



IJMRD 2015; 2(3): 642-644
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Impact factor: 3.762
Received: 10-03-2015
Accepted: 25-03-2015
E-ISSN: 2349-4182
P-ISSN: 2349-5979

Khokan Kumar Bag
Assistant Professor of Bengali,
Shambhu Nath College,
Labpur, Birbhum

Rural livelihood of eighteenth century's Bengal: In perspectives of *shivayana* by Rameswara Bhattacharya

Khokan Kumar Bag

Abstract

One of the better mediums for collection of historical resources i.e. facts and time is literature. In medieval Bengali literature, the rural lives have been highlighted. It is true that there was no multiplicity in rural life in the so-called society as is found in present globalised era. Actually, that society was too much motionless than the present. But to understand the rural livelihood of medieval Bengal, the study of medieval Bengali literature is very indispensable part. Rameswara Bhattacharya was one of the greatest Bengali poets in 18th century. In 'Shivayana' - a book written by him, God Shiva has been represented as an illiterate-helpless- poor person of rural Bengal in 18th century. In fact, the family and personal life style of Shiva have been highlighted here by which the original picture of rural Bengal livelihood along with the social milieu of that period is known.

Keywords: rural livelihood, Proletariat, poverty, cultivation, lower-middle classes

1. Introduction

"Literature is the mirror of Society"— it is a very customary words. All the societal matters, may it be trivial, smaller, particularly real socio-economic and cultural events are reflected through literature. These pictures and facts are not found in our history books. But, it is very important part to understand the socio-economic lifestyle of people. So, most of materials of ancient history are collected from literatures. In medieval Bengal (12th to 18th centuries), the socio-economic pictures of Bengalis are found in our narrative poems. One of the great narrative poems is *Shivayana* by Rameswara Bhattacharya in earlier 18th century. The rural livelihood of Bengal in 17th and 18th centuries has been highlighted in this book. The actual pictures have been presented through this paper.

Objectives

1. To understand the livelihood of lower class people of medieval Bengal.
2. To establish the Shiva as a representative of lower class people.

Lower Income Group

In view of Karl Marks, working classes of society are 'Proletariat'. **Working class or lower class, labouring class** is a term used in the social sciences and in ordinary conversation to describe those employed in lower tier jobs (as measured by skill, education and lower incomes), often extending to those who are unemployed or otherwise earning below-average incomes. Poverty is a state in which an individual, group, or population lack essential elements of life within their societies. This usually has the connotation of a lack of basic survival items like food, clothing, shelter, and health care, or the financial means to obtain these, but can also mean having less tangible problems like social exclusion, dependency, and the ability to participate in society. Its exact meaning varies considerably with context and the social environments involved.

India's poverty line has always been a matter of huge debate, but it was a discussion mostly confined to economists and policymakers. But the matter has now gone public, following a row about an affidavit from the planning commission to the supreme court of India, in which the official poverty line was set at 26 rupees per person per day in rural areas and 32 rupees in urban areas. This can only be a good thing, because the official attempts to measure poverty are not just arcane, but riddled with contradictions. In addition B.P.L. is a new social group— the government of India, sets poverty line for the upper limit has been arrived at by

Correspondence:

Khokan Kumar Bag
Assistant Professor of Bengali,
Shambhu Nath College,
Labpur, Birbhum

allowing five earning persons in a household with a per capita monthly income of about Rs. 447 per month in the rural areas, which works out roughly to Rs. 2,250 per month per household (<http://www.thehindu.com>, last updated November 13, 2011) But, in 17th & 18th centuries, there was no 'line theory' like present, although there were lower income group people.

Shiva: In pre-Bengali Literature period

At first, we will share with our readers that the Shiva is an oldest God who has been a very popular deity in our society from prehistoric age. In our literatures (both written & unwritten), the Shiva has been found as in multiform. Sometimes, Brahma or Bishnu or Shiva has been described as powerful deities in our ancient literatures. The sole reason of such dominance is for their supremacy in that period. Shiva was the non-Aryan 'Rudra' in Vedas and non-Brahmins in Ramayana-Mahabharata. In Purana, it is found that the Sati was ashamed for marrying Shiva because he was not an Aryan, a topsy-turvy non-Aryan deity. Actually, Shiva is the simple hearted person, he can take poison easily. A purana (Brihddharmapurana) of 12th century said that the Daksha did not agree to bestow his daughter with the Shiva for marriage as Shiva was a non-Aryan deity. Shiva married Sati forcefully (Brihddharmapurana). According to Mahabharata and Puranas, Shiva was a forest dweller. We could not see Shiva as a beggar in Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata. It means that the economy of society was very well at that time. But, as time

passes, the economy of people became weaker perhaps for political reason. We found Shiva as a beggar from the age of Puranas. Therefore, it can be said that Shiva was established as beggar before 8th century in Bengal from which we can guess the rural livelihood in 8th century's Bengal.

The real pictures of the then people are found in some books — these are "Gathasaptasatee" of Haal, (before 8th century) 'Saduktikarnamrita' of Shreedhar Dasa, 'Subhashitaratnakosh' of Bhidyadhar, 'Subhashitamuktawali' of Jahlan, 'Subhashitawali' of Vallabhdev etc. The Shiva was lifted from beggar to farmer in 'Shivagiti' by Vidyapati in 14th century.

Shiva: a representative of rural poor people in 'Shivayana'

One of the greatest books of Shiva-story poem in Bengali is 'Shivayana' written by Rameswara Bhattacharya — a poet of 18th century. In this book, Shiva was of three parts of his life. These are Shiva as a beggar, farmer and conch-shells seller. Shiva was a non-kulin and non-Brahmin in ancient literature, but turned into Kulin Brahmin in 'Shivayana' as well as Medieval Bengali literatures. Bengali parents were helpless for rigid customs like 'Koulinya' and 'Gouridana' in that time. For these reasons, they being compelled by those customs had to execute marriage of their daughter with the poor, uncultured, lazy, old man like Shiva. Under these circumstances, parents tried to solve crisis of their son-in-law's by serving them as 'Gharjamai' (a man who lives in his father-in-law's family) But, Shiva felt in 'Shivayana' that —

Kariya Shyalak Seba

Shwashuranne Thake Jeba

Tahar Jibone Thak Dhik.

Ei Hetu Maheswara

Koilashe Karilo Ghara

Nagare Magiya Khay Bhik. (Chakraborty: 393)

(The life of dwelling in father-in-law's home is hooted. It is better to live in own house or perform begging.)

In this book, Shiva performed begging door to door of poor and lower caste house in rural area. Generally, we did not find any so-called higher caste and middle class people in this book. The practice of begging and its features are clear from the begging of Shiva. At that time, people did not donate any Rupee or Paisa to the beggars as is found today's society. Rather, begging was confined amidst donation of fruits, vegetables and sweets only. Some people gave 'Rice'; somebody gave essential commodities for living like farmer gave variety of melon (Futi, Shasa), the sugarcane, edible herb or creeper (Shak), banana, esculent edible root (Kachu), pumpkin, karalla etc. Those who made sweet (Confectioner) gave sweet drop (Laru), Mudi (a kind of food made by parching rice on hot sand), parched rice with molasses (Murki), Those who made oil gave oil, wife of merchant gave bhang, turmeric, cinnamon, camphor, sandalwood, pepper, opium, asafoetida (Hing), myrobalan (Haritaki), areca-nut etc. Therefore, there was no need for marketing for Shiva. The financial condition of God Shiva was like the B. P. L. category people in our present society. He was the only earning member of his family; all other members were dependent on him. So, there was started quarrel between husband and wife. Poverty was the main cause for quarrel of their family. Gouri asked to her husband Shiva —

Darun Daridra Jeni Debotar Majhe.

Bura Hoiya Bibasana Bulu Kon Laje. (Chakraborty: 402)

(Shiva was the poorest in the deity society. He roam about here and there without proper dresses with other deities but had not shame for that.)

It is real that the alms are not honourable for living. There are two more occupations for common people, cultivation and business except alms. But, businessmen are never honest. Therefore, it was impossible to perform business for two reasons by the Shiva — as Shiva did not have any fund and another is he was not able to cheat. In this connection, Gouri forced Shiva for cultivating the paddy.

Therefore, Shiva tries to bring attention to agriculture. It is fact that the backbone of economy of Bengal is farming. In spite of business and commerce, agriculture was main livelihood of people. According to an ancient manuscript, the cultivation was acceptable by the self-respect person. Because, in business, a huge capital is required and many fake matters and cheating are there. There was no self honour in services and no money in mendicancy (Majumdar: 225).

It is true that the disparity of status between rich and poor group was very clear in that era. There was plenty of money in rich group and other hand, the farmers was too much exploited. The Bengali society has seen the oppression of Zamindar system. The poet Rameswara Bhattacharya was removed by Hemat Sing from his hearth and home.

The women of poor family were not only confined within home work in this era. They also worked in farms, in water for catching fish for their family. The description of catching fish in field by the Durga as “**Bagdini**” confirmed it in “**Shivayana**”. Similarly, from the narration of Shiva as conch-shells, we can understand the livelihood and economic conditions of these castes. Actually, the livelihood of lower and lower-middle classes in medieval Bengal was indistinct and incomplete without Shiva. (Bag: 138)

Conclusion

The real pictures of rural livelihood of poor group of people in 17th and 18th century’s Bengal have been highlighted in this paper. The view is supported from the historical outlook. But, it is not possible to introduce problem solving theories from social science perspective because it is just a narrative one.

Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to Dr. Piyal Basu Roy, Assistant Professor in Geography, Alipurduar College, Jalpaiguri for helps.

Reference:

1. Bag, Khokan Kumar : *Madhyayuger Bangla Sahitye Shivkahini : Upeksheter Katha*, Sudarshan Prakashan, 2012
2. Chakraborty, Panchanan (Ed): *Rameswara Rachanabali*, Bangiya-Sahity- Parishat, 1371.
3. Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra: *Bangla Desher Itihas*, General, 1987.