



SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE NACHNIS OF PURULIA: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

The Nachni is an integral part of Bengali culture and, more generally, Indian culture. The community as a whole, however, shows a striking lack of recognition for this type of art. Conversely, these women, these dancers, are often stigmatised and looked down upon to the point where the women have come to view their profession as something to be ashamed of. The purpose of this research is to learn about the lives of the Nachnis, a group of socially and economically disadvantaged women in the Purulia district. Primary anthropological tools and techniques have been used to complete the study. The research shows that Nachnis are on the cusp of ascending from the lower socioeconomic class to the upper lower socioeconomic class, a sign that they are on the road to positive economic and social development.

Key words: Nachni, culture, socio economic, lower & status.

Introduction:

The Nachni is a popular performing folk art form in West Bengal. The name Nachni refers to both the dance and the woman dancer. The Nachnis are in general the unmarried or married girls or women who are engaged with this profession because of livelihood insecurity. Due to their poor social status and lack of education they are stigmatized within the society. (Manna,2016)

The nature of organisation of the troupe, social values associated with it and the occasion of its demand give it an identity of a unique institution in Bengal society. Unlike other forms of dance popular in West Bengal such as Natua dance, Pata dance, Chhau dance, Jhumur dance, etc. the Nachnis suffer from social, religious, political, and economic exclusion. Often they are compared with prostitutes.

The Nachnis belong to various castes and tribal societies like Bhumij, Karmakar, Majhi, Mahato, Dom, Baishnav, Sahis, etc. But once they entered into this profession, they form one new social identity. They are

mainly found in Barabazar, Baghmundi, Arsha, Balarampur, Kenda, Purulia, Joypur, Jhalida blocks of Purulia district of West Bengal. In Orissa, they are found mainly in Mayurbhanj district and in Jharkhand state in Nimdi, Bundu, Tamar and Patamda. However, the dance and the dancers are more concentrated in West Bengal.

Once patronised by the kings and zamindars, the art and artists suffered neglect without any proper patrons. But recently it has enjoyed state protection with the provision of monthly Shilpi Allowance of Rs. 1000 per artist. In a way the informal institution has been formalised with state recognition and under the protection of social security organisation like Manbhum Loksanskriti Nachni Unnayan Samiti, Purulia. But the organisation of the troupe is still informal.

Before the social security scheme of Shilpi Allowance, Nachinis depended on wage labour and on the share from occasional performance. Obviously, it seems that with assured monthly allowance, a change has taken place in their economic position. But the attitude of the society has not changed.

Over the years changes have taken place in the content and context of the institution of Nachini. With the abolition of zamindari and other royal order the performance is sponsored on festive occasions. The *darbari jhumr* of traditional time which was mostly a eulogy to zamindars has become a strong medium of expressing voice of the margins. Needless to say, spectacular changes are observed in contemporary period as compared to the traditional time. Unfortunately the social status of this deprived section has not changed. The Nachnis still suffer social stigma of different dimensions.

A casual talk with them also acquaints with another dimension of their deprivation. In contemporary time, due to access to urban setting, media, etc. they have their hopes and aspirations which are crucified on the altar of traditional social values against them.

Review of Literature:

Nisith Chakrobarty in his book “Nachni” (The dancing Girl of Rural Bengal), (2001) reveals the life of Nachni dancers. He showed, after the abolition of zamindari system the Nachnis were in a state of decline and frustration, in this situation Rasiks helped nachnis to get separate identity in the house of people. He described their socioeconomic condition. He also wrote some famous dancers’ biographies in his small edition like Charubala Devi, Bimala devi.

Dr. Kshirod Chandra Mahato and Sri Hangseshwar Mahato in their Journal “ Nachni Slipi Sindhubala”(2008) point out the life history of the legendary Nachni dancer Sindhubala Devi, who performed dance for the Kings of Kahipur,(Jyotiprasad Singh Deo). There was a special Nach Mahal where she performed dance with Jhumur songs. The king gave her special room in his mansion to live.

Tripti Biswas in her book “Sindhubala Jhumur O Nachni”(2003) point out the inter relation of Jhumur Gaan (a type of folk song) and Nachni dance. She described that jhumur songs are the main theme for Nachni Dance. A nachni performed on only Jhumur songs. In Sindhubala’s time, the Darbari Jhumur was sung for the entertainment of the king.

Sramik Sen and Kiriti Mahto in their Book “Lokbhumi Manbhum” a collection of folk article of Chhatrak(2015) described the cultural dances , songs, rituals of this Purulia district. In a very special chapter of dance they write some important facts on Nachnis of Purulia district. They revealed the definition of nachni dance and tried to find out its origin from the medieval period. The dance forms are also discussed in this special chapter.

Kamal Chakrobarty in his book “Puruliar Itihas” (History and Culture of Purulia District), (2018) reveals a brief description of Nachni Dance , its origin and the changes in due course of time , its forms of dance, the instruments used , the ornaments used. New songs are introduced in Nachni Dance; these are called Khatta Songs in the native language of Purulia district.

Objectives: For the purpose of the present study, following objectives have been formulated.

- To examine the socio-economic status of the Nachnis of Purulia district.
- To find the importance of Rasik in Nachni’s life.

Significance of the Study:

This research highlights every corner of the Nachnis’ socio-economic status. It also reveals the importance to Rasik in Nachni’s life and to build up her life better in terms of social and economic condition. The study also helps Govt. to take up necessary steps for the betterment of the nachnis.

Research Question

- What is the present socio-economic status of Nachni?
- What is the role of Rasik in the Nachnis’ life?

Research Methodology: This study is an empirical and field-based research work on the Nachnis of Purulia district.

Area of study: For this research work, the researcher conducted field work in Barabazar, Baghmundi, Arsha, Balarampur, Kenda, Purulia, Joypur, Jhalida blocks of Purulia district of West Bengal as Nachni dancers are found in these areas.

Data Size: The area of the study includes 58 Nachnis of the district of Purulia. The number is selected from the list of Nachnis available with Manbhum Loksanskriti Nachni Unnayan Samiti. The list shows total number of Nachnis of Purulia district for they are listed for the monthly silpi Vata (folk artist pension) from the Government of West Bengal. 10 Rasiks have been interviewed for a deep insight into the art.

Data collection and time period: This research paper is mainly based on primary data which were collected in the period from June 2021 to March 2022.

Research Tools: For Primary data collection, anthropological primary tools (schedule) and techniques such as observation, interview, life history, Case study, photography and audio visual aids has been used in this study. Kuppuswamy scale has been used for understanding the socio economic status of the Nachnis for the present study.

In order to effectively determine an individual's or family's socioeconomic status, they require continuous updating over time. *Kuppuswamy's scale* is the most popular tool for gauging a household's economic standing in a city. The scale was originally developed to assess an individual's socioeconomic status, but it has since been adapted to evaluate a household's. Kuppuswamy first developed the scale in 1976, with initial parameters including education, occupation, and total income; later, the scale was modified to also take into account the educational background, occupation, and total annual household income of the family head. The Kuppuswamy SES incorporates three variables, and these are broken down into different categories and assigned scores (which will be defined in the body of the chapter) for each subgroup. The Kuppuswamy SES assigns a score between 0 and 29 to each member of a family, dividing them into the "upper class," "upper middle class," "lower middle class," "upper lower," and "low socio-economic class." Since the value of the Indian rupee has decreased over the years, the parameter of the family's total income from all sources has become less relevant on the scale, despite the fact that the breadwinner's profession and level of education have not changed.

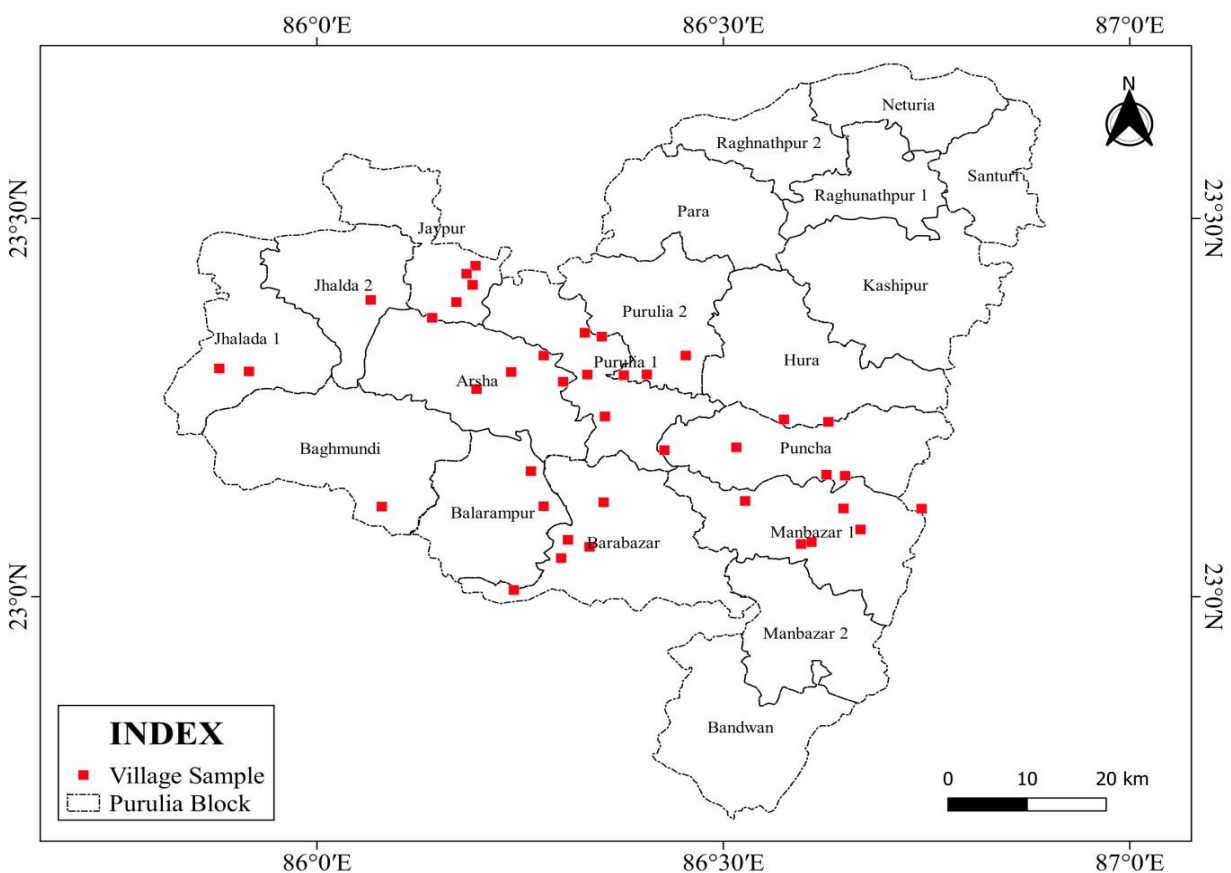


Table 1: Occupation of the Head of the family

S. No.	Occupation of the Head	Score
1	Legislators, Senior Officials & Managers	10
2	Professionals	9
3	Technicians and Associate Professionals	8
4	Clerks	7
5	Skilled Workers and Shop & Market Sales Workers	6
6	Skilled Agricultural & Fishery Workers	5
7	Craft & Related Trade Workers	4
8	Plant & Machine Operators and Assemblers	3
9	Elementary Occupation	2
10	Unemployed	1

Table 2: Education of the Head of the family

S. No.	Education of the Head	Score
1	Profession or Honours	7
2	Graduate	6
3	Intermediate or diploma	5
4	High school certificate	4
5	Middle school certificate	3
6	Primary school certificate	2
7	Illiterate	1

Table: 3**Total Monthly Income of the Family (Updated Monthly Family Income in Rs (June, 2022))**

S.No.	Updated Monthly Family Income in Rupees (2012)	Updated Monthly Family Income in Rupees (2020)	Updated Monthly Family Income in Rupees (2021)	Updated Monthly Family Income in Rupees (2022)	Scores
1.	≥30375	≥199862	≥123,322	≥184,376	12
2.	15188-30374	99931-199861	61663-123,321	92,191-184,370	10
3.	11362-15187	74755-99930	46129-61,662	68967-92185	6
4.	7594-11361	49962-74755	30,831-46,128	46095-68961	4
5.	4556-7593	29,973-49961	18,497-30,830	27654-46089	3
6.	1521-4555	10002-29,972	6,175-18,496	9232-27648	2
7.	≤1520	≤10001	≤6174	≤9226	1

Source: Author's estimation based on primary data and kuppuswamay's Scale Index

Table 4: Kuppuswamy socio-economic status scale 2021		
S. No.	Score	Socioeconomic Class
1	26–29	Upper (I)
2	16–25	Upper Middle (II)
3	11–15	Lower Middle (III)
4	5–10	Upper Lower (IV)
5	< 5	Lower (V)

Source: Author's estimation based on primary data and kuppuswamy's Scale Index

Results and Discussion:

Socio-economic status of Nachni (By using Kuppuswamy SES):

A family's health and nutrition can be judged in part by their socioeconomic status (SES). To put one's socioeconomic status into perspective, consider that "any individual's position within a system of hierarchical social structure" is one definition. One's socioeconomic status (SES) is a significant factor in their use of health care services, including their access to care, their ability to pay for care, whether or not they are accepted by beneficiaries, and how often they use services. The prevalence and causes of illness and death in any given area are affected by the community's socioeconomic status. Diagnosis of an individual or family is often aided by knowing their socioeconomic status (SES), which is commonly measured in scientific and social studies. That's why medical history taking always requires a high socioeconomic status (SES).

For the purpose of the study following socio economic indicators has been considered to measure the socio economic status of the Nachnis of Purulia district. The indicators include occupation of the head of the family, education of the head of the family and total monthly income of the family.

TABLE:5 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF OCCUPATION OF HEAD OF THE FAMILY	
Mean	1.93
SD	1.12
CV	58.09
Max	6
Min	1
Range	5

Source: Author's Estimation Based on Primary Data (Schedule and Interview Method)

Table 5 represents the descriptive statistics of occupation of head of the family of the respondents which has been designed based on Modified Kuppuswamy socio economic scale 2022. The first sub content of the scale has been represented in the above table. On an average it has been found that most of the respondents has attained a score of 1.93 which is near to 2 which represents that elementary occupation is the core work /job of

head of the family which has been found consistent and non volatile which is represented by the value of standard deviation i.e. 1.12 only and co efficient of variation which is at lower side which indicates that there is not much variation in the category of work of the head of the family. The maximum score secured by respondents is 6 which indicate skilled workers and shop and market sells workers. On the other hand the minimum score reflects by table is 1 which indicates unemployment. On a nutshell it is can be said that the occupation of head of the family of the nachnis is mainly engaged in elementary job.

MEAN	1.54
SD	0.50
CV	32.58%
MAX	2
MIN	1
RANGE	1

Source: Author's Estimation Based on Primary Data (Schedule and Interview Method)

Table 6 represents the descriptive statistics of education of head of the family of the respondents which has been designed based on Modified Kuppaswamy socio economic scale 2022. The sub content of the scale has been represented in the above table. On an average it has been found that most of the respondents has attained a score of 1.54 which is near to 2 which represents that elementary education has seen of head of the family which has been found consistent and non volatile which is represented by the value of standard deviation i.e. 0.50 only and co efficient of variation which is at lower side which indicates that there is not much variation in the category of education of the head of the family. The maximum score secured by respondents is 2 which indicate that they primary school certificate. On the other hand the minimum score reflects by table is 1 which indicates illiterate. On a nutshell it is can be said that the education of head of the family of the Nachnis is primary level of schooling.

MEAN	1.12069
SD	0.328611
CV	29.32%
MAX	2
MIN	1
RANGE	1

Source: Author's Estimation Based on Primary Data (Schedule and Interview Method)

Table 7 represents the descriptive statistics of total monthly income of the family of the respondents which has been designed based on Modified Kuppaswamy socio economic scale 2022. The sub content of the scale has been represented in the above table. On an average it has been found that most of the respondents has attained a score of 1 which represents that elementary occupation is the core work /job of head of the family which has

been found consistent and less non volatile which is represented by the value of standard deviation i.e. 0.32 only and co efficient of variation which is at lower side which indicates that there is not much variation in the category of total monthly income of family. The maximum score secured by respondents is 2 which indicate earning between 9232-27648. On the other hand the minimum score reflects by table is 1 which indicates earning below 9226. On a nutshell it can be said that the total monthly income of family of the nachnis is below 9226 according to the modified kuppuswamy scale june 2022.

Table: 8			
Kuppuswamy's Socio-economic Class Score			
SI No	Score	Socioeconomic Class	Total (In Numbers)
1	26–29	Upper (I)	0
2	16–25	Upper Middle (II)	0
3	11–15	Lower Middle (III)	0
4	5–10	Upper Lower (IV)	26
5	< 5	Lower (V)	32

Source: Author's Estimation Based on Primary Data

Table 8 represents the socio economic class score of the Nachnis of Purulia which indicates that they belong to lower and upper lower socio economic class. 32 Nachnis belong to lower socio economic class and rest 26 Nachnis belong to upper lower socio economic class.

Role & Importance of Rasik in the Nachni's Life:

A nachni's rasik is a multi-dimensional figure in her life, playing the roles of mentor, boss, patron, lover, and, often, father to her and her children. The dances in the nachnis repertoire are a mashup of different genres and traditions, but they are performed in a way that appeals to the local crowd. A rasik (literally, "one who is related to rasa," an aesthetics essence of art) is known as a "bad boy from a good family" but is also an art connoisseur; his moral standing is low but he can be financially successful (not always, however). His devotion to art can make him appear mystical. Traditionally, the nachni would live with her rasik in his household, though they would keep their living arrangements separate if the rasik already had a lawfully wed wife. The rasik would train his nachni if he were a skilled instructor of music or dance. They formed a group and, with the help of session musicians, put on paid performances at various venues. The rasik served as master, partner, lover, consort, and manager of the team; the nachni was the centre of attention and a major source of income. Until some unforeseen event, like death, separation, or desertion, occurred; nachni would essentially be living off of rasik's income in exchange for shelter and support. Since raising a nachni and giving her proper training was neither simple nor quick, it was possible that her rasik would abandon her. Becoming a nachni required years of training and dedication. In addition, it was unusual for women to enter the nachni profession.

The social position of Nachnis was not good at all. Many times they had to endure the hatred and contempt of the society. Her place in Rasik's family was not given. She had to live in a separate house. She had no permission to attend social events. Almost everyone in the society looked at her with contempt. Many times it had to be digested without objection. There was no response to the unbearable statement. The wives of some of the Rasiks used to quarrel for no reason at all. Sometimes they would climb on the Nachnis without any reason. Many a time a powerful person would snatch the Nachni from Rasik. The kidnapper was disliked but was forced to stay with him. Sometimes Rasik was killed and Nachani was forcibly looted. Such examples can be heard all over the place. Is this the last word? As long as there was the elegance of youth in the body, as long as there was some kind of happiness and sorrow, there was no one to be found in the declining age. In her old age, she had to beg from door to door with a stick in one hand and a tupa in the other. When the artist died in the last stage, no one wanted to touch her body. It is also heard that the dead Nachni was tied with a rope and dragged her to waste.

A lot of things change with time. That is why it can be said that time is powerful. With the change of time, people's mind and mentality also changes. Now the country has become independent, environment - situation - laws have also changed. That's why Nachni artists don't have to bear the hatred and contempt like Dhumris. Socially, people's thinking-consciousness has changed a lot. The social status of artists has become very bearable, but it cannot be said that now no one looks at artists obliquely. Many of the artists are living in families. There is no way to understand, neither a dancer nor a housewife. Their children are or have been sharers of Rasik baba's land-property. Now no dancer can be seen begging. When a Nachani artist dies, she is no longer dragged along with ropes. Such a scene has disappeared from society.

Finally, everyone needs to understand that Manbhum dance artists have some differences from other folk artists. Other folk artists get some honors by displaying their art. But Nachnis can't earn any other way than performing dance songs. They have to depend entirely on it. Fortunately, the West Bengal government is giving an allowance of 1000.00 (one thousand) to the dancers. At the end of the month, that money can be said to be a sure thing, but at present, that money can be said to be little. It is very good if government initiatives and measures are taken so that other artists get the opportunity to exhibit their art in different parts of the country and in other countries. Common people also need to pay close attention to this.

Once upon a time, the Zamindars, the kings used to take the responsibility of feeding the dancers, but who would have it? The financial condition of Nachnis before entering this profession was not good at all. If you do a little research, you can find out that ninety-nine percent of the girls and wives who have come into this profession are almost all the girls and wives of very poor family background. Many times, due to lack of food and clothing, despite working hard, they were forced to leave their homes to get rid of the daily unbearable financial hardships and sufferings, the subsequent financial position of the Nachnis was not at all happy. Not to mention the uncertain earnings in this profession. With so little income, it was difficult to buy or repair dance equipment,

musical instruments. Most of the time, whatever income was available, it did not come to the hands of the Nachnis. She did not have money to spend herself. There was no right to spend freely. Rasik did not give the dancers any right to the property of his house. Many times food was given only if all the household chores were done. Otherwise the food would not have arrived. However, this was not the case for all. The period and environment of becoming a Nachni had changed a lot. Many artists come from ordinary homes. Artists have left their husbands for various reasons other than financial hardship. After becoming Khemti or Bai, one does not have to endure the condition like Dhumri. Their income is also very flexible. It is not at all that you have to fall into financial trouble. Sometimes the income means that the artist can spend as much as she wants. You don't have to work as servants. The children of artists have inherited the ancestral property of many Rasiks.

They get everything they need from Rasik, all their daily needs are fulfilled. But since they get very little money, they don't have their own land, savings. To improve their dancing, they watch movies, they try to learn dance by watching heroines of different movies, and they attach great importance to the fact that more aspects can be added to the dance. Apart from movies, they sing Jhumur songs for their own entertainment.

Every human being spends a lot of money on living, people are worried about meeting the needs of daily necessities, Nachnis are always worried about their living and eating. The way Rasik lives, they live like that, as long as the dancers are young, as long as they are appreciated, they can earn a lot of money, but only with the help of a Rasik. It is as if they have no option without Rasik. So they do not hesitate to be the shelter of the rasik just to stay a little better.

Nachnis make a living by dancing, but in addition to this, they earn their living by farming and performing dances at various events and fairs. In the rainy season a Nachni get 150 rupees from being involved in agriculture. The dancers who are old enough, their sons and daughters work and take care of them, Rasik gets some income. That too is at the expense of the family. In addition to these, a lot of help comes to them from many NGOs at different times, which reach them at the right time. They receive various types of financial assistance. There are also examples where the dancer is no longer alive, so she has to spend his days by begging.

Purulia's society is village-centric and agrarian. The quality of agriculture is again extremely underdeveloped here. Because the soil here is rocky and rainless dry nature along with the mismanagement of irrigation system has helped to lower the quality of agriculture. The economy of rural Purulia is quite naturally plagued by the underdeveloped agricultural system. As a result, apart from agriculture, they resort to various sub-occupations in order to survive. From the point of view of profession and for earning, along with men, women also have to be active. Again, in some special cases, efforts to use women as commodities can also be observed. Apart from this, inhuman issues such as disrespect, humiliation, exploitation of women are seen to happen constantly in different areas of the society. In Purulia's rough terrain, the position of women is not at all pleasant in view of the patriarchal social system. The sad cries of women are constantly heard in various social situations. The true

form of women in the background of Purulia has been captured with effortless skill in the fiction of various writers.

Conclusion:

The present study tries to achieve its only objective which is to understand and examine the socio economic status of the Nachnis of Purulia district who are generally a marginalized girls or women of this district. Nachnis were in great demand for entertainment in the society. The dancing art of Nachni was gradually became pleasure only for a handful of people like landlord and others. Women do not desire or inclined to be a nachni. Mostly nachnis come from lower classes and financially backward classes. Common people do not think highly about nachni. Financial problem leads the women to take up the profession of dancing as a nachni. Dancing performance should be considered an art as well as a tradition. Maximum women of this profession are illiterate. The Government of W.B has been trying to help the nachnis and to revive this art. Dancing of nachni is recognized as a rural folk dance. Common people should come out from the rigid mindedness to revive this folk tradition. To fulfill the study objective, primary anthropological tools and techniques have been used. The study reveals that the Nachnis are in the eve of moving from lower socio economic class to upper lower socio economic class which is an indication that Nachnis are in the progressive path of economic and social growth.

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