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Changing Pattern of Urban Society of the Punjab under the sultans of Delhi

Dr. Sunil Sharma
Assistant Professor
Govt. College, Gharunada

Abstract:

The present study deals with the emergence of a new pattern of urban society of Punjab during 13th to 15th century. As western historians has put stress upon the unchanging pattern of orient societies while Indian scholars accepted the changes with the advent of Turks invaders. The changes occurred at large scale that some scholars called it revolution. With the conquest of theTurk invaders the people immigrated from central Asia and settled in the Punjab region. The migrated people belongs to urban culture which further promote the process of urbanization in the Punjab and a new social composition has emerged in the region that was quite different from existing one.

Contemporary as well as near contemporary sources relating to the 13th and 14th centuries provide numerous references to the changing pattern of urban society and culture. However, the British administrators who wrote on Indian history often postulated the theory of "unchanging orient societies."[1] This concept was widely accepted by other western scholars. They would have us believe that western rule or colonialism was something that was necessary to shake these countries out of their long slumber or to bring the change at least to a minimum level in these static societies.[2]Henry Elliot in the introduction to '*The History of India as Told by its own Historians'* puts forward rather superficial understanding of oriental societies. He said that in oriental societies one does not find "the vicissitudes of institutions, social, political and religious." As far Elliot was concerned, oriental history was nothing but "the monotony of successive conspiracies, revolts, intrigues, murders, fratricides and rise and fall of dynasties." [3] Karl Marx often quoted India as a place "unresisting and unchanging."[4] Stuart Piggot said about the unchanging institutions and material culture of India, "we do not find and should not look

for an inherent element of progress in Indian history. No organic evolution of institutions to changing human needs, no development of material culture nor gradual spread of higher standard of living to a constantly increasing proportion of the inhabitants."[5] The Indian historians of post-independent era effectively contested the concept of static and unchanging societies. Satish Chander argued that 'unchanging orient" is changing rapidly and had changed but it does not mean that this change is sudden. The earlier belief was based on the perception and interest of colonial powers.[6] As far as the period under reference is concerned, Indian scholars rejected the concept of "unchanging orient." D.D. Kosambi considered that the Indian society was static before the arrival of Muslim intruders but he does not tune with the Marx's analysis of India's social structure as being essentially an unchanging one. He depicted the Islamic raiders in India as an instrument of breaking down the hidebound customs already prevalent in Indian society in the form of feudalism, thus, paved the way for "the adoption and transmission of new technique." [7] Muhammad Habib coined a new term "Revolution" to denote the social and economic changes both in the rural and urban sectors. He observed that the invasion of the Ghorian Turks brought about a great social and economic revolution because the industrial and social forces in country had been prepared for the centuries but the caste system and *Thakur* regime prevented these forces to operate. The external pressure of Turkish invasions broke the regime and liberated the forces. He opined that *"the so- called Ghorian conquest of India was really a revolution of Indian city-labour led by the Ghorian Turks."*[8]

IrfanHabib also accepted changes in social and economic set-up but saw these changes as a part of social and economic process not as a revolution:

> What the Sultanate brought about, was not a social revolution but the creation of new system of agrarian exploitation with parasitical urban growth based upon it. It united political and economic forces stronger than even before and vesting the control over the bulk of surplus in the hands of ruling class whose individual member remained unattached to any particular parcel of land. The cash nexus, the growth of town and commerce belied these appearances and a large volume of urban production was a characteristic feature of the new system. In lieu of, a

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proper technical name to designate the economic organization established under the Sultanate as Indian medieval economy.[9]

NarulHasan pointed out that India is a large country with considerable variations in its different regions. There is existence of major differences as diversities with remarkable unity in the broad pattern of socio-economic development, cultural and administrative institutions. The understanding of the significant trends of historical change in the country would remain sadly incomplete unless the details are studied at the regional level.[10] To understand the phenomenon of social change in proper sense, it is imperative to study a region like the Punjab in the context of country as a whole. This region not only played an important part in the history of India but also acted as the cross roads of many movements of culture, commerce and people in Asia. Thus, it became a cockpit, a crucible of confluence in which there was an unending amalgamation of communities and cultures resulting in a broad pragmatic, experimental and utilitarian outlook and a robust, clear-cut and comprehensive commonsense view, which cut the root of all sorts of dogmas, conventions and conservatism. Its social and cultural canvas evolved through the process of socio-culture reciprocity among the divergent forces both inside and outside. The Persicians, Greeks, Parthians, Kushanas and Hunas came in an unending sequence. Each ethnic group contributed to the evolution of culture fusion in the Punjab. The establishment of Delhi Sultanate was a landmark in the social and cultural history of the Punjab. A reciprocal process of cultural synthesis started with contact to regional identity which led to the process of vernacularization of Islamic cultural and vernacular identity molded the shape and practices of Islamic culture and *vice versa*.

A new social composition began to be formed in urban centers of the Punjab because a large number of the Persians, Turks and Afghans began to settle in the towns and cities. Islam from its very inception was urban-oriented and urbanism as a way of life was its core. The follower of Islam with their urbanite background obviously confined themselves along with their retainer in towns and tried to exercise their authority over the countryside through a new institutional device known as *Iqta*.[11]

H.C.Verma writes that besides being functional differentiation based on economic status of an individual, there was also structural differentiation based on pyramidal division of the society. In it, Sultan stood at the top followed by the ruling-cum-appropriating class that included the nobles, *ulema*, bureaucracy that is government officials, traders and merchants and artisans.[12] This social stratification was also visible in the Punjab as attested by the accounts of Fakr-i-Mudabir.

As he himself was present in Lahore during 1206 C.E., his testimony about the nature of urban population and their influence is observable. He says that to welcome Qutb-ud-din Aibak came at all sections of people like *Qazis*, *Imams,*Saiyyads, Sufis, officers (*Ashab-i-Manasib*), *amils*, soldiers, citizens, the important and the ordinary, the strong and weak, and the rich and poor.[13] This is more or less a comprehensive list of the groups of people living in Lahore and other major cities of the Punjab during the period under the present study. From the above description it is concluded that class distinction among the city dwellers was based on property, occupation and economic conditions not on caste or religion.

Other contemporary chroniclers like, Ziya-ud-din Barani and Yahiya bin Ahmad Sirhindi also attest almost same references of urban population. As regarding the division of population, Barani speaks of persons of low birth and high birth, learned and illiterate, wise and foolish, artists, free born (*abids*), merchants, *derveshes*, clerks, soldiers, *bazaaris*, employed and unemployed.[14] In *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, he refers to the religious scholars, mystics, physicians, astrologers, artisans, shopkeepers, merchants, caravan people, courtesans, musicians, dancers, buffoons, tavern keepers, jugglers, story-reciters, wrestlers and jokers.[15] The author of the *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* speaking about the people of Delhi and its vicinity refers to *amirs,maliks*, notables, *ulema*, *sadat*, *mashiekhs*, beggars, artisans and money lenders.[16]

On the basis of above stated observations, A.Rashid divided the society among the three classes that were *ahl-i-suyuf* or *ahl-i-daulat* (men of sword), *ahl-i-qalam* (men of the pen) and *awam-i-khalaq*. The first two constituted together the social aristocracy. The class of *ahl-i-suyuf* which consisted the ruling class, bureaucrats or military officials

occupied the highest position at social order. The social status of the members of *ahl-i-suyuf* was determined by their military ranks such as *sar-i-khal*, *sipahsalar*, *amir*, *malik* and *khan.* The next class was the men of the pen comprising ethnologists *i.e*., *ulema* and Brahmans and litterateurs, *mashaiks*, in other words, the class of intelligentsia. At the bottom of the social ladder were *awam-i-khalq* or common people comprising professionals, clerks, men of business, artists, merchants, bankers and money lender, and homeless city dwellers and vagrant religious mendicants.[17] The Sultan of Delhi also established same social hierarchy in the Punjab. After the conquest of the Punjab, Shihab-ud-din Ghori kept his trusted men at different places in the province, Nasir-ud-din Aitmar-al-Bahai was appointed at Lahore,[18]Suif-ud-din Aibek at Sarsuti,[19]Taj-ud-din SanjarKazLakkan[20] at Multan and SaifuddinAibekKhatai[21] got the *Iqta* of Samana and Kilhram. All these members of the aristocracy with their bureaucrats constituted the parts of *ahal-i-suyuf* or *ahal-i-dault* in the Punjab. The foundation of Muslim rule was laid by the endeavor and exertion of foreign warriors and nobles. These foreign nobles belonged to Turkish, Persian, Arab, Afghan, Mongol, Abyssian and Egyptian stocks but were known by the generic title "Turk". They constituted the ruling oligarchy or *ahl-i-suyuf* of early Sultanate. They were appointed as commander-cum-civil administrators or office in charge of provinces and were the holders of other similar appointment of various grades and ranks.[22] Most of the military and civil officers belonged to Khita, QaraKhitas, Qichpaq, Garji or Ilbari of the Turkish race. Although they were predominantly Turkish and Afghans but in social affiliation this class also included a small measure the members of other races, obviously for their exceptional military and administration talents such as Sabiq-ul-MulkNasir-ud-din, a member of Saiyyad descendants. The social stratification in which Muslim immigrant families were monopolizing the key positions both in civil and military administration did not work for long. The progress of learning, expansion and consolidation of the central authority, cultural influences such as those of the Sufis and the employment of skilled artisans in the royal *karkhana*paved the way for the rise of people from unprivileged families in society. The expansion and consolidation of Sultanate in the province created the need for a large number of educated people to carry

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an administrative work and old aristocratic families could no longer supply sufficient officers to meet these needs.[23]

The Indian Muslims started competing with the Turkish aristocracy. This section of nobles of the Punjab that gradually worked for its way to position of authority was of the Indian born Muslims like Imad-ud-din Raihan. Since their position was stronger on the account of close link with the native people, Turkish nobility often did not tolerate their appointment to any post of honour and authority. The prevailing attitudes and consequent tensions among the Turkish aristocracy as depicted in Barani's statement, "low born Muslims are capable only of vices--immodesty, falsehood, miserliness, misappropriation, wrongfulness, evil speaking, ingratitude, shamelessness, imprudence so they are called land born, bazaar people, base, mean, worthless, plebian, shameless and of dirty birth."[24] The people of the Punjab secured their positions in the *ahl-suyuf* by getting appointments to civil-cum-military administration with the annexation of Punjab into Ghazniempire. For example, SandhiRai and BajiRai were appointed as generals and Tilak as commander-in-chief or as same with the civil ranks.[25]

With the advent of the Khaljis to power, far-reaching changes took place in the state policies with regarding the recruitment of the officers. Hamid-ud-din Multani who was also Malik*ul-Tujjar* (chief of merchants) was entrusted to the *Qazzat*of the empire for which member of a well-established family of noble descents known for learning and religiosity was considered fit. He had also served in the royal household as *pardadar* (in charge of curtains) and *Kuliddar*(keepers of keys).[26]

During the reign of Muhammad Tughluq, both Ibn Battuta and Barani mention many lowborn persons who belonged to the Punjab were raised to important positions in the empire. Ibn Battuta's reference to Rattan, a Hindu who was a barber by caste is of great significance. Despite of his low origin, Ratan was a scholar of mathematics nobles.[27]

Islami would have us to believe that the Sultan favored the enemy of Islam and therefore subjected Muslim everywhere to tyranny.[28]

Insha-i-Mahru also shows that the people once belonging to the lower strata of society could maneuver for position through what may be term as their ability to create nuisance. By the time of Sultan Firuz Shah, the Kambos of Multan had become so influential that they could intervene in approvals of the royal court and be heard by Sultan.[29]

The example Hem Chander known as HemmuBakkal is said to belong to Dhusar (Sub caste of Baniya) in Rewari may also be cited. Hemu started his career as a market inspector during Sher Shah's reign but rose to the rank of premier noble under Sultan Adil Shah Sur.[30]

During the Tughlaq period, Afghans held important administrative posts in the province. By the time, Muhammad Tughlaq came to the throne in Multan they became so powerful that some of them began to aspire to kingship.[31] The Mongol *amirs*and *maliks* who embraced Islam during the reign of Balban, had settled in India also began to aspire for position of authority in the Sultanate.

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