

A study on ancient & Medi-Eval history of India

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Abstract

The archaeologist's finds do not tell by themselves how the men of some particular period actually lived. To reconstruct that way of life (the whole 'culture') needs comparative study of many different primitive tribes still surviving in out-of-the-way places of this world. Then it gradually becomes clear how a given set of tools was made and used, how the people who made them in the remote past must have lived.

Something can even be said of the social organisation -when social organisation came into being- but with less certainty. The very fact that a primitive tribe in Australia or the interior of Brazil can be studied means that the tribesmen have had some contact with the outside world and eventually with civilisation.

Keywords: civilisation, social, caste

Introduction

Most contemporary savage groups have a social structure which is rigid enough to discourage any innovation, though it is not the same social structure for all. No materialist can afford to neglect the effect of ideas upon social development.

The modern name of the now flourishing cult is Nandi, from a fancied resemblance of the graven stone to Siva's bull. It is easy to point out many more primitive survivals in Indian life. A woman in her courses may not be touched by any male; even accidental contact means that the male must purify himself by a bath and have his clothes washed at once. The woman has to remain in isolation during her period. This menstrual tabu is being destroyed by modern city life.

The Gondhalis are a professional caste of celebrants who specialise in a longcontinued tumultuous dance to their own music and song, for special rustic ceremonies. The name can be traced to the aboriginal Gonds, from whom the performance seems to have been derived before A.D. 1100. The connection is now forgotten. The custom of swinging people by iron or steel hooks suspended from a horizontal ladder (bagad) on top of a post survives in many villages. The privilege of being swung is reserved for a few leading families. The hook is passed under a sash or belt; till the last century (and even now in a very few villages) the hook was actually passed through the muscles of the loin. This looks like an Iron Age custom, and so it may be.

But it can be traced farther back in some localities as a substitute for still earlier human sacrifice. The chosen victim - also a privilege jealously reserved for members of a special clan or two - was treated as a god for a brief period, then beheaded and the head placed on a particular slab before the permanent god. All such work remains the study of superstitions, an exercise in psychology and sociology. The study of the more recondite gods and cults can be taken somewhat deeper.

The bond of production varied, but there was a bond. Caste is class on a primitive level of production. In many cases the bond is simply of peasant families, all related, joining in general agriculture. But many castes were the equivalent of

medieval guilds following specialised professions such as basket-makers, herb-vendors (Vaidu), diggers (Vaddars), fishermen.

Some of these still try to remain in the Middle Ages with the rest of isolated village life. The tribal origins of many such castes is known: e.g. Kaivarta in Bihar and Bengal for 'fisherman', Bhoi in Maharashtra. Totemic features also manifest themselves. Clan villages like that of the Vaji mentioned above are paralleled by others where every original inhabitant has the same surname: Crocodile (Magar), wolf (Landge) peacock (More), the sacred pipal tree (Pimple) speak for themselves.

The first food production on a large scale in India (actually Pakistan) was in the valley of the Indus river, namely West Panjab and Sind. The dates would be 3000-1750 B.C. This could not spread beyond the particular type of land. Then came the real expansion to the east for 1,800 kilometres into the Gangetic basin; this required totally different techniques of food production, accompanied by a new social organisation - caste. That expansion took another thousand years, say to 700 B.C.

Such a diffusion would not have been feasible under primitive conditions without an early stage of the caste system under which the fruits of labour could be expropriated without slavery. The next major thrust, into the peninsula proper, was backed by the highly developed northern society with its advanced techniques; in particular, a recently acquired knowledge of metals. The new territory was far more varied and therefore not to be settled in the same way as the northern. Hence the further development and new function of caste, where the brahmin would write puranas to make aboriginal rites respectable, while the savage chiefs of the tribe would turn into kings and nobles ruling over the tribe. This was really the formation of new classes under external stimulus, whereas the older northern caste system had first developed as a class structure from within the tribe.

Finally, with feudalism, caste performed an administrative function, still keeping the primary producer at work without the use of too much force. Peasants of villages in newly settled

land normally belonged to the same kinship group, as noted above, within a caste that had been a tribe. Land was held by this group. No stranger could enter the community except by consent of the first settlers. A person expelled by the group had literally no place in society, hence the term out-caste. Each such group retained its particular laws and customs. The king, his officials, and their brahmin advisers adjusted disputes between members of different groups, paying the fullest attention to local usage and law.

Disputes within the group were mostly settled by caste or village councils (sabha), as they still are where modern forms of individual property and money have not destroyed the older tradition. Caste division and brahmin cunning kept the country superstitious, helpless in the face of foreign aggression. Nevertheless caste did protect the poor at times even under feudal oppression.

Review of Study

Thackston *et al.* (2010) ^[1] described that any given tendency or institution has a long history before it finally emerges into a recognizable form, and likewise it continues to live in some form even after it seems to have ceased to exist. The line of demarcation between the two periods in the history of northern India because it saw the beginning of the break-up of the Gurjara-Pratihāra Empire, the last great empire of northern India, after which we find a medley of petty states. He himself recognizes 916 A.D. to be a weak dividing line. No doubt, after their disappearance there did not arise any empire in northern India in comparison to that of the Pratihāras, though we cannot ignore the imperial families of the Candellas, Paramāras, Calukyas, etc.

Richards *et al.* (1995) ^[2] described that periodization one can generally have only rough approximation and should not expect to find fixed dates. When, why and how the ancient period ends and the medieval period begins in Indian history is very difficult to say. In many respects the early medieval period prepared the ground for the later period, which basically represents a continuation of tendencies in the earlier one. The one fundamental difference between these two sub-periods is the presence of Muslims as rulers in the later period, and this accounts for most of the apparent differences. The fact that in the early medieval period the Muslims were not the dominant political power has often led scholars to bracket it with the ancient period. The division of sections in the Indian History Congress seems to have been based on this idea.

Annemarie *et al.* (2004) ^[3] described that the advent of Muslims in India is generally seen as marking the end of the ancient period. The text books on ancient Indian history by eminent scholars such as R.D. Banerji, R.C. Majumdar, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and R.S. Tripathi carry the narrative roughly upto A.D. 1200. But this position is based on the British scheme of dividing Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British period that is broadly accepted by the Indian History Congress. In that year Mahmud, son of Sabuktigīn, captured Ghazni. The conquest made by Mahmud led to the ultimate establishment of Muslim rule over Northern India. But it was only with the Mamlūk Sultans of Delhi that Muslim power definitely established itself; for the intervening period of two hundred years the Muslim did not attempt an effective conquest of India to the east of Punjab. If the establishment of Muslim rule is to be treated as ushering the medieval period the dividing line is to be placed towards the close of the

twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. Thus, it was not accepted as the demarcating line between the two periods.

Lisa *et al.* (2012) ^[4] mentioned that the line of demarcation between the first two is by no means easy to fix. There are views of various scholars on the starting point for the medieval which is following: Rapson took the establishment of the Kuṣ ān a dynasty to represent the dividing line between the Ancient and Medieval periods. But this suggestion ignores the fact that the Gupta period, which represents the classical age of ancient Indian culture comes after the Kuṣ ān a. Sir John Marshall and F.J. Richards seek to find in the rise of the Guptas the division between Ancient and Medieval India.

John *et al.* (1993) ^[5] described that a wrong notion about the nature of the Gupta period which, no doubt, was an age of the efflorescence and even of the culmination of some earlier tendencies. But, it does not represent any significant transition from the preceding centuries. V.A. Smith regards the year 647 A.D. as marking an epoch in the history of India. But in recent studies this suggestion has been rejected, for it is based on the misconception that Harṣ a was the last emperor in Indian history and that after the death of Harṣ a everything, including polity and religion, declines. Thus ancient India is divided into two sections, the first upto A.D. 711 and the second from 712 to 1206 A.D. Thus, it is difficult to fix a dead line between the two periods and it becomes more difficult when we intend to find the dead line between the ancient and early medieval India. In the present work the study period acknowledges to the early medieval period from circa 600AD-c.1200AD.

Vanina *et al.* (2012) ^[6] described that the peasant means a tiller of soil to whom the land which he and his family work offers both a home and a living. Various scholars worked on the peasantry in different places and in different era. All of whom use a wide variety of definition and concepts about the peasantry. Some writers have employed the term "peasant" to characterize entire societies. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a peasant as one who lives in the country and works on the land: a countryman, a rustic and peasantry a body of peasants. Webster's International Dictionary describes the peasant as being a class that tills the soil as free landowners or hired labourers.

Research Study

Marxists have more or less consistently used the word in its narrower and rigorous meaning and Andre Beteille also accepted this rigorous definition of peasantry because only in this way one can explore more deeply the relationship between those who work on land they themselves control and those who work on land controlled by others. But he himself admits that in the real world there is frequent and considerable overlap between the two categories.

Coming to the Indian context it seems that the agricultural population of India may be divided into three categories:- (1) Non-cultivating owners and tenure holders, (2) Owner cultivators and cultivating tenants with recognized rights of tenancy, (3) Share-croppers and agricultural labourers. In this strict sense of the term only members of the second category can be called peasants. But peasantry in India had always merged with the non-working landowners at one and the landless agricultural workers at the others.

The term „peasant“ is one of those major indispensable, useful and therefore imprecise and hard to define words like

capitalism and socialism. No practical definition of the term "peasantry" is possible there are as many definitions of this term as there are scholars who have worked or still working on this subjects. Its contents are primarily economic in nature but as with the other two terms certain sociological associations or be implication are very strong and some ideological attachment appear to be indissoluble.

Peasantry, in fact, is a prejudicial word – people tend to have fixed ideas which they hold uncritically about what constitute a peasant and a great deal of confusion is created by seeking to establish an unnatural degree of precision for this convenient and general but inexact term. The problem of definition, which cannot be wholly avoided, can however be reduced to manageable proportion and almost circumvented by first considering the different but not unrelated contents within which the word is most frequently used.

The study of peasantry in the context of socio-economy development in ancient India has remained almost a neglected field so far. In agrarian societies, the key figure in the basic subsistence economy is always the peasants. There is a general denial on the part of the modern scholars to treat the peasant as an independent category. There is hardly any agreement even among sociologists and social anthropologists about the meanings attached to such terms as „peasant society“, „peasant communities“, „peasant culture“ etc.

All time they recognize peasant society as a residual category putting together all kind of societies, which is neither manifestly „tribal“ nor explicitly „industrial“. Some have equated the peasantry with the rural society itself.

Raymond firth seems to accepts this broader concept by implying that the peasant category will include in addition to the tiller of soil, all those who live by the various forms of labour which are associated with the community of tillers.

Eric Wolf defines peasants as rural cultivators whose surplus are transferred to a dominant groups of rulers that use the surplus both to maintain their own standard of living and to distribute the remainder among group in society that do not form but must be fed for their goods and special services in term.

Robert Redfield places the peasants in rational opposition to „an elite of the manor, town and city“ implying their low status in social herarchy. T. Shanin, who use the terms „peasantry“ „peasant community“ and „peasant society“ loosely to views the relationship between the peasants and non-peasants as one between „villagers“ and „non-villagers“.

For Redfield, the latter group is an elite of manor, town or city, whereas for Shanin, they are the outsiders who subjects the peasants to domination. In the analysis of Russian peasantry .V.I. Lanin, stratified it into Kuluk, Stredniak and Bedniak i.e. rich, middle and poor peasant respectively.

This obvious cleavage within the peasantry undermines the idea of its being a homogeneous category and the peasant's subjection to dominate by outsiders alone. W.H. Moreland, defines peasant as a man who, whatever the incidents of tenure may be, cultivates a holdings entirely or mainly by his family labour.

An almost similar definition is giving by Irfan Habib, when he states that peasant is a person who undertakes agriculture on his own implements and using the labour of his family. Both of them ignore the factor of land control while defining the peasant. In terms of the control and use of land, the peasantry

may be differentiated into the non-cultivating land- owners, peasant proprietors, share croppers and landless laborers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As India has been primarily agriculture based country the peasants have been playing a vital role in the history of land. In a more specific way we cannot think of agriculture without peasants and vice-versa. The earliest known civilization had developed system of agriculture in this country well testified by the reports of the archeological excavations which have brought to light many important facts of the early economic history.

The peasantry might have been originated in prehistoric period. Although, it cannot be said anything clearly regarding its origin in India. The stage at which peasants originate within a society must naturally arrive only after agriculture is established as a major provider of food. The primitive people might have spent the large part of its labour time on the cultivation of plants and harvesting of seeds.

In this process not only the food gatherers (mainly hunters) turn into producers but also the monogamistic family itself evolves as a basic unit of social organization. It has been argued that megalithic communities like those of Chopni-Mando among the Vindhyan foot hills who consumed wild rice belonged to the pre-history of agriculture.

Domesticated plants came with the Neolithic revolution and two zones where crops were raised have been identified within India. The first is the Bolan Valley itself where grains of cultivated rice and bones of domesticated cattle and sheep-goat have been found within the period B.C.6500 to 4500. The second zone is that of Kachi plain south of Bolan-pass--an arid area. Here at Mehargarh (6th to 3 rd millennium BC) the remains of barley and wheat of three varieties have been found. The lowest level gives bones of wild animal's only.

The Indus culture then not only gave India its first cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, but also gave its first peasantry. The Aryans came to India as semi nomadic people with a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy in which cattle rearing played a predominant role. Scholars are of the opinion that the main occupation of the Rgvedic people was cattle rearing and it was the chief sources of their livelihood.

The Dharmasutras also laid down that the ruler and people should construct tanks and canals for irrigation. However, the irrigational needs were not fulfilled and the peasants broadly depended on the rain for irrigation of their fields. And in case of the failing rainy season the peasants had to face many problems.

Conclusion

It is a transitional phase of Indian history wherein changes in almost all institutions as mentioned in beginning of the study such as polity, social, cultural as well as economy took place. Moreover, the growing regional identities in art, script, language and the concepts of pūjā, bhaktī and tantrā in religious sphere were the significant developments which separated it from the ancient period. However, being agrarian nature of the economy and its predominance on all aspects of society the study of peasant communities or of peasantry becomes worth studying.

And its significance lies with not only to historians but sociologists, anthropologists, economists and other scholars

today as well. The word peasant has been described in the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary as a countryman: a rustic; one whose occupation is rural labour; and peasantry as a body of peasants or tillers of soil; rustic: labourer.

Animal husbandry was another important and inevitable occupation of the cultivators as it was supplement to the agricultural process. Buddhist ideology on non-injury to living being and reaction against Vedic sacrifices decisively helped to protect the cattle wealth, which was indispensable for the progress of agriculture.

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