

# *A Detailed Analysis Of The Ganjhus Of Jharkhand From Sociological Perspective*

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**Abstract :** *This article aims at providing the much needed data on the subject matter and to present a detailed sociological profile of the Ganjhus-the most neglected dalit community of Jharkhand. This article deals with the social life of the Ganjhus, their family, their way of life, their identity, their social position in the caste society and also social interactions among themselves as seen in the marriage and kinship relations as well as social customs and behavioural patterns. It further deals with the social developmental indices like education, health, status of elderly persons, women and children. This article briefly highlights these aspects of the life of the Ganjhus.*

**Keywords:** *Social identity, caste society, marriage and kinship relations, social developmental indices*

## **Introduction**

Egalitarian society remains a dream. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of inequality. In particular, power and prestige are unequally distributed between individuals and social groups and in many societies. There are also marked differences in the distribution of wealth [1]. Power refers to the degree to which individuals or groups can impose their will on others, with or without their consent. Prestige relates to the amount of esteem or honour associated with social positions, qualities of individuals, and styles of life. Wealth refers to material possessions defined as valuable in particular societies. It may include land, livestock, buildings, and many other forms of property owned by individuals or social groups. Like other socially and economically backward people of this country, the *Ganjhus* of Jharkhand believe in a society in which they are equal to others and have equal opportunities in life. They do not want to be ranked in society in terms of power and prestige; nor would they like to experience the stratification of low social status. They consider themselves as a warrior community which is inferior to none and want to live with dignity, self-respect and self-worth. The present study portrays the social life of the *Ganjhus* in the context of the existing inequalities that prevail in the Indian societies.

## **The Ganjhus - The Low Caste**

The *Ganjhus* are considered as one of the lowest scheduled-caste groups in the caste hierarchy by the upper-castes. Since they are placed under the scheduled-caste group, technically they are *dalits* or even untouchables. In order to understand their social status, we need to look at the caste system itself. The origin of caste and untouchability in India is an ancient phenomenon. Although the *Ganjhus* are placed among the *dalits* as mentioned, they consider themselves as an indigenous group and part of the Hindu society and never count themselves as untouchables. In accordance with the principle of purity and pollution [2] the *Ganjhus* are not considered to be impure as they were not involved in any polluting works. According to the elders of the village Pannanavatanr, the *Ganjhus* enjoyed a status that is equal to the *Kshatriya* group of the Indian caste hierarchy. Traditionally the *Ganjhus* were agriculturists and continue to live on cultivating in their land. Another reason they point out to prove it is that they should not be considered impure, as their ancestors were freedom fighters. They take pride in their ancestors as they mention the names of Bansingh- the great and Nilambar and Pitambar, all three of whom fought the British in Palamau [3]. In accordance with the principle of purity and pollution, some *dalit* groups like the *Chamars* and *Bhuiyas* are considered to be impure because of their eating habits and the nature of their traditional occupations. In the case of the *Ganjhus* these theories are not applicable. The *Ganjhus* are an assimilated or rather a semi-aboriginal tribe [3], who have been put later on the SC list. They were outside the *varna* socio-religious organization but due to the effects of sanskritization they have been put on the SC list [4].

## **Impact of Sanskritization on the Ganjhus**

Sanskritization, a process to ensure upward mobility of individual castes in the caste hierarchy by imbibing the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and style of a high caste, is a well-known phenomenon in India. It is a process through which the upper and lower castes accept and adapt the cultural value system of the so-called high or dominant castes. Though the *Ganjhus* were

affected by the sanskritization phenomenon, it has not led to any significant change in the status of the *Ganjhus*. Although the *Ganjhus*, have adapted some of the customs of the Hindus and started celebrating the Hindu festivals as they are officially known as Hindus, they have not been absorbed into the caste system. For the *Ganjhus*, belonging to the *Kharwar-Bhogta* community is the most important aspect. They are very proud of their *Jati* identity as *Ganjhu* or *Bhogta* and are not bothered about the process of sanskritization or its effects on their lives.

## The Ganjhu Society (Samaj)

The *Ganjhus* have a community of their own which is headed by the *Jeth Rayath*. But according to Singh, a *Ganjhu Panchayat* is headed by a *Mahto* who controls the village *Panchayat* (Singh, 1993). But this is not the situation among the *Ganjhus* of Hazaribag and its neighbouring districts of Jharkhand, where the *Ganjhu Samaj* has its own *Panchayat* and is headed by one of the *Ganjhus*. The decision-making power lies with the *Panchayat*. The *Ganjhu Samaj* believes that they don't get full justice in a village *Panchayat* dominated by the high castes or the middle-caste landowners, shopkeepers and money-lenders.

## The Ganjhu Village

Unlike the other *dalit* groups that have no villages of their own or live at the outskirts of villages, the *Ganjhus* have their own villages, a little far away from the non *dalit* villages. Their villages are close to the jungles and hills. The *Ganjhus* could not recall when and how they were settled in their villages. They live away from other villages not because of untouchability or anything connected with the theory of purity and pollution but wanted to live a free life without being controlled by other caste people.

## Discrimination Against the Ganjhus

The construction of the *Ganjhus* as the so-called low castes by the members of the so-called high castes and being placed in the list of the Scheduled Castes groups has caused them to experience different forms of discrimination.

## Practices of Untouchability

A vast majority of *Ganjhus* (about 63%) indirectly experiences untouchability. Thirty three per cent of them experience untouchability directly. The caste people consider them as *achhut* (untouchables). In social gatherings they are not given an equal place where the Pundits and others sit, but are given a lower place. They are not given meals in the high-caste people's houses nor do the high-caste people accept food from the *Ganjhu* houses. Four per cent of them said that they never experienced untouchability either directly or indirectly. But on the whole the high-caste people consider the *Ganjhus* as untouchables. So in conclusion it is quite clear that externally the attitude of untouchability is not shown, yet internally they do experience the feeling of untouchability. There are two types of discriminations in schools faced by the *Ganjhu* children. The first type of discrimination is the attitude of the teachers. As mentioned earlier most of the *Ganjhu* villages are in isolated places. These villages have either one or two teachers, the majority of them belonging to the upper-castes. They show their indifference to *dalit* children. The teacher says that the *Ganjhu-Bhuiya* children should not be taught; they should be taught to touch the feet of the *Guru*. One of the reasons for many drop-out students among the *Ganjhus* is the indifferent and negative attitude of the teachers towards the *Ganjhu/dalit* students. The second type of discrimination in schools is the way the high-caste people look at the *dalit* children. The attitude of the privileged group of people is that the *dalits* have no right to education. They insult the children by saying that they are dirty children, wearing dirty clothes and going to school. Some of them even ask a question: If all *Bhuiyas* and *Ganjhus* are educated, who will do menial work for them? The teachers too say that it is useless to educate the *Ganjhu* children. As a result, the *Ganjhu* students are all considered to be children of the *Naxalites* and they too will become *Naxalites*.

## Ganjhus' Perception of their Identity

The *Ganjhus'* perceived identity is different from their real identity. Seventy-eight per cent of the *Ganjhus* said that they were tribals. They said that their tribal identity was lost due to various factors. Eighteen per cent of them said that they are *dalits* or *Harijans* as all the government records place them under Scheduled Caste category. Small minorities of four per cent respondents indicate that they were *Rajputs* and belonged to the famous clan of Raja Bansingh and want to be known as a warrior community. Due to different social forces, the presence of the *Naxalites*, the social relations and structures are changing in some

way with the *Ganjhus*. They are gaining some respect from the economically powerful backward classes. It is also noticeable that with regard to commensality, some of the upper-castes and the backward castes join the *Ganjhus* for marriage meals. The *Brahmin pundits* accept eatables from the *Ganjhu* family.

## Alliance and Kinship Among the *Ganjhus*

The family life and the kinship relationships are the most predominant elements of their lives especially their social life. As soon as the *Ganjhu* children turn adolescents, their parents want them to be married off. It is in establishing more families within their own and thus extending their relationships within their own community. The *Ganjhus* have both nuclear as well as joint families. Olden times the *Ganjhus* preferred joint families as it was a big support to the family. But some time after the marriage, the couple, if they want, can live a family of their own, without depending on the other members of the family. But it is a normal custom that the couple remains with their parents till they get a child.

### Marriage

In order to understand the social space, it is important to study the institution of marriage among the *Ganjhus*. The purpose of marriage is for procreation and perpetuation of the family, the clan and the caste. The *Ganjhus* consider marriage as essential for every person of either sex. A substantial percentage (47%) of the *Ganjhus* prefer to marry off their boys at the age of twenty to twenty-two. They said that when the boys reach the age of twenty or twenty-one they should take up responsibilities at home. Marriage is the best way of assigning responsibilities to young boys. Thirty per cent prefer marriage for their boys at the age of 17 to 19 as they consider that between seventeen to nineteen is a good marriageable age. A small percentage (11%) prefers marriage for their boys at the age of 15-16. This could be counted as child marriage. This is an indication that child marriages are still prevalent in the remote areas of our villages.

Monogamy is the rule for the *Ganjhu* however, who is not blessed with children from his wife may be allowed to take a second wife. It is the responsibility of the parents to take initiative and arrange the marriages for their children. *Bhogta* parents select brides and bridegrooms for their sons and daughters and they couldn't think of any other form of marriage other than arranged marriage. When parents think of seeking a bride for their son they set about it by employing some comparatively clever friend or relative from the village to act as an *agua* (leader). He makes enquiries regarding eligible girls, the background of their parents, their family history, with the number of brothers and sisters and the name of clan or *gotra*. When the *agua* finds a suitable girl and the boy's parents (in the absence of their parents' uncle or brother) consider her an eligible match for their boy, the *agua* is asked to negotiate, and make a marriage proposal. Marriage in the same totemic clan is not allowed in *Bhogta Samaj*. It is considered as a sin, productive of dire consequences or inviting calamity to the *Samaj*. The same clan is known as brothers and sisters. They are known as own people and blood relations. Their society does not give sanction to such a marriage. The *Ganjhus* recognize relationship up to three generations and the fourth generation could engage in marital relationship. Divorce is also allowed with social approval and compensation is paid to the aggrieved party. For a proper divorce both the husband and the wife need to agree. They have to inform the village *Panchayat* that they want a divorce. The *Panches* of the two villages sit together for a *Panchayath* meeting for a legally valid divorce. Both the man and woman can marry for second time as per social customs.

### Dowry

The Indian society as a whole is plagued by the evil practice of the dowry system. At the birth of a girl child, the parents begin to worry thinking of the burden of dowry at the marriage of the girl. But the *Ganjhu Samaj* is different. They consider the girl precious and the society demands a small price for the girl which is known as the price of the bride, that is just rupees fifty-one, only. It is to be highly appreciated that there is no dowry system among the *Ganjhus*. No compensation is given except the household articles utensils by the girl's family. If anyone gives any articles other than the utensils then each party has to pay a fine of rupees ten thousand to the *Ganjhu Samaj*. This fine is imposed as a rule in the *Ganjhu Samaj* in order to discourage the existing social evil of the wider society.

## The Ganjhu Family

As in other communities, the family is the basis of social life for the *Ganjhus*. It consists of a man and a woman united together with their children. This is the simplest form of the family but it also exists under mere complex forms such as joint family or extended families. Among the *Ganjhus* there are both nuclear and joint families. The *Ganjhu* family is male-dominated or patriarchal and the leadership is in the hands of the husband. In essence a family is under the rule of the eldest married male. He is the owner and administrator of the family property. When the father or the patriarch dies he is succeeded by his eldest son with the approval of the village *panchayat*, and will inherit the authority and functions enjoyed by his father. This transfer of authority as head of the family is called *pagadi rasm*. In a few cases the women are accepted as the head of the family after the premature death of their husbands. The division of property may take place any time after the death of the father. The wife of a deceased *Ganjhu* receives an equal share of the inheritance if she has sons. She can live with her sons if she so desires. If she has no sons, no property will be allotted to her, but she is allowed to live in the family.

## The Status of Ganjhu Women

*Ganjhu* women enjoy greater freedom compared to women of the so-called high castes. Though the *Ganjhu* community is male-dominated and patriarchal, the position of the women is not a subordinate one. They are also involved in the decision-making processes of the family. *Ganjhu* women are extraordinarily courageous. Whenever the police reach their village, the men escape to the jungles while the women courageously confront the police. They have the strength and courage to stand up to any force that tries to oppress and subjugate them. *Ganjhu* women have an important role in the family and in their society. They work in the field and support the men in earning the daily bread. They are considered to be the main agents for the expansion and continuity of their family and clan as they give birth to children and bring them up for the family and society and teach them the values of life. Apart from the household works and income-generating works, *Ganjhu* women find time to organize themselves under the umbrella of self-help groups (SHG) known as *Mahila Mandal* (MM). Their *Mahila Mandals* are not a registered body but an internal organization of women aiming at women's empowerment. Under the banner of women's self-help groups, they pick up government projects like well projects for drinking-water facilities etc from the block head quarters.

## Literacy and Educational Level of the Ganjhus

Education perhaps is the most important factor for development of human societies. The majority (62%) of them are illiterate and have not been to school. 38% of the *Ganjhu* men are literate which is higher than that of the 2001 census report. A small group, to be precise 10%, had been to school and studied up to class five. They are semi-literate who can write at least their names. Illiteracy among *Ganjhu* women is more than the men as is most prevalent in Indian society. More than three-fourths of the women i.e (78%) are illiterate and have not been to school. The figures below will show the findings in detail.

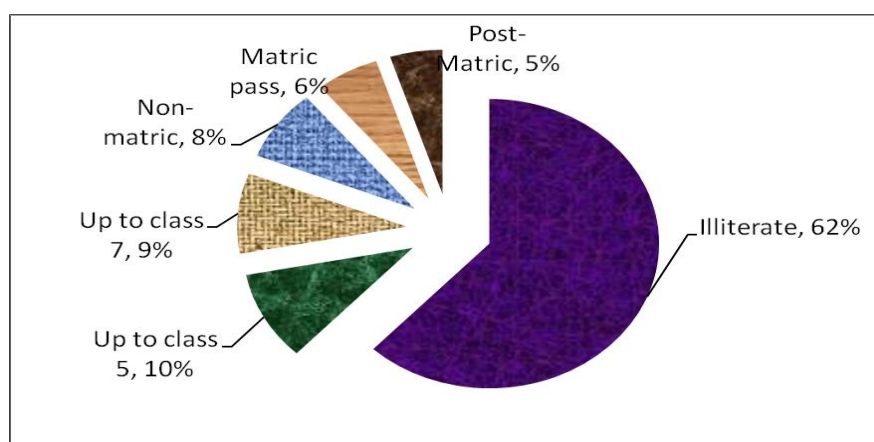
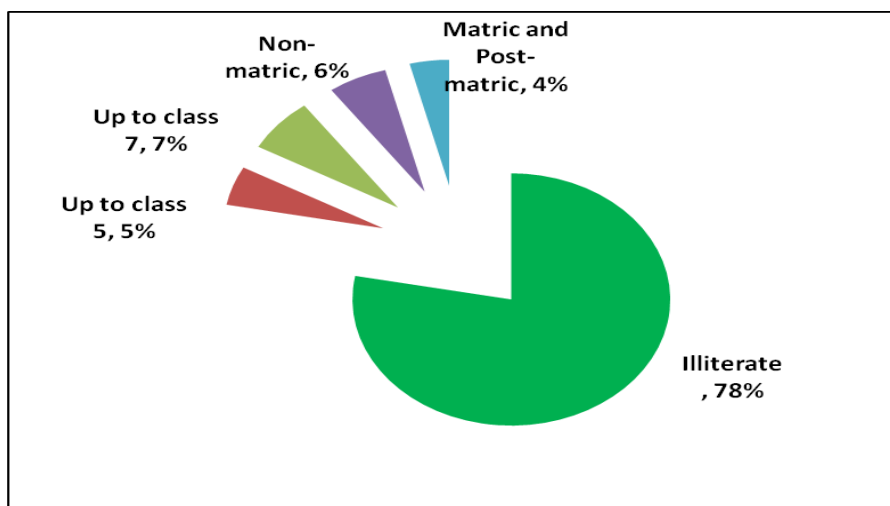


Figure 1 Level of Education of Men



**Figure 2 Level of Education of Women**

However, the educational scenario has changed at present. Almost all *Ganjhu* villages or nearby villages have got government primary schools. In some of these villages some NGOs have put up a number of primary and middle schools to educate the *Ganjhus'* children. The Jharkhand government spends a lot of money for rural education. The Jharkhand government with the help of the villagers appointed para-teachers to teach in the schools. But what they lack is proper motivation, a proper atmosphere, a suitable pedagogy and committed teachers. Most of these schools physically exist but lacking in infrastructure and a conducive environment for learning. These schools have become *Khichadi* schools as mid-day meal is distributed in these schools. The focus of the teachers and the students are on the mid-day meal. As a result the morning time is spend in preparing the the mid-day meal and after the *khichadi* is served, the children go back to their homes. Hence, not much teaching and learning take place in the schools. They need a better environment and a suitable pedagogy that is befitting their village atmosphere and cultural roots.

## Health Condition

Health is connected to their attitude towards life therefore it is an important social development index to map the *Ganjhus* on the social space. The hygienic condition of the *Ganjhu* village is very poor. Sickness makes this even worse. No government health care facilities are available to them in the *Ganjhu* villages. When they go to the Block hospitals, no immediate medical attention and care is available. They depend on herbal medicines to a certain extent at the time of sickness. They keep their houses and surroundings clean. But their domestic animals like cows, buffaloes, goats and pigs are also kept very close to their house. Malaria, various kinds of fevers, typhoid, tuberculosis, and a variety of skin deceases are common among the *Ganjhus*. In a modern society where doctors and hospitals are easily accessible, sickness may not seem to be an unresolved problem. But for the *Ganjhus* it is not so. They are at the mercy of nature, the environment, and the destructive forces like pollution, industrialization, modernization, ecological imbalance, malnutrition due to lack of proper food and drinking-water, lack of health care. All these contribute to their physical ailments. It is pathetic to feel that people dying in remote villages of ordinary sicknesses just because there are no health care facilities. Not only this, since no health-care facilities are available they turn to the local *Ojhas* (sorcerers) for help. These *Ojhas* exploit such situations and extract money for their living.

## Conclusion

This study has surveyed the various social processes and social structures which determine the social status and identity of the *Ganjhus*. Though they seem to be having strong roots in a tribal culture, their assimilation into one of the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy has put them under the scheduled caste group which indirectly puts them under the group of untouchables. The study has discovered that though they belong to the SC group they do not consider themselves as untouchables or outcastes. They have a self-image, self-esteem that does not recognize them as a small *jati*. They could stand up to the might of the influential class whenever they tried to suppress them. This study has also discovered that the *Ganjhus* found the *Naxalites* a lesser evil that helps to check the exploitative forces that are at work in the *Ganjhu* villages. There is a growing awareness of their growing strength, their strong village *panchayat*, their resistance of being branded as anti-socials and *Naxalites*, their political awareness, especially of women

power. The *Ganjhus* cherish possessions like cultivation of land, cattle and children. But crop failures, outbreak of epidemics, mysterious illnesses and multiple natural calamities are great threats for them. This leads them to gradual impoverishment. This is an opportune time for the government to intervene in the problems of the *Ganjhu* society and resume their integral development.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I highly acknowledge the efforts of Dr. Sabbir Ansari, and Sr. Kaslin Juliet for preparing the manuscript and valuable support all throughout.

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