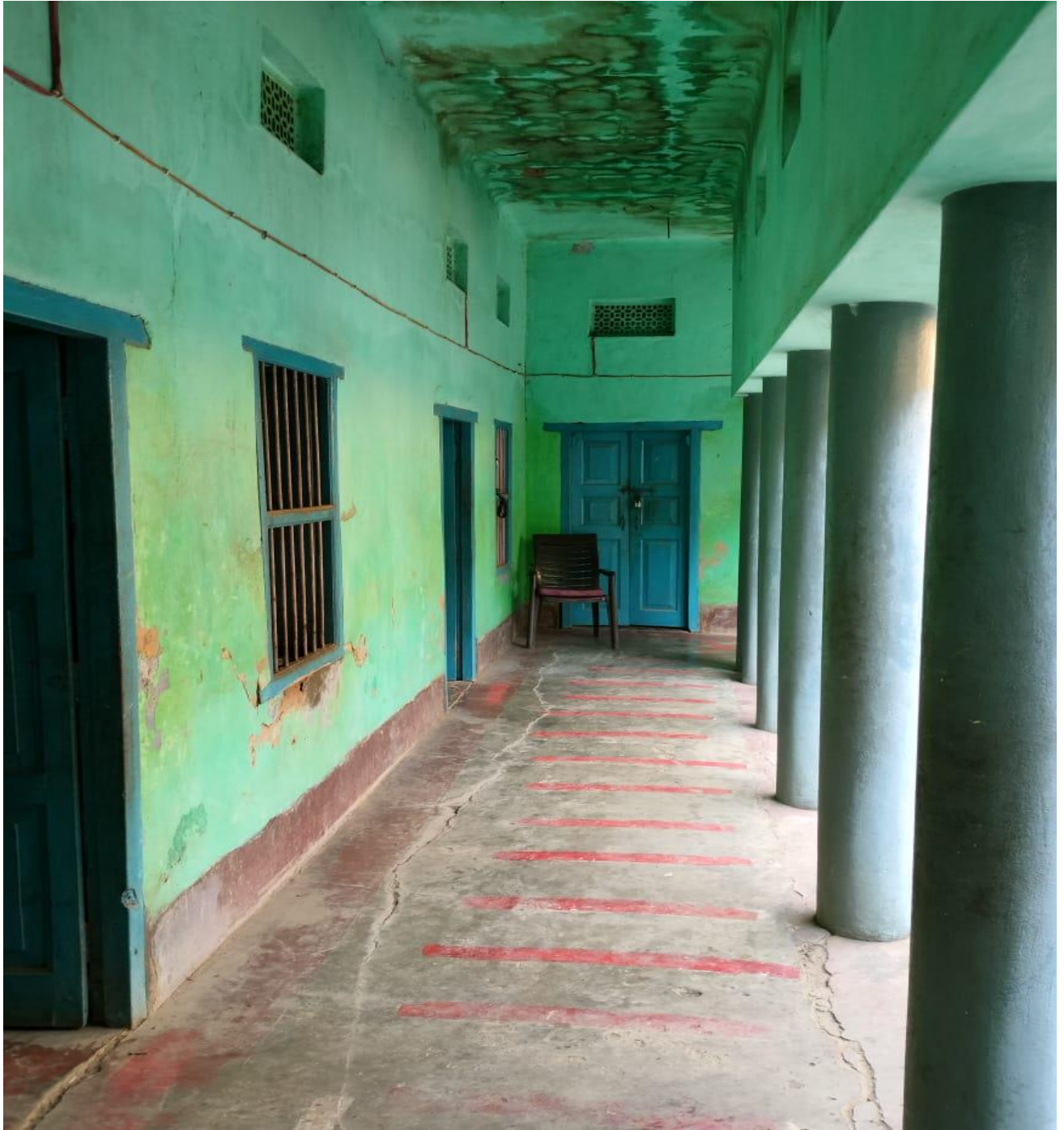


Fig.2:



Fig.3

MYTHOLOGY AND CUSTOMARY PRACTICES

Myths regarding the family deity:

Every Rajput family, be it the Bisen Rajputs or any other sub-caste of Rajputs, has a family deity. This family deity is called Kuldevi, if it is a female deity or Kuldevta, if it is a male deity. The family deity is more of a personal concept and it varies from family to family. The Kuldevta of the Bisen Rajput family living in the village of Dihra is a deity called Gauraiya Baba. Before every auspicious occasion in my family, like a wedding or before any important event, people pray to Gauraiya Baba and perform a “Puja” for the smooth and hassle-free occurrence of events. The practice of worshipping Gauraiya Baba has been going on for years now and it is almost a ritual to hold a “Puja” before every important event.

Religious practices and their significance:

Every family has their own special religious practice that is significant to them and that has a history behind it. One such practice followed in our familial home in the village of Dihra is that of worshipping Sati Devi before every auspicious event or occasion.

Sati, also known as Sati pratha in Hindi, is the act in which the wife of a deceased man jumps in the fire along with the dead body of her husband. It was considered an evil to the society and was later abolished by Dr Raja Rammohan Roy. There is a story regarding this Sati pratha in the village of Dihra that has religious significance. The migration of my forefathers from Majhauri to Chilahri and finally to Dihra was not an easy one. When these people migrated to the village of Dihra they had a fight with the original inhabitants of the village, near a village called Karsarh.

In the earlier times, every family had an advisor or a purohit who would advise them on several matters. Our family also had a purohit. The Purohit had advised that this one man, named Vikram Singh should not accompany the others for the fight that was supposed to take place in Karsarh, because his presence there would result in their loss in the fight. In those days, people abided by and respected the Purohiths' opinions, and nobody denied their word. Believing what the Purohit had said, the people locked Vikram Singh in a room to prevent him from coming to the fight and they, themselves left for the fight. After the people had left, Vikram Singh somehow managed to escape and reached the place where this fight was taking place. Eventually, they ended up winning the fight, but Vikram Singh got killed. After his death, his wife had to perform Sati. She jumped in the pyre with the dead body of her husband. This lady is famously called Sati Ji in the village of Dihra. People pray and make offerings to Sati Ji before every auspicious occasion. During the weddings, the first wedding card is written and put forward in the name of Sati Ji. Even though a large majority of our family does not stay in the village of Dihra, they always make an effort to send offerings for the worship of Sati Ji at least once a year.



Fig.4.

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