

## Social Position of Temple Artisans: A Case Study of Râha Bengal, 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Abstract:** *The skill of the temple artisans of Bengal is reflected all over Bengal. Their living centre was located in several areas like Bishnupur, Sonamukhi, Senhati, Daspur, Pilsoa, Sochande, Banpas, Mallarpur, Dubrajpur, etc. They are mainly from Sutradhar, who are belonging to the Sudra caste. But all artisans of the temples of Bengal were not Sutradhar, Bagdi and Hari also involved in this activity. The Tentulia and Kasai Bagdi were artisans from hereditary. The artists, despite being of the low cast, deserved a lot of respect for their magnificent work. The term 'Artisans' is used here as large scale which includes architects, masons, sculptors, carpenters, etc., actually, all of them who are involved in temple building activity. Some temple inscriptions of late medieval and nineteenth-century of Bengal and some medieval literary sources like various MaEgal Kâvya, genealogy, the folk story had given some information about their settlement and socio-economic condition.*

**Keywords:** temple artisans, Sutradhar, architects, medieval literary, settlement

Observing the temple inscriptions of Bengal, it is revealed that, some villages of Purba and Paschim Midnapur, Howrah, Hooghly, Purba, and Paschim Burdwan, Bankura, and Birbhum districts were the habitation centers of artisans. *ShyâmchâGd* temple of Malla king Vira Saha Deva at Dharapat of Bishnupur is the oldest temple inscription of Bengal which mentioned the name of artisans. Sri Rama De and Sri Paramanda Sarma were artisans<sup>1</sup>. The inscription mentions that it was built in the 1525 Saka era and 909 Malla era i.e., 1603 AD. Sri Rama De was *Kâminâ*<sup>2</sup> (mason) and Sri Paramananda Sarma was *Vevârtî*<sup>3</sup> (supervisor). This inscription does not mention the address of the artisans. The earliest period of the seventeenth century was not trended to mentioning the details of artisans otherwise maybe the artisans were from the same village or local area therefore they did not fill the necessity of mentioning the address. Generally, inscriptions of the earliest periods did not mention the name of artisans, those generally mentioned the name of patrons or builders or builder families along with the date. Later period, artisans took place on the temple inscriptions along with the patrons.

Bankura district is famous for temple architecture, especially for Bishnupur and Sonamukhi. Thousands of temples are located in the rural and urban areas of the Bankura district. Those temples were must be constructed by a special group of artisans. Inscription of *Shyâmrâi* temple at Bishnupur (1643 AD) of Rangunath Simha had mentioned the name of eight artisans.<sup>4</sup> *Krîshòarâi Jiu* temple at Bagari of Garbeta Police Station, Sri Jadabram Chattopadhyay was the patron and constructed by Sanatan Mistri of Bishnupur.<sup>5</sup> Inscription of *Atchâlâ* temple (1882 AD) of Bera family at Deriyapur under Garbeta police station mentioned Sankardas Mistri was an artisan.<sup>6</sup> The inscription is written in the Bengali language-

*Srisha Ekar Dâsa mistrî krîta Eg  
Birachîta sâEg Bishnupur Sakâbde 1804.*

The meaning of this inscription is, Sri Sankar Das Mistri had built the temple in the 1804 Saka era. His home (*SâEg= SâkîG*) is at Bishnupur. Inscription of a *TulashîmaEch* at the same village of Nandi family mentioned Muchiram Sutradhar of Bishnupur was an artisan. Garbeta and Bishnupur are situated under different districts but Garbeta is not far from Bishnupur, only 25 km away. Artisans of Bishnupur continued their temple building activity up to the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *PaEcha-Ratna* (5 towers) temple at Jogardanga of Garbeta PS is an example. Gabinda Sutradhar of Bishnupur was the artisan of this temple.

Sonamukhi was one of the famous artisans' villages of that time of Bankura district. Ramhari Sutradhar or Hari Sutradhar was renowned artisans of Sonamukhi. He built a *deul* temple in Midnapur city in the 1773 Saka era or 1851 AD.<sup>7</sup> *Pachîe-Ratna* (25 towers) temple of *Shrîdhar Jiu* at Sonamukhi was constructed by Hari Sutradhar. Interestingly, the *Pratâpçûwar* temple at Kalna was built by Pyarikumari, daughter-in-law of Maharaja Tejas Chandra, Ramhari Mistri of Sonamukhi was the artisan. Two inscriptions are found on the wall of this temple. One is in the Sanskrit language and another is in the Bengali language. The last three lines of the Bengali inscription is<sup>8</sup>-

*Mahâma Gdir Girmân Haripriti Harashite Hare dila dâ  
Sakâbda 1771 San 1256 âi Deyul Sonâmukhî  
Nibâsî Srirâmhari Mistrî Girmita.*

The distance between Sonamukhi and Kalna is 112 km. Surely, the artisan of Sonamukhi had a reputation; otherwise, the construction of temples under the royal family was not possible. Ramgopal Mistri was another famous artisan of Sonamukhi, he constructed the *PaEch-Ratna* (5 towers) *Siddeæwar* temple at Shyambazar Palli of Sonamukhi.

Sri Bishnuram Mistri was a famous artisan of Rol village in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He built *Râdhâdâmôdar RâshmaEch* at Shaspur under Indas PS in 1890. He also

reconstructed *Buna Ćeiva* temple at Donganal village in 1903 AD and *Râdhâballava Ĵiu* temple at the same village in 1904 AD.<sup>9</sup>

*Atchâlâ* temple at Bakadaha village was constructed by Srinarayan Mistri in 1846 AD, he built a *Saptadax-Ratna* (17 towers) *RâsamaEch* at Hadalnarayanpur village under Patrasayar PS of Mandal family. Narayan Mistri was the artisan from Balsi village.<sup>10</sup>

Bakhati was another artisan's village of this district. Artisan of Bakhati village, Sri Pulin das Mistri constructed *Râdhâdâmôdar* temple of Laha family at Baital village. Another artisan of Bakhati was Sri Rammohan Mistri. *PaEcha-ratna* temple of god *Raghunâth* of Mukhapadhyay family at Kotolpur village in 1785 AD was built by him. Chief artisan of *Râdhâkânta Ĵiu* temple at Akuli village of Indas Police Station was built Sri Isvari Gan of Valyada. Prof A. K. Bhattacharyya had identified Valyada (*Karigar Sri Isvari Gan sâkim Valyada*) with Bahulara. It is famous for the well-known earliest *deul* temple of Bankura district.

Birbhum district has revealed some habitation centers of temple artisans. *BishEu* temple at Kabilashpur was constructed by artisan Sri Haridasa in 1643 AD but there had no information about the living center of the artisans. Inscription of the temple mentioned that "*Sânâam II Mehâtârî/ Sri Haridasa.*"<sup>11</sup> *Ćeiva* temple of Ganpur under Mohammadbazar PS mentioned the name of artisans along with patrons. Sri Ramanidhi was an artisan who lived at Mallarpur.<sup>12</sup> The Temple of Dubrajpur Hattala was constructed by Gopinath Hari in 1874 AD. *Trayôdas-ratna* (13<sup>th</sup> tower) temple of Nandi Pukur of Dubrajpur was also constructed by Gopinath Hari in 1867. Brajanath Raj and Gopinath Raj of Saota village built *ChaGdîmandap* of Charkal village under Nanoor PS. The inscription mentions that

*"Ai Cha Gdîmandap/  
nirmita Sribrajanâth Râj Ô/  
Srigôpinath Raj Sâ Sâôtâ/  
San1226 Sâl/  
Târikh 13 Aúwin Budhbâr.*"<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly *atchâlâ* temple at Bhotbagan under Malipanchghara PS of Howrah district was constructed by Bhajahari Laskar Raj of Suri (Birbhum district) in 1857.<sup>14</sup> Artisans of Suri was a very good reputation and popularity, otherwise, artisans of Suri did not get the contract to build the temple in Howrah.

Some villages of Burdwan district were habitation centers of artisans but due to lack of inscriptional sources, we cannot extract detailed information about them. Inscription of *Ćeiva* Temple (locally known as *SiAhavâhini*) at Sankari of Khandaghosh in 1762 AD mentioned, Harekrishna Pala was a mason.<sup>15</sup> Goloknath Raj of Banpas had built the *atchâlâ* temple of the Roy

family at Bankhati under Kanksha Police Station in 1817 AD. He also built *the dālān* temple in the same village and same family. *Atchâlâ* temple of Chattopadhyay family of Labpur in Birbhum district, Sri Bangshidhar and Mogaram Raj were artisans, they came from Ketugram village of Burdwan District.<sup>16</sup> Satgachiya, Pilsoya, Sochande were other artisan villages of the Burdwan district.<sup>17</sup>

Only Muragoyar village of Murshidabad district was the artisan's village. Artisans of the temple lived at Ula-Birnagar of Nadia district. The name of the artisans was known from the temple of Bakhrahah and Bawali of Budge Budge PS of 24 Parganas but no information was found about their settlement.<sup>18</sup>

Senhati of Hooghly district was a very famous settlement area of temple artisans. Senhati was under Jahanabad Pargana's from the time of Mughal administration. Present Arambag and adjoining area were under Jahanabad Parganas. A large number of artisans were known from various temple inscriptions of Hooghly, Midnapur, and Howrah districts. *Sitârâm* temple at Goghat was built (patrons) by Sri Brajalal Majhi in 1868 AD. Kartik Chandra Mistri and Mahindanath Mistri were the artisans.<sup>19</sup> *atchâlâ Sitârâm* temple of Alui village of Buiya family was constructed by Ganesh Kundu of Senhati.

After ten years, in 1877 AD. Mahinda Mistri built *SiAhabâhinî* temple at Krishnapur of Goghat PS.<sup>20</sup> Digambar De, Ramkumar De, Mathuramohan Mistri, Tinkari Mistri were other famous artisans of Senhati. Temple inscription of Sarkar Family of Chandrakona gave information about the settlement of temple artisans of Khanakul. Banamali Das and Jadu Mistri were the artisans of Moyal village. Artisan Banamali Das constructed the *Chandrachur Ēiva* temple at Daspur of Howrah district. Temple inscription of Bhagalpur village of (under Kotulpur PS) of Bankura mentioned that Safalyaram Dey was an artisan of Kanpur village. Atpur was another village of temple artisans. Sri Ramgopal Mistri constructed *Biæwæwar* and *Kæwæwar Ēiva* temple of Baruipur village (Udaynarayanpur PS) of Howrah district.<sup>21</sup>

The largest amount of information on the settlement of artisans has been found from various parts of the Midnapur district. Daspur was famous among them. Lodhan Sai, Sri Sarup Mistri, Sri Gopal Chandra De, Sri Haricharan Das, Sri Kalachand Chanda, Sri Thakurdas Sil, Sri Shibnarayan Chanda were well-known artisans. Lodhan Sai built *the Dharmathâkur* temple of Daspur in 1859 AD. *Lakshmijanârdhan* temple at Keshpur was constructed by Sri Gopal Chandra De Mistri. Thakur Das Sil was a famous artisan among them. He built a few numbers of the temple at Daspur, Surathpur, Chakma, Balarampur, Talabandi, etc.

Other famous artisans of Daspur were Sri Harahari Chandra Mistri and Sibnarayan Chanda Mistri.<sup>22</sup> *Atchâlâ Ūiva* temple at Gobindapur of Paskura PS mentioned Sri Uday Chandra Patit was an artisan, who was from Rajhati village. Barada village of Ghatal PS, Nirmalbazar, Khirpai, Lahirganj,

Illambazar, Raghunathbari, and Ramjibanpur village of Chandrakona PS, Habibpur and Toyapara of Midnapu Sadar PS were the settlement of temple artisans.<sup>23</sup>

Saotara, Jhikira, Thalia, and Raychak of Howrah district were the habitation centers of artisans. *Dharmathâkur* temple at Kolkata village (Amta PS) was constructed by Sri Abhaycharan Mistri of Thalia. Sri Ramprasad Mistri of Rautara built *GarchaGdî* temple at Jhikira, Kali temple at Kalyanpur, and temple of Goyespur.

Artist Hrisikesh Mistri and Guiram Sutradhar were from Jhikhira. *Kâshinâth Ūiva* temple at Debipur village was built by Sri Maheschandra Sen Sutradhar of Rautara.<sup>24</sup> He was from Raychak of Howrah district. He also built the *Āiva* temple of the Sarkar family at Chongghurali village of Jagatballavpur PS.

From the inscriptional information, it has been revealed that several villages of Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Hooghly, Howrah, Midnapore, Murshidabad, Nadia, and 24 Parganas were habitation centers of temple artisans. We did not get any information about any artisans of the Purulia district yet. Although, the total list of artisans is not more than a hundred thousand temples were erected in this area. It is simply assumed that lot of artisans were lived in various centers all over Bengal. Survey of Directorate of Archaeology and Museum of West Bengal states that 64 temples of Howrah District, 221 temples of Hooghly district, 702 temples from both Purba and Paschim Burdwan, and 293 from both Midnapore districts are recorded.<sup>25</sup> Construction of these huge number of temples was not possible only by a few artisans a large number of artisans were involved in these works. Census reports of Bengal in 1872 AD gave the information thousands of artisans were lived in every district of Bengal. The Census recorded that, 15973 *Sutradhar* or (Carpenters), 4754 *Kumar* (potters), 1607 *Chunârî* (Lime burner and Sellers), 1455 *SâEkhârî* (Sell cutter) were lived in Burdwan district. In Bankura, 4610 *Sutradhar*, 4518 *Kumar*, 1216 *Chunârî*, 1506 *SâEkhârî* were lived in deferent parts of the district. In Birbhum district, 7747 *Sutradhar*, 7583 *Kumar*, 206 *Chunârî*, and 574 *SâEkhârî* have belonged. 5108 *Sutradhar*, 14872 *Kumar*, 1365 *Chunârî*, 968 *SâEkhârî* were lived at that time in Hooghly and Howrah district together. 10070 *Sutradhar*, 11278 *Kumar*, 1032 *Chunârî*, 422 *SâEkhârî* inhabitants in Murshidabad district. And 70339 *Sutradhar*, 29122 *Kumar*, 645 *Chunârî*, and 1513 *SâEkhârî* were lived in Midnapore districts.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that in Bengal there was no deficit of artisans. But all artisans of this community were not involved in temple building activity, a percent of artisans were involved in this activity.

#### **Various types of artisans involved in temple building activity**

Many kinds of materials were used to build temples in Bengal. Baked bricks, terracotta plaque, wooden door, stone slab, inscriptional stone slab, inscriptional terracotta plaque, and stone idols of God were used generally for

this activity. All these works were not done by a single artisan. It was a group work; we find evidence of this in various temple inscriptions of all over the Bengal. Throwing the ethnographical study on artisans, we know that, before making artistic materials like bricks, terracotta plaques, etc., they verified and checked the quality of raw material, then selected. Already mentioned that artisans from one region had moved to another region for temple constructions. Since many special artisans were associated with this work and they lived in the same places.

Artisans of the temple of Bengal were mainly from the *Sutradahar* Community. From ancient times they were the master of wooden work. The living house of Bengal especially rural Bengal is small and made with wood, bamboo, rice straw, and other soft material. The artist of these houses was *Sutradhar*. We know that the architecture of the temples of Bengal looks like living houses of Bengal, although all features were not similar, there is added some new architectural addition time to time. Carve roof of the thatched house of Bengal imposed on *châlâ*, *bâGglâ*, and *ratna* temple of Bengal.<sup>27</sup> Artisans of the temple and living room were coming from the same community. Later, some of them became experts in the construction of temples.

From that inscriptional evidence, various terms were used for artisans. We know the names of one or more artisans in an inscription and different words have been used to describe them. Inscriptions of *Shyâmchând* temple at Dharapat of Bishnupur mentions that '*Sri Rama De Kâminâ*' and '*Vevârti Sri Paramânanda Sarmâ*'. The text of the inscription is in mixed Sanskrit and Bengali prose. *Kâminâ* is a Bengali word probably being driven from *Karmin*, which means worker. Later period *Kârîgar* was used instead of *Kâminâ*. mid-17<sup>th</sup> century prose '*Manasâ MaEgal*' of Ketakadas Khemananda is mentioned '*Kâmilâ*' although the word has been used for blacksmith generally Khemananda used the term for all kinds of artisans.<sup>28</sup> According to Ashok Kumar Bhattacharyya, the word '*Vevârti*' correct import of this word '*Vevârtta*'<sup>29</sup> draw attention to the Persian word '*Bârtan*' which means supervisor. Odia inscription of *SarvamaEgalâ* temple at Keshiyari also mentioned the term *Vevârtta*. This inscription had mentioned '*Adhdhaksâ*' *Vikala Dâsa* ie., superintendent, *Kâmil* (*Kâminâ*) *Vâsurâma Kinu* ie., mason (*Kârîgar* in Bengali) and '*Karana Hari Dâsa*', he was scribe or writer of the inscription.<sup>30</sup> *BishEu* temple at Kabilaspur mentioned "*Mehâtari Sri Haridâsa*". This is driven by the Persian word *Mustâfir*, meaning artisans.<sup>31</sup> *RâdhâkrishEa* temple at Chandrakona mentioned "*Purânika Sri-Môhana Chakravartî*."<sup>32</sup> He was a master of genealogy and also a historian. *Dâmôdar* temple at Baital also mentioned the name of the supervisor and mason. "*Paricâraka-Sri Dvârikânâtha*", the term *Paricâraka* signifying a superintendent.

*Mrityunjay Eiva* temple at Senhati was built by Tinkari Mistri of Senhati and Sashibhusan Mistri of Daspur but interestingly wooden door of the temple was made by Sripaticharan Mistri of Kharar village. The wooden door

of the *Āsisekhar* temple in the same village was made by Banamali Mistrī.<sup>33</sup> When *Bīūwakarmā* constructed city for *Kālketu* and Temple for *ChaEdī*, *Āiva*, and *BishEu*; *Dārubrahma*, son of *Bīūwakarmā* was carpenter, created a beautiful design on wood.<sup>34</sup> Suitable prose also took an important role in temple inscriptions. Patrons try to inscribe the temple and his family history through the melodic rhythm. *PaEcha-ratna Dāmôdar Jiu* temple at Khelar village of Kharagapur PS had mentioned "*Dāsānudāsa Lekhak Sridurgārām Sāntrā*." He was a prose writer by profession, he had written this rhythmic prose.<sup>35</sup> Very interestingly inscriptional record found from *æikhar deul* of Thupsara village. So, it is sure that prose writers also participated in this work. This inscription is written in the Bengali language. The last four lines of this inscription are-

*Sripitambar Mistrī*  
*Sā Pilsôyā*  
*Naksādār SudhākrishEa*  
*Sā Sôchānde*.

Bengali word *mistrī* means artisan or mason but *naksādār* is a sculpturer of terracotta plaque and designer of temple ornament. A lot of inscriptions mentioned denoting artisans as *mistrī*, *rāj*, *rāj mistrī*, etc. Some temple inscriptions mentioned the name of more than one artisan. The first name mentioned is undoubtedly the chief artisan, who was mainly an architect and supervisor. *Sridhar Jiu* temple at Chakma village of Kharagapur PS mentions Sri Thakurdas Sil and Sri Gopal Chanda.<sup>36</sup> Thakurdas Sil was the superintendent or supervisor of this temple building. *Sitārām deul* of Balarampur was built by Thakurdas Sil and other eight artisans. Thakurdas Sil was chief artisan, under his supervision this temple was constructed. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *deul* temple of Jotkesavpur mentioned Jadunath Sil, and the other 12 artisans built this temple.<sup>37</sup>

Building constations part of *ChaGdī MaEgal* of Mukundaram Chakrabarti, *Manasā MaEgal* of Bijaygupta, *Manasā MaEgal* of Ketakadas Khemananda mentioned *Bīūwakarmā* was supervisor and lot of artisans has worked under him. Story of Bijay Gupta's *Manasā MaEgal* stated that Tarapati, leader of artisans (blacksmith) selected some special artisans among fourteen hundred artisans for making living room of *Behulā* and *LakshAindar*.<sup>38</sup> This story indicated that the supervisor or architect choose the others helper artisans. W. W. Hunter mentioned many occupational groups of Bengal who were involved in the construction of building in his "A Statistical Account of Bengal", those were constructive art contractors, Bricklayers (*Rāj mistrī*), Brickmakers, Brick Dealers, Carpenters, Potters, Stone vendors, Lime burner, Lime dealers, Lime vendors, etc.,<sup>39</sup>

### **Skill of artisans**

It is a matter of great concern how the artisans of medieval temples of Bengal

did such a magnificent job, despite having no traditional engineering institutions. It is no doubt that they learned the skill from generation to generation and also, they did group discussion, that's why we could not find a large number of artisan's habitation centers all over the Bengal. Sometimes artisans of different palaces worked together.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, they had an idea about Indian art, architecture, and ecology; on the other hand, they had a deep knowledge of mythology especially *Râmâyana* and *Mahâbhârata*. Artisans pointed out firstly site-planning and layout total planning of architecture, garden, water reservoir, boundary wall, etc.<sup>41</sup> *Vâstu Sâstra* did not mention various kinds of temples of Bengal, it is mentioned that the *Nâgara* style temple also called *deul* type of temple, is located in Bengal. Artisans of Bengal were skilled in building all kinds of Bengal temples. Artisans of Sonamukhi were well known for the construction of *ratna* temple and terracotta works but they were also expert builders of *deul* temple. Artisans of Daspur, Senhati Bishnupur were skilled in all varieties. But the artisans always tried to construct the most beautiful temple through their best skill. Interestingly the Artisan of Daspur participated directly in the competition of temple construction.<sup>42</sup> Patrons announced the prize for best artisan.

One of the interesting things is that the temples of Surul village of Sarkar family, bricks of the temple have revealed Bengali scripts. Maybe the master-builder of the time instructed the artisans to use these bricks in the right place.<sup>43</sup> Mukul Dey also gave detailed information about the process of temple construction in his book 'Birbhum Terracotta'.

Artisans mainly used lime, dust fired bricks (*chuna* and *surki*) and mixed with raw eggs as plaster material. Brick and terracotta plaque are the main materials to construct the temples of Bengal. Some temples were also built by stone especially the *æikhara* type of temple. Generally, the *ratna* temple was made of brick and decorated with terracotta plaque. We know from various books that, the temple of Bishnupur is the best example of the terracotta temple of Bengal but all temples of Bishnupur were not decorated with terracotta. Some of them were decorated with laterite stone.

The total number of monuments of both Purba and Paschim Burdwan District is 702 marked by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Govt. of West Bengal; out of them, 678 belong from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Terracotta work is displayed on 430 temples. Pictorial note on the terracotta decoration is the story of *Râmâyana*, *Mahâbhârata*, the story of *KrisEa Leela*, the figure of another Puranic deity, social story, animal figure, etc.<sup>44</sup> The Bengali translation of the *Râmâyana* by Krittibas Ojha in 15<sup>th</sup> century AD and the Bengali translation of the *Mahâbhârata* by Kashiram Das in 16<sup>th</sup> century had a special effect on the decoration of the temples. These translations had a great impact on the temple founder, the artisans, and above all the society. So, the temple artisans highlighted the images of the society through the temple decoration.



### Social position and economic conditions of artisans

The artisan community of Bengal was belonging to the *Sûdra* caste. However, *Sûdrâs* were divided into three divisions i) Pure *Sûdra* Caste, ii) Intermediate *Sûdra* Caste and iii) Lower *Sûdra* caste. The artisans were belonging to this Sub-Sudra caste. Among the artisans, some sects were involved in temple construction. Primarily, *Sutradhar* (Carpenter) were dominated temple building activity. The meaning of 'Sutra' is yarn and 'Dhara' is the holder. In Bengal also in India, *Sutradhar* or carpenters were used 'yarn' as measurement tape. This is why they are known as *Sutradhar*. *Sutradhara* belongs in the intermediate *Sûdra* cast. Those are neither esteemed nor despised by the upper caste or upper-class Hindus but they were honored for special work.<sup>45</sup> They are the offspring of a *Karan*<sup>46</sup> father and a *Vaishya* mother.

Indirectly, *Kumar* or *Kumbhakâr* (potter), *SâEkhârî* (Shell cutters), *Chunârî* (lime burners and sellers) brick makers, stonemasons were involved in temple building activity. In Bengal, the total number of pure *Sûdra* Caste is fourteen but originally pure *Sûdra* caste is nine in number, called the *Nabasâks*.<sup>47</sup> Pure *Sûdras* or *Nabasâks* are *Jalachal Sûdra*.<sup>48</sup> *Kumar* and *SâEkhârî* are under pure *Sûdra* caste. *Chunârî* is lower *Sûdra* caste. They are classified as a laboring caste.<sup>49</sup>

The earliest inscriptions of Bengal temples frequently mentioned names and addresses of artisans. In the later period, names and addresses of artisans were largely engraved on temple inscriptions especially from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Artisans of Midnapore, Hooghly, and Howrah used the word '*mistrî*' as their designation and title both. '*Das*' or *Dâsa* is also used as a middle name of artisans mainly Midnapore and Hooghly. Artisans of Bankura, Burdwan, and Birbhum used '*Kârîgar*', as the designation.

Not only was the traditional artisan's community were involved in temple building activity, *Bâgdî* and *Hâi* or *Hârî* community were also involved in this activity. *Trayôdas-ratna* temple of Dubrajpur was built by Sri Nanda Bagdi and Sri Gopinath Ha

i. *Bâgdîs* are a caste of aboriginal descent or semi-Hinduized aborigines. In the Birbhum district, they are divided into some sub-cast which are *Khetrî*, *Kusmetiâ*, *Tentuliâ*, *Trayôdas*, and *Nôdâ*, among them the *Tentuliâ's* rank highest.<sup>50</sup> *Bâgdîs* of Bankura district divides into nine sub-casts: i) *Tentuliâ*, ii) *Kâsâikuliâ*, iii) *Duliâ*, iv) *Ujhâ* or *Ojhâ*, v) *Mâchhuâ* or *Mechô*, vi) *Gulimânjhi*, vii) *Dandamânjhi*, viii) *Kusmetiâ*, ix) *Mallametiâ* or *Matiâ*. *Tentuliâ*<sup>51</sup> and *Kâsâikuliâ*<sup>52</sup> are two groups works as masons. They also prepared lime, which is used with betel leaves and betel nut for chewing by all castes of native Indians.<sup>53</sup> They are at the bottom of the social scale reported by the Birbhum district gazetteer. They were mostly engaged in cultivation, boating, fishing, and labor. But they, specially *Tentuliâ Bâgdî*, were involved in artistic work. *Bâgdîs* is said to be the offspring of *Kalu* father and *Vaisya* mother.<sup>54</sup> *Kalus* is under the lower *Sûdra* caste, the profession of then were oil making and selling. They were classified

as artisans' caste. However, the ranking of *Bâgdîs* is very low in the Hindu hierarchy of caste system but the *Tentuliâ* section held a little higher position thus able to give Ganges water for religious purposes. Maybe it was possible for their artistic activity.

*Hâi* or *Hârî* also belonged to semi aboriginal caste, especially they were swine keepers.<sup>55</sup> They were also involved in scavenging, sweeping, and cultivation.<sup>56</sup> They are divided into four sub-caste i) *Bhuinmâlî*, they are involved in cultivation, ii) *Dâi o Phul Hârî*, who are midwives iii) *Kâhâr Hârî*, they are palanquin bearer and iv) *Mehôter Hârî*, who are Sweeper. Which sub-group of the *Hârî* caste were involved in temple building activity is not clear. Maybe some of them were learned and dedicated themselves to this artistic work. Muslim artisans were involved in temple construction but we did not find any information before the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1890 AD Mistri Sri Panaulla Kazi of Tajpur constructed *Dûrgâ Dâlân* of Jibta village of Kotulpur PS. Another example is, SK Mayjaddin, who built the *æikhara* temple at Karidhya village of Bankura district.<sup>57</sup> We know that artisan of Muslim community is very popular, they have left their artistic impression on mosques, places, etc. maybe they constructed various temples of deferent part of Bengal but before the last quarter of the ninetieth century did not gate inscriptional evidence of temple construction. Probably, Hindu patron was not willing to use Muslim name on their temples from a religious point of view.

They were not economically enough strong. Artisans of that time were not paid a lot for their work, because the work was much less in demand. However the economic condition of the artisans of the temple was better than other artisans because temples were built by royal families, traders, landlords, and zamindar families, simply, rich families. That's why they got a high salary from them. When the economic system of Bengal was highly affected by the famine in 1770 and the crisis of foods reached on highest stage that time also artisans of the temple got and continued their jobs. The temple of Ganpur of Birbhum was built in 1775 AD when Bengal was suffering from famine but the founder of the temple had arranged a job for the artisans. *Dâmôdar Jiu* temple at Khelar village mentioned that, during the famine of 1866 AD paddy rate was very high. 13 *ser*<sup>58</sup> for one rupee, that time also artisans continued their work. Although people of other professions had a hard time finding work artisans of temples got some jobs in that tough situation.

#### Notes and references

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3. The correct word *vevârtta* derives from the Persian word *bartan* which means a leader.
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32. Ibid, p. 80
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35. Tarapada Santra, op.cit., 2020, p. 395
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37. Pranab Kumar Roy, op.cit., 2004, p. 282
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40. *Āiva* temple of Udayganj under Ghatal PS was built by Sasibhusan Mistri of Daspur and Tinkari Mistri of Senhat
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42. Bimal Kumar Dutta, *Bengal Temples*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1975
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44. Pratna Samiksha, op.cit., Vol. 9-12, pp. 262-265
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48. From the hand of those Sudras a Brahmin may receive drinking water without defilements
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51. *Bâgdî* sub-cast *Tentuliâ* is called after tamarind tree or *tentul* tree
52. The sub-cast *Kâsâikuliâ* is named from the Kasai River
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55. W. W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, 1997, p. 46-47
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58. One *ser* approximately 933.10 gram. It was a measuring system in Bengal. *Ser* looks like a bowl, which is made with wickers