

DELINEATING PEASANT CULTURE AND THEIR TECHNOLOGIES [200-600CE]**Birendra Kumar**

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EXCERPTS:

This paper /article is tended to delve into details of the peasant culture and the development of different technologies particularly the agricultural one resulting in the expansion of cultivable land and acceleration of cultivation of food items or the cereals between the 200-600 CE. By exemplifying important treatises like Dharma shastras, Arthashastra and Kamasutra and other archaeological sources, the researcher substantiates two types of developments during this period—acceleration in the process of urbanization in the vicinity of the Centre or near the abode of the political authority by breaking the shackles of Brahmanical values while in the villages peasants found constrained to do away with the Brahmanical values. These types of developments have also been described by the Greek traveler Strabo and in the Jataka stories which mentions different types of cereals like rice, wheat, barley, lentil, meat, fish, clove, different variants of clothes etc. While in the magnum opus of Kalidas, it was described how the Vidushak shows how the food for the common masses were differentiated to that of the elites. In the peasant culture of the early times of India not only sweets or puddings were served but also dissension or the peasant's rebellions appeared in the context of issuance of excessive land grants and the transfer of not only the villages but also the villagers.

KEY-WORDS: Bhumichhidanya, Agrahara, Langul, Ambrosia, Kalma, Vidushak, Dukus, Anshuk, Utariya

By just telling peasant culture, we get an expression of such a culture which is connected with village. Peasants are important element of social structure. Historians have been lacking in trend to see peasant separately from, village community. The nature of ancient literary sources, being noble, there is hindrance in studies related to peasants. In traditional Brahmana literature, attempts have been made to see villages and towns separately. For example, the first three categories of Brahmin books, Dharmasatra, Arthasastra and Kamasutra can be seen. First category of books Dharma sutra and Smriti literature while pleading for rural life go to the extent of saying that only in rural atmosphere a man while living pure, dean, honest, and peaceful life can comply with his religion. On the other hand, Arthasastra written by Kautilya and Kamasutra written by Vats Ayana are books

supporting another type of ideology? From Arthasastra, we get to know only about town-centric things about rural organizations. We know nothing Vatsyayana goes one step further still and say in clear words that in order to lead a worth living, town is the only appropriate place. Similar opinions have been expressed from the works of Kalidas and Bhasa.

Thus, in order to know the ancient stage of peasant society, the study of ancient India and ancient Sanskrit literature is necessary: whereas the case of Dharma sastras are concerned, though it is supportive of villages, it has neither attempted to understand rural peasant organization nor has made efforts to carve out a clear picture of the same. From this point of view, these too are in shape similarly noble and separate from peasant community as much is important books of the other ideology in Arthasastra and Kamasutra are concerned. Though in these two sources, village and towns have been described as two different forms of culture, whereas rural culture was a culture directed by miracle of religion therein the culture of towns had negligible religious impact. General specialty of rural culture was religion. This entirely depended on religion, whereas town culture in the views of traditionalists was non-religious because town folks did not have any regards for Brahmanical values. To enrage the traditionalists, it was enough therefore a sense of hatred developed in them towards the society of towns. On the other hand, it was impossible for the rural peasants living in villages to challenge religion and Brahmanical values.

Therefore, in order to study peasant culture in ancient India, it is very much important to understand religion, because it is religion and religious values which are used to exploit the peasants and landless laborer to the maximum possible extent.

During this period, religion was inseparably linked to peasant culture. From ancient times itself, agricultural work was related to God and thus was made pious work from ancient times only Rudra has been described as the god of forest, farm and land in ancient religious literature and it has been told that he lives inside the earth. Besides this “Langul” and ‘Linga “have been used for plough and panis respectively which convey the same meaning. Since Linga was linked with Shaivism, therefore, it was supposed that Shiva was the god connected to the growth of plants. According to Megasthenese, in ancient times Indians were vagabonds. They did not do farming till Dionysus came and taught them ploughing and sowing, it was Greek God only who taught (hem yoking bull in ploughs. In ancient tales of Greece Krishi (agriculture) has been combined with agricultural ritual of Dionysius who can be compared with rural Shiva as holding plough in hand Shankarshan or Baldev which has been described in the epic book, when Shankarshan was combined with another gods of production i.e., Vasudev or Vishnu thereafter in various parts of the

country peasants started worshipping Vishnu and Shiva. From Arthashastra, we come to know that before sowing a handful of grain with a piece of gold, it was washed in water and sown first of all chanting. I salute Prajapati Kashyap. Let agriculture develop and goddesses live in seed and property. It is worth mentioning here that later on Kashyap was linked with Vishnu who is worshipped as the highest god and controller of the universe. This also indicates that later on Ram, who was identified with Vishnu and his wife Sita on whom fertility of soil was assumed to depend. In the same way, the left side of the statue of Ardhanareeshwar a obtained from Mathura was identified as wife of lord Shiva by their worshippers. Strabo says that Indians worshipped Jew Ambrosias (like rain). This Greek god can be identified with the god of clouds Indra described in Indian books. Peasants also worshiped bulls and other animals useful in agriculture. For increase in crop production sacrifices were performed. Classical writers have mentioned that in the beginning of every year the king convened a meeting of the religious philosophers to increase wealth in the form of grain and cattle from Buddhist literature also it is known that peasants used to contact learned Brahmins in order to know how to use new agricultural implements. For ploughing fields and sowing, an auspicious date and time was selected by astrologers in one Jatakas, a Brahmin says today is my ploughing festival. So, we consider earth or soil, cattle, and other related tools for cultivation were objects of religious or semi-religious importance. During this period, peasant culture was inseparably linked with religion and religious karma and (rituals). Truth is that even today Indian peasants are linked with religion and religious-type of activities in the same way. But this religious nature of the peasants in those days became the basis of their exploitation; Inseparable parts of peasant culture were, in those days, their food and drinking habits, their clothes and dressing instruments used by them for entertainment etc.

Through various literary sources, the description of food items that we produce are barley, rice, kalma varieties of paddy and molasses, gandika varieties of sugar, and their sweets, sweets milk, and butter, ghee, curd, kheer, pudding, money, various types of meat, fish, chilly, cardamom, long dove, various types of spices, salt and sweet mango like innumerable fruits.

During these days' barley, wheat and rice were the main food crops of rural people. Sugarcane and ghee were prepared from sugarcane and milk and many types of modaks were made by sugar. In dramas written by Kalidas, the diet in which interest is shown by Vidushakas shows the kinds of food in which common masses were interested. At a time, Vidushakas says that his stomach is burning like the pan of a sweet-maker on fire. It can be said on the basis of this statement that varieties of sweets, food items etc. were regularly being made on the stalls of sweet-makers then only his par can remain burning always.

Despite the influence of Buddhism and Vaishnavism, non-vegetarian food items were also popular amongst masses. Besides this, vegetarian foods were certainly popular and barley, wheat and rice were common food grains. There are several types of rice like shali, kalam and nivar. Because of large number of cows, milk, butter ghee and curd were available to the people. During (those days, cow-worship was a part of peasant culture because bullocks used for ploughing fields and cow-milk is used for making curd, butter and ghee and other food items in various forms. In cooking food use of spices were very common. At least we can find there is a dear indication of using spices like cardamom, lavang (dove) and chilly etc. Another important item in salt of modern age was known to the people of that age also and it must have been used along with other spices in preparing food. Even in those days welcoming the guests is an inseparable part of Indian rural or peasant culture.

Despite influence of Vaishnavism and Buddhist religion, people of that era used the food items like meat and fish as these items had acquired main place. It seems that meat was obtained not only from hunted animals but also it obtained from slaughtering animals as there were slaughter houses was regularly in function where meat of pet animals were easily available. Fish was also enlisted in the diet of common masses. In this context, the statement of Fa-Hien proved that people did not domesticate pigs and chickens and they did not sale animals. There were no slaughtering shops nor there were liquor shops present. Because the great traveler Fa-Hien saw the things in the perspective of the Buddhist religion. Almost towards the end of that age Huan Tsang wrote that people ate bread and rice and other grains with milk and sugar and other preparations made of these items and also, they used mustard oil. Besides these, the meat of goat and sheep is also taken at that time. Some meats were also prohibited and practicing of consuming liquor was a common thing.

Several types of clothes were popular among the people of that age. Besides cotton, silk and woolen clothes were also in use. Dukus, Anshuk, Uttariya, Ushmish, Stananshuk Stanapatta names indicate that during this age stitched clothes were very rarely used. One cloth was used to cover the lower portion of the body and another was used to cover the upper portion of the body. Men were found of wearing beautiful garments. They wore, white milky and colored dresses also. Amongst colors blue, red, saffron, green, kusumbhi and Kumkum were in use generally by the common people.

In order to remove monotony of busy life common people used various instruments of entertainment. People of that age believed that entertainment was a means to double the capacity of life and working capacity. They used dramas, gambling, bull fight, story-telling, social function music dance as means of entertainment.

Drama houses (theatres) were born in that age. This was the age of development and

climax of cultural dramas of Kalidas. There were dramas houses we got its enough evidence in literature. Dramas of that age were the best means of entertainment at the same time they reined the cultural interest in the society and also highlighted the bright side of spirituality. Enacting dramas used to be through the medium of dance playing musical instruments and singing. In social functions people participated in collectively and enjoyed it. On the occasion of any festival or function all the varnas and classes people participated and enjoyed equally and devotedly. Another aspect was seen on the occasion of social function whether the people from high and low, poor and rich, educated. and uneducated, Brahmin and Shudras all were participated with full zest by shedding their emotional differences.

From the above discussions we should not understand that peasants were leading very happy and contented life during that period. Factually, the situation was just opposite. The magnitude of land donations and the rise of the middlemen led them imposition of excessive taxes which made their lives miserable. Therefore, against contemporary system, the attitude of peasants became revolting due to indifferent and inhuman approach of tax collect or sand such type of inferences could be seen from the literary sources. In Jataka books such rebellious attitude of the peasants is presented through Smritis, symbols and medium of stories. Peasant community secretly opposed those who captured most of their produce.

A common form of peasant's opposition can be traced when most of the unhappy lots migrated to another country. If the nature of rules became exploitative and unbearable peasants left their lands and houses to run away to some other places and settled there. In such situation, when shifting was not possible though they lived there they delayed in payment of taxes or denied such payment. Thus, running away was a threat against revenue. Against revenue exploitation this was not only done by house-holders, rather artisans and slaves also did the same. There was mentioned of a story that a peasant disturbed by the interest on loan migrated to another land where he could live in peace.

Jataka books made it dear that another method of showing discontent by the peasants was to stop roads and disturb communication. Through these sources, it is clear that the payment of wages was made either in cash or in grains. In ancient India due to increase in money circulation and marketisation, it had become easier to purchase labor of a worker which resulted in fastest growth of working-class system. It is mentioned in a Jataka that a trader fixed at 200 coins per cent for carts for five carts with a worker but on the conclusion of the work he paid 500 coins at the rate of 100 coins per cart. Therefore, as a revolt the worker kept the road blocked until he was paid the balance amount that was fixed. Peasant is anger and discontentment is also reflected in other Jataka stories 43.

Another method of the workers revolt was also the use of indecent language and

foul language. This language is different from the languages of others. They have their own languages and own phrases and proverbs which is to express resistance against oppressive relations of the exploiters. Due to this in a village- a ploughman and his master, an old woman, boys and all in as much as frogs even are heard cursing the king, this is mentioned. A cursing word is a word born out of pain and trouble there is an example of a householder beating a plough man and his wife, because they were cutting fun of his voice. In some Jatakas, there is also mention of wordless expressions as protest these all symbols show protest of their own condition which was prevalent at that time. Protesting can be seen in another method in the form of thefts and robberies committed by the peasants.

Evidences of these are mentioned in the Jatakas. It is described in nearly twenty-five Jatakas. During post-Vedic period, the king and some individual land-owners together took a vast population of a huge proportion within the net of their exploitation and compelled them to sell their labor for their livelihood. Getting ruined thereby some people accepted theft and robbery as their profession. According to Jataka, due to severe famine, the oppressed and suppressed people unable to earn their livelihood so they were resorted to theft and robbery as their main source of livelihood. Moreover, drought, famine and the escalation of high prices gave birth to such factors due to which incidents of robbery increased. By the collected evidence, it is clear that mostly took shelter in jungles they attacked the caravans of landowners and traders of the towns and robbed them. It is mentioned in Jataka that rather than earning livelihood from agriculture and trade, a man gathered five hundred robbers and became their leader. In another Jataka book, it has been told in 2-3 encounters with them soldier used to write a letter to the king to inform him that they are unable to suppress them. The king then launched attack against them to suppress them. That proves that such type of activities like theft and robbery was organized in the form of social unrest and protest at its initial form.

The boarder rebellions mentioned in the Jatakas should be seen as peasants' revolts. Near twenty Jatakas mention such rebellions some of such rebellions were as a result of political enmity which were pointers to the fact that the geographical borders of the states in those days were not settled in a proper way. In three Jatakas, it is mentioned that people running away to boarder rebutted areas for their livelihood to escape from the clutches of cruel form of revenue system, famine and conspiracies scripted by the king. It is written in one Jataka that the fact of Boddhisatva was burnt twice which was located on border and also, they destroyed the seeds of the villagers. All these make it dear that due to over exploitation of peasants such type of machinery was active. In such a situation, the only away left for the peasants was to protest against these inhuman activities of the state.

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