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Lost of Civilization Heritage: A Sociological Study of Baghmatian Society, Sheohar

By Dr. Md Ehtesham Akhtar
Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University), India

Introduction- Any river in the world has very high environmental value. The environmental status of any river anywhere in the world indicates environmental status of that region. River Baghmati considered as a holy river for both Hindus and Buddhist in India and Nepal. In Nepal the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works has drafted a bill to form the existing `High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization (http://www.ngoforum.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7105&Itemid=6). During last election in Nepal, issues of river Bagmati were listed in their election manifesto. So many holy temples are situated on the banks of river Baghmati. One ancient temple is also in Sheohar in Dekuli one km away from the bank of river Baghmati. Baghmati River enters Indian territory in Bihar in village Shorwatia in Sitamarhi district, nearly 2.5 Km north of Dheng railway station. Total length of river Baghmati is about 589 Km. It traverses nearly 195 Km in Nepal and rest 394 Km in Bihar.It outfalls in river kosi at Badlaghat in Bihar (http://fmis.bih.nic.in/Riverbasin.html#Bagmati).

The social and cultural practices around the bank of river Baghmati is called Baghmatian society. In Baghmatian society many religious and cultural practices are just because of river and its seasonal flow. It may not be an exaggeration to say that river Baghmati has immense influence in developing the life style of people. In context of Nepal and Bihar Baghmati River not only have environmental value but also have high social, cultural and historical value.

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LOSTOFCIVILIZATIONHERITAGEASOCIOLOGICALSTUDYOFBAGHMATIANSOCIETYSHEOHAR

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Dr. Md Ehtesham Akhtar

I. Introduction

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Methodology: The present study conducted in Sheohar District of Bihar in India. Study is first hand attempt to preserve historical memories of the place for future research. Due to low literacy and high flood affected region no sociologist, historian, researcher and media person attempted to preserve the natural occurrences, cultural and religious practices of the place. For the study participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted. For in-depth interview elderly people of above 75 years of age were selected who born there and never migrated in search of jobs from Baghmatian society to other parts of India and the world. Other section of society selected for study was elite classes, got their education just after independence of India. 117 Villages were chosen for the study out of 207 villages in Sheohar. The data from census 2001 has been taken according to the needs of the study.

The study had covered a broad spectrum of social relations, customs, traditions, of Hindus and Muslims in Baghmatian society. The study also looks into the causes of marginalization of Muslims in post-partition era and attempted to know existing infrastructure and difficulties of the region. It specifically examines discourse of change and continuity of century old traditions, cultural practices and social values.

The study attempted to search available data on Social, Cultural and Religious practices of Sheohar in different libraries of Bihar and also over the internet but nothing available. Thus study rotates towards preservation of cultural and religious practices of Sheohar for knowledge and better research.

II. Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Area: Sheohar

Sheohar District Map

Sheohar is an administrative district in the state of Bihar. Situated around 150 km in the north and east from Patna the capital of Bihar, headquarter of the district is Sheohar and the district is a part of Tirhut Division whether the 2nd majority of Bihar Muslim population exists. Sheohar is connected to the adjoining districts of East Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Sitamarhi by road. The district carved out from Sitamarhi on 06-10-1994. Sheohar occupies an area of 443 Sq.km and has a population of 514,288 (census 2001). The district is mixed population of Hindus and Muslims, no other religion exists there (http://joshuaproject.net/states_

Author : Ph.D from Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University) New Delhi, Pin 110025.
e-mail: ehteshamakhtar786@rediffmail.com

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districts/IN/IN34/IN3403). Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. It is one of the flood affected districts in Bihar, due to over flow of river Baghmati. The appropriate season for tourist are October to March. Dekuli (Dhancoul) is a holy place popular for its ancient temple of Lord Shiva. All types of crops produced. Varieties of rice, wheat, and a number of rabbi crops produced. No railway connectivity with adjoin districts. The nearest airports are Jaiprakash Narayan International Airport, Patna (174 km) and Gaya International Airport, Gaya (244 km). Local Transport of the area is Auto-rickshaws, Cycle-Rickshaws, Tangas, Jeeps and Buses. Locals use bicycles, and motor cycles. Important festivals of the district are: Chaat, Durga Puja, Holi , Eid and Muharram. Sheohar have five blocks- Sheohar, Taryani, Piprahi, Dumri-Katsari and Purnahia .

Table 1 : Demographic Structure of Sheohar (Census 2001)

Total Population	Urban Population	Rural Population	Growth Rate	Density
515961	21262	494699	36.16%	1279

Table 2 : Banks in Sheohar

Lead Bank	Nationalised Bank	Rural Bank	Co-Operative Bank	Land Dev. Bank
Bank of Baroda	10	12	02	01

Table 3 : Administrative Division

Sub-Divison	Block	Police Station	Panchayat	Rev. Village
01	05	05	53	207

Table 4 : Muslim dominated villages in the District

S.No	Name of blocks	Total No of village	Total no of Muslim dominated village	% of Muslim village
1	Dumri Katsari	20	13	65 %
2	Piprarhi	21	11	52.38 %
3	Purnahiya	23	9	39.23 %
4	Sheohar	42	14	30.33 %
5	Tariani	71	29	40.85 %

Sheohar district have 207 villages out of which above 177 villages chosen for the study. The above table shows total number of villages selected for the study in the block and out of which total number of Muslim dominated village in the block. The study find only 76 villages have Muslims domination that is 43 % of total village of the districts.

Table 5 : Schools in the district

Primary School (Hindi)	Primary school (Urdu)	Middle School Hindi	Middle School Urdu	High School Co-Ed and boys	High school (girls)	Madarsa	Sanskrit School	Teacher Training Collage
286	28	84	9	10	2	04	04	01

Table 6 : Male and female literacy

Male population	Female population	Sex ratio	Literate male	Literate Female
273680	242281	885	98775	45669

Table 7 : Literacy Rates 1991-2001 (Bihar & India)In (%age) Census Bihar All India

Years	Bihar			All India		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1991	38.48	52.49	22.89	52.19	64.20	39.19
2001	47.0	59.7	33.1	64.8	75.3	53.7

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Table 8 : Literacy Rates for sheohar and its adjoining Districts Census-2001 (In %age)

Sl.NO	Adjoining district	Total		Male		Female	
		1999	2001	1999	2001	1999	2001
1	Sheohar	26.18	37.01	36.36	45.54	14.34	27.43
2	East- Champaran	27.59	38.14	39.69	50.14	13.69	24.65
3	Sitamarhi	28.49	39.38	39.86	51.02	15.49	26.35
4	Muzaffarpur	36.11	48.15	48.44	60.19	22.33	35.02
Total	Bihar	37.49	47.53	51.37	60.32	21.99	33.57

According to 2001 census Bihar has lowest literacy rate in education that is 47 percent of the country's literacy rate and Sheohar had 37.1%. The conditions of the schools in Sheohar are extremely unsatisfactory. The infrastructure of most of them is in a rundown condition, the basic facilities which are essential for a good school for better functioning are not seen in most of the schools. In most of the schools visited in Muslim dominated villages, the presence of students was less than 50 percent of the enrolled. Sheohar had a total number of 314 Primary schools out of which 28 had primary Urdu schools that's very less for the Muslim population. Out of 93 middle schools only 9 schools are Urdu medium schools that is also less for requirement rate. Most of the Urdu medium schools have shortage of teachers. The basic education which is the right of every citizen of India is not provided by the Government. Teachers are not timely paid by the Government. Due to late payment so many teachers are not in a position to send their children for higher education. Teachers get their salary four or six month late. This is also a new cause of drop out of children from schools and colleges. Late payment may decrease the literacy rate of Sheohar. Lesser number of Muslim students goes for higher education due to the economical backwardness and unawareness about education.

Girls literacy rate are low in comparison to boys .government have provided only two girl's high schools in the Baghmatian society that is also less. In village dominated District where caste system is very rigid, to send young girls out of home is a shame for parent and society. If any young girl is going to school or college no one will be ready to marry her easily. Early girl marriage system are in practice, in such harsh condition more girls school are needed . Even Muslims doesn't feel safe to send their daughter to school and colleges. Anyone who wants to educate their daughter has to send her out of the district, he could not teach her daughter in the same district. He has to send them either to Patna or other places of Bihar and India which is more expensive. The common voice in the area is to educate a girl is tough. The Muslim women in Sheohar are still deprived of many benefits. The muslin leadership should awake itself to this alarming situation and try to arrange the avenues of education to these "poor" women.But one thing which may be clarified here that it is not the "purdah" which is the reason for Muslim women's backwardness in different sphere of life. Lesser number of women wear purdha or vail in Sheohar as compare to the other parts of Bihar that may be .1or .2 percent. To educate more boys and girls school are needed.

III. Muslim Villages and Health Infrastructure

Table 9 : Health Center

District Hospital	Sub-divisional Hospital	Referral Hospital	Primary Health Centre	A P H C	Health sub- Centre
01	01	01	02	07	34

Muslim villages are suffering from lots of problems like health facilities, electricity, drinking water, roads and communication. One of the major issues in Baghmatian society is of health. The above data shows the worst heath facilities available in the districts. Health facilities available from the government are in miserable conditions. All types of health facilities not available in baghmatian society, Sheohar district have only three lady doctors out of 242281 women population. Sheohar have only 34 sub- centers out of 207 villages which is basically for immunization purposes and no one prefer to go there . In all sub-centers Government provide vaccine free of cost but health worker charged 5 rupees each. Vaccines are not monitored by the Government staff frequently. All Muslim dominated villages have less facilities in comparison to Hindu dominated villages. A serious patient has to go to Patna or Muzaffar pur no option in Sheohar . So many serious patients died in Sheohar due to lack of emergency facilities.

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Table 10 : Electricity Available in Blocks

S.No	Name of blocks	Total No of village	Total no of Electricity in village	% of electricity available
1	Dumri Katsari	20	9	45 %
2	Piprarhi	21	14	66.67 %
3	Purnahiya	23	9	39.23 %
4	Sheohar	42	21	50 %

The condition of electricity in Sheohar is worse only few hours of electricity is available. Sometimes weeks pass without electricity if a transformer is burned by electric fault, people have to wait for months for a new transformer. The above data is directly taken from the field, which shows the worst condition of electricity. In purnahia blocks only 39.23 % village have electricity, dumri katsari , tariani and Sheohar also have worst conditions of electricity as per figure shows . Still only 48.59 % villages in Sheohar have electricity. On the other hand electricity poles are seen in few villages but flow of electricity is never seen. One Muslim dominated village named Sugia katsari in Sheohar Block, villagers were using electricity in government record but the village has no single electricity pole. Village is more than 900 years old. Recently a survey was made where the government allowed for electricity poles and wires for sugia katsari village but the contractor started working on the other side where Muslims were less in numbers. All facilities provided by government are given first to Hindu dominated villages and in lastly to Muslim dominated villages. At present some parts of Muslim dominated side of Sugia Katsari village are using electricity. On the other hand almost all villages of Sheohar have a private generator who provides electricity in the evening around 5 hours and charged 80 rupees in a month and allows only two bulbs to use. This is a good business in villages. Roads of all Muslim dominated villages are in Worst condition but these days Government are working to improve the transportation system of the district to connect Sheohar to muzaffarpur hardly 35 to 40 km and takes 5 hours by bus .flood is not only the reason of poor quality of road . Construction of roads is so poor that it cannot work more than a year.

IV. Sheohar, Muslim Society and its Uniqueness

Before going in detail first we should know; how old the Baghmatian civilization is? No one answer suffices the origination of the Baghmatian society.

Around 15 people who were above hundred years of age were interviewed but no one could figure out how old the Babhmatian society is. Nothing is available in the history books of Bihar, India and the world. Not even a single book of history is available on the Baghmatian Civilization in any visited library. Villagers have the opinion that his/ her forefather came from the particular area of Bhiar, but doesn't know the origin of the village, society, religion and culture of Baghmatian society. Baghmatian society is as old as civilization itself. The birth place of Sita, wife of the Hindu lord Rama is around 30 km to 35 km from Sheohar. Despite nearby holy places of Hinduism there is less migration in Baghmatian society. Majority of the migration are in- migration which is easily seen in Sheohar. As it is a backward area in all spheres of life and highly flood prone zone from centuries. Both Hindus and Muslims are co-operative towards each other, both communities have soft corner for each other, sharing each other's happiness and sorrow from centuries.

During the British period Muslims were less in number but economically strong as compare to their Hindus counterparts. Muslim's way of living looks very simple near to sunnah .The Ulema of Baghmatian society have strong influence over Muslims. Majority of Muslims in Sheohar districts belong to the Deobandi – School of thought. Muslim marriages and exchange of goods are very close to sunnah. Non-Islamic practices are exceptionally seen in Baghmatian society for example – lesser number of graveyards are made up of bricks and stones etc. Muslims of the baghmatian society have good faith in their ulemas. Most conflicts within Muslims are solved according to the Islamic teaching within the village by influential people of the village. Besides that Sheohar district have only four Madrasas which are not in a good condition these days. Around 90 % of school teachers in government primary, upper primary, Middle and high School are from the madrasa background. Madrasa educated are more in number in comparison to school educated. Percentage of madrasa going students is increasing in comparison to school going student. All Muslim dominated villages are found well cleaned in comparison to Hindu dominated Villages. Such type of awareness is seldom seen in other Muslim dominated areas of Bihar and other states of India. 95 % Muslims of baghmatian society Comes under BPL (below Poverty line). The practice of biradri and caste system doesn't look rigid in Muslim society. The Dominant caste groups within the Muslim society are Saikh and Rajput amongst the Hindus. But today Rajputs strongly dominate Sheohar both in culture and in numbers. 90 % of the Muslims in

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sheohar live in groups not for fear of Communal conflicts and economic reason but for the safety of their religion and culture. Inter religious marriages is not witnessed. Hindu Muslim conflicts never occurred. During the British period some anti-social element tried to attack on a Muslim village named mahuawa but they could not succeed in their mission to spread hatred and conflict. At their instance approx thirty Hindu villagers gathered to attack the village (Mahuawa) but could not succeed in their mission. Books were published on this issue but today not available in the market or any library of India. Only elderly people quote examples which are around hundred years of age. Muslims started to migrate outside Sheohar after 1985 in search of jobs. 90 % Muslims migrated to metropolitan cities like, Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta. Today the world is changing, society is progressing but the culture of baghmatian society seems intact and static. Both communities share each other happiness and sorrow, respect their religious festivals. But they don't accept the religious and cultural practices of others. Every village has a uniqueness and history in itself.

V. Hindu Muslim Relations: Pre and Post-Partition Scenario

Before and after the partition Sheohar is still a Hindu dominated district of Bihar besides the fact that both Muslims and Hindus have good cultural relations for centuries. Before partition Sheohar was ruled by a king named Sheohar Raja (Sheohar king). The history of Sheohar raja is also not available in any literature. Territory of Sheohar king was not vast. It had limited territorial spread. During Mughal and the British rule Muslims felt more safe according to elderly people of the region.

Before partition all Muslims in Sheohar were highly supportive and influenced by the thought of Muslim league but in the adjoining districts Muslims were highly supportive and influenced by the thought of Indian National congress. Besides that even a single person did not migrate to Bangladesh or Pakistan. People love their birth land and culture. Both Hindus and Muslims are highly religious in practices. They don't belong to atheist and communist ideology. The study observes single person in Sheohar is not an atheist or communist. Indian part of Baghmatian society never experienced the effect of communist thought despite the fact that there is communist ruling state of West Bengal and presence of such groups in nearby state of Nepal. Lot of changes occurred in the world but no drastic change witnessed in Indian landscape of Baghmatian society. Following the major incidents that occurred in the world events like the Partition of India , Demolition of the Babri Masjid , Communal rights in Sitamarhi, WTC attack ,the recent Taj episode in Bombay, wars between India and Pakistan , Emergency during Indira Gandhi's period. After the 9/11 attack the situation of Muslims all over the world changed. Muslims started to feel unsafe within their own territory. No scene of mutual hatred, suspecion and conflict witnessed in the Baghmatian society. Both the communities in the area have no time and reason to fight on the basis of religion and culture. One of the major reasons of their peaceful coexistence is the havoc created by flood conditions of river Baghmati. Perhaps this makes them to cooperate each other and share their grievances in time of need. Even during the British Period all villages of Sheohar districts were controlled by the kings affiliated to their respective religions; (Sheohar Raza and Parsauni raza) One Hindu King and another Muslim King. Buildings of both kings are still available. Both the kings belongs to Sheohar (insider king) by birth. The king never attacked any other king nor tried to capture other regime. Raja had lost his power after partition of India. Before and after partition till 1995 people used wood made wheel cart to go from one place to another. Majority of buildings were made up of bamboo, wood and soil made. Despite of changes happening in the world Baghmatian society is still has so many memories of its old civlisational heritage and intermix culture of Hindus and Muslims. Though there have been some changes, but these do not show a complete rupture between past and present. Present is still deeply rooted in its old heritage.

VI. Work and Workers

Sheohar is a developing district in Bihar. Infrastructure is very poor; Pakka buildings are less in numbers especially in villages. 80 to 90 % populations live under BPL (below Poverty lines). Heavy migration witnessed from Baghmatian society due to unavailability of industries and jobs. Large numbers of people permanently shifted to Delhi and other parts of India. It is found that workers condition are not good in Delhi and other parts of India too. Labour cost consists same in sheohar, Delhi and other metropolitan cities. On the other hand it could be said that migration is a fashion in some ways. Labour class doesn't like to work in his native land and feel shame to work in field in village. But working environment for laborers are found miserable in cities, no respect and proper living conditions are given by the owners of the factory etc in cities. They are misbehaved, badly treated, abused and some time even beaten up by their lords or 'thekedars'. But in villages of Baghmatian society proletariats provide much respect, never abuses, beats and misbehaves. Working hours are flexible, paid in time besides that laborer doesn't prefer to work in native place. In other parts of India like Haryana and western UP women are seen working in the field in large numbers, but in Baghmatian society, women are rarely seen in the field especially Muslim women in Muslim dominated villages.

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At present the area has no beggars, no one begs. Almost fifteen years ago beggars were seen in large numbers. 10 to 12 beggars come daily for begging in a village, sometimes in a group but today no beggars are seen. Almost after three to five months one or two beggars have seen, mostly Hindu beggars, Muslim beggars rarely seen in the area. All have migrated outside baghmatian society or they are in a better position. In a baghmatian society anyone who wants to give some money to a beggar they have to wait for a month or above. Another option is to send that money to Madrasa. The workers working outside the state mostly come to village on a particular occasion. When they return to their village, they spend their money in useless things and after a period of time they finish off their money, take debt on interest and book tickets to come back to their cities and then free themselves from the burden of debt. Most of them don't think about their better future, they don't know how to save money. This is one of the measure reasons to not stop the poverty of the area. I could strongly say that above reason is the main causes of large number of people living below poverty line. The main problem in sheohar is labour problem. Farming is affected due to shortage of labourer, labourers prefer to work in Punjab, Haryana, and other states in the field but doesn't prefer to work in field in his own village and town.

VII. Parrot and Timing: Lost Civilization Heritage

As Haralambos writes in his book Sociology, Man learns his behavior and uses his intelligence, where as animals simply acts on instincts. The regimented society of social instincts such as ant and bees is an object of lesson in order and organization. Every member has clearly defined task in cooperative enterprises. Haralambos quoted the examples of organized order of ant, bees and chimpanzees. Here I want to add one thing new which disappeared from society around 20 years ago that is the parrot arrange mental life style . Parrot lives in a group, thousand and thousand of groups of parrot were seen. One group of parrot consists of more than five hundred parrots in a large group, smaller groups range within 50 to 100. All groups have their own time to reach to their proposed place and leave their job place in time and henceforth reach their place in time. Parrot flies in a row, arrangement of rows looks like an NCC cadets doing parade in an order. All parrot fly at equal distances. They have three to four long horizontal lines and rest smaller vertical lines. By viewing the arrangement pattern of parrot any one can say that some military person have trained them. They had fixed time to leave their places in the morning before sunrise and also fixed time to reach their home places before sunset. parrot fly not silently but by speaking and making noises , people know the time of parrots flying, which group will come first by hearing the sound of parrot . People of Sheohar left his bed in the morning to hear the sound of the group time . I heard some of the elderly people saying wake up for namaz the parrots have started to come. Before sunrise parrots fly in a group, just after sunset parrots stop flying in a group, they fly individually. In the evening one hour before sunset all parrot start to return in his group, before sunset all reach to their places. A farmer could forget his time to come home in time but parrots never.

VIII. Baghmati River: Awar and its Lost Significance

Awar is a local term which was used for fish. In Bagmati river during floods one Variety of fish will come in the same day no other fish will come that day for example - suppose rohu fish is coming today whole day rohu will come no other fish will come that day . Fish started to come in night in large numbers but in the day time their speed slows down fishermen put their nets in the night. Different day have different types of fish coming from time to time in the river. It seems that someone has trained them and fixed his days and time to move. Such types of similar miracles occurred in bani-esrail (Quran quoted). Elderly people recollect that around 90 years ago fishes move in the water and insect flies in the air just above the fish , by viewing the insects people know where the fish is moving that helps the fishermen to pour net in the water . All these miracles disappeared from the society around 20 to 25 years ago.

IX. Language and Identity

As mentioned above Hindus and Muslims are living together for centuries. Both community have their own local dialects .Hindu dialects are known as Hinduana Boli (spoken by Hindus), Muslim dialects are known as Musalmani Bhasa (spoken by Muslims). In Sheohar Sixty villages out of 173 having both Hindu - Muslim community, out of sixty villages 35 are of Muslim dominant population. Baghmatian civilization shows both communities exchanging their goods, participating in sorrow and happiness, sitting together, eating together, working in the same field but never exchanged their local dialects (mathly), no one likes to speak others dialects , both community prefer to speak their own local religious dialects. They never have conflicts on issues like whose language is superior or the best. On the basis of languages they easily trace their religion and community .If we talk about Urdu majority of Indian population knows that Urdu is the language of Muslims but Muslim scholar opine that, Urdu is not only the language of Muslims it is the language of all Indians (Chairman Urdu Academy Delhi). Lots of Hindus and Sikh prefer to speak Urdu, examples

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available in Lucknow and Delhi. No one claim Urdu is the language of Muslims alone. But Muslims and Hindus in Sheohar say proudly that they have their own dialects on the basis of religion .World is changing; languages are merging in one languages to another languages. Lots of local dialects merged in major speaking dialects but effect of changing world and globalization are not seen on the culture and language of baghmatian society. It is surprising that both communities are living together from centuries but not accepting the dialects of others, really it is a miracle. I could say that baghmatian society is the only society in the world where both Hindu and Muslim live together but have separate language.

X. Baghmatian Society: Emerging Disruptions

I found in Urdu literature about the Ganga-Yamuna ki tehjeeb, that shows a particular culture, society and a limited area. Like Ganga-Yamuna Ki tehjeeb I could say that the society of Sheohar is like baghmatian society that also occupies a limited area and a unique culture and society. Hindu Muslim relation looks like brother and sister. Till 1999 baghmatian society was a peaceful society in the world, people having no fear, but today the whole area has gone under the influence of Maoist. Youth joining Maoist and supporting the thought and actions of Maoist. Not only the Hindus are joining the Maoist but Muslims also. General public have started feeling unsafe in the region. Late night no one could travel. Insecurity and unsafe conditions are more prevalent. The word Maowadi (Maoist) is a terrible word for a child and adolescence. No company or organization wants to work in that area due to lack of facilities like electricity, road, market and fear of Maoist etc. In local dialects Baghmatian society is also called Dhab elaqa (Flood effected area) .

The study shows the causes of illiteracy and total failure of governing system in Sheohar; a flood prone region of Bihar. The study went into the details of causes of marginalization of Muslims. It reflects upon the peaceful coexistence of Hindu-Muslim identity and life styles. The firsthand account on the details of the ways of time recording, fishing is recorded. With tools of participant observation and in-depth interviews, the story of the marginalized workers shows the presence of chronic poverty, unemployment and hopelessness in the study area. The study also dwells on the issues of existing infrastructure which shows the plight of the region. It seems that government and the policy making had neglected the region's development and progress.

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