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Editors' Note

Time flies. It is now almost a year that our departmental journal, AWAKENING, has entered into the academic world. Overwhelmed by the support and encouragement from our esteemed readers, we are now to publish the second volume of our Journal. This volume presents a new variant in the domain of historical studies. More interdisciplinary and cross-cultural themes have been stressed in this edition, with the primary focus delving on the different facets of South Asian History. Like our previous volume, we have endeavoured our best to provide a domain of the analyses of different historical topics to our contributors, especially students.

We are heavily indebted to our respected Principal, Dr. Ayantika Ghosh, for her enthusiastic and unstinting support in bringing out the second volume of the present journal. We also express our gratitude to all faculty members of our institutions for providing different kinds of constructive suggestions, especially minutiae on the choice of articles for acceptance. We would also like to congratulate the youngest contributor of this journal, Smt. Adrija Chatterjee, a student of class 10, for writing such a scholarly article. We look forward to suggestions and feedback to make our journal a better one and also to make it a platform for exchange of new views and ideas.

Wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

Kolkata

January, 2024

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‘The Activities of Refugee Women in West Bengal from 1947 – 1959’

Dr Swati Sengupta Chatterjee

Abstract

There was a massive refugee exodus following the partition of the Indian subcontinent. En route to West Bengal, India, the women refugees had to undergo a great deal of sufferings. Initially the middle-class and educated people from East Pakistan migrated to West Bengal. A section of these refugees formed the squatters’ colonies. The refugee women of these colonies became politically conscious under the refugee organizations such as UCRC. The women refugees of the squatters’ colonies became in some cases bread earners for the family. They also became participants against police atrocities. Those refugees, who came after 1950, had to initially stay at transit camps. The female refugees further suffered in these camps. Mahila Samities grew up in these camps. Eventually the government decided to disperse the camp refugees to Dandakaranya. In this article, the author has discussed the role of women refugees in anti-dispersal agitations. They participated in anti-Dandakaranya movement which continued till 1961.

Keywords: Agitations, Exodus, Refugee Women, Satyagraha, Squatters’ Colonies.

Introduction

In case of the Indian Subcontinent, partition and independence came simultaneously. After the partition of India, two nations emerged – India and Pakistan. The story did not end here. Some

subjects, in an attempt to form a homogenous nation-state, turned into minorities. They found themselves on the wrong side of the border. Thus the nation had wrong soul in a wrong body. In this connection, A R Zollberg mentioned that process of building of new nations is a refugee generating process.¹

After the formation of India and Pakistan, refugee exodus took place through both the Western and Eastern frontiers. In case of refugees who came through the Western frontier, the process of resettlement was completed within a short period of time. But the refugees, who came through the Eastern Frontier, faced a different situation. The government fixed a policy of repatriation for them. The refugees continued to come to West Bengal for a long time. The refugees from East Pakistan were recognized during the period mid 1948 – 1949. The refugees from East Pakistan came in three phases – 1946 – 1950, 1950 – 1958, and 1958 – 1971. From the second half of 1950, the refugees from East Pakistan were termed East Bengal refugees. In all of the phases, women along with their male counterparts came as refugees to West Bengal. In course of time, these women refugees posed as a threat to the governments of India and West Bengal as well as to their male counterparts.

Existing Historiography

Prafulla K. Chakrabarti in his seminal work *The Marginal Men*, highlighted the emergence of refugee women in the political field and how they were influenced by the Mahila Atmarakhsya Samiti.² The next work on the women refugees would be by the authors Joshadhara Bagchi and Shubhoranjan Dasgupta titled *The Trauma and the Trimuph*. In these edited volumes, the authors (such as Rachel Weber) have dealt with the question of female refugees in the colonies.

¹A.R. Zollberg, 'The Formation of States as a Refugee Generating Process', *Annals*, 467, May 1983.

² Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men, The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Kalyani: Lumier, 1990.

Subhashri Ghosh and Debjani Datta wrote about the condition of the women refugees in the camps, in the second volume.³ Gargi Chakraborty in her book *Coming out of Partition*, dealt with the women refugees who came to West Bengal from East Pakistan and their settlement in West Bengal.⁴ Joya Chatterji in her book *Spoils of Partition*, dealt with the question of women refugees in West Bengal.⁵ Debjani Sengupta in her work *Partition of Bengal*, dealt with the refugee women in colony fictions and post-partition Bangla fiction.⁶ Paulomi Chakraborty in her book *The Refugee Woman*, dealt with the question of Refugee women from East Pakistan. She used Jyotirmoyee Debi's book *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*. She further made a critique of metaphor making– Ritwick Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. She also dealt with the women as political subjects in Sabitri Roy's *Swaralipi*. She concluded the book in the chapter titled reading beyond the refugee women from East Bengal.⁷

The present author also penned a book titled *West Bengal Camp Refugees*, dealing with the role of women refugees in the camps.⁸ I have mainly focused on the role of female refugees in the refugee camps and the growth of political consciousness amongst them. In this article I have attempted to demonstrate the gradual emergence of female refugees in the colonies with the spread of education and their role as bread earners. But the women refugees of the camps had a different goal. They fought against the establishment, the rehabilitation policies of the government.

³ Joshodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph, Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Vol I), Kolkata:Stree, 2003. The Second Volume was published in 2009.

⁴ Gargi Chakravarty, *Coming Out of Partition:Refugee Women of Bengal*, New Delhi Calcutta: Bluejay Books, 2005.

⁵ Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition, Bengal and India, 1947 – 1967*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁶ Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal, Fragile Borders and New Identities*, New Delhi: Cambridge University press, 2016.

⁷ Paulomi Chakraborty, *The Refugee Woman, Partition of Bengal, Gender and the Political*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁸Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees, Dispersal and Caste Question, 1950 – 1965*, Kolkata: Sreejoni, 2019.

Research Methodology

In this article, numerous sources have been used. These sources include newspapers, IB reports and interviews in addition to secondary sources (books and articles).

The Women in East Pakistan After the Partition of India

These women had suffered in East Pakistan before migrating to West Bengal. Suresh Chandra Banerjee, the president of West Bengal Congress Committee, cited some cases of Hindu women of East Pakistan. Their plights were recorded in Newspapers of November 1948. He highlighted the nature of oppression – ugly gestures made by Muslim men to the Hindu women. They also made lewd proposals to the Hindu women in their male members' absence. The Muslim men also sent threatening letter to the Hindus, either demanding the surrender of their women to the Muslim men or demanded money. There was physical violence as well. They abducted women. Only religion and honor of a community were associated with women.⁹ There were other factors as well that in a way caused a panicky exodus. The Hindu men, women and their families were forced to migrate because their *dhan, maan, pran* were in danger.¹⁰ One may mention that mostly the Middle-class *bhadralok* refugees came in the first wave of migration. Refugee women emerged as a fighting force from these *bhadralok* refugees. They brought about various changes in the society and economy of West Bengal.

⁹Haimanti Roy, *Partitioned Lives, Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947 – 1965*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 163.

¹⁰Nilanjana Chatterjee, 'Midnight's Unwanted Children, East Bengal Refugees: Politics of Rehabilitation', Unpublished PhD thesis, Brown University, 1992, p.67.

Communist Party of India, Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and Refugee Women

Bijoy Majumder was the first person to whom the Communist Party of India entrusted the task of blunting the anti-communist attitude of the refugees. He was known to the refugees as a sincere, honest, and dedicated worker. But he knew that the refugees would not accept him as a member of CPI. Therefore he started working amongst the refugees in the guise of a Congressman. His party supported him.¹¹ Gradually he realized that communist dominated *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* should work amongst the refugee women. Gargi Chakravarty has shown how *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* developed in the early 1940s in Calcutta. It worked from 1943 till 1946 and continued to do so even after independence. Some communist support worked behind it.¹²

The Women Refugees and the Colonies and Camps' Committees

It is pertinent to mention that in course of time, camp and colony committees were formed with the representatives from the camps and colonies.¹³ Bijoy Majumder realized the importance of these committees. He wanted to conduct organizational work amongst the refugees. He formed a central committee for coordinating work. Thus the *South Calcutta Bastuhara Sangram Parisad* was formed. A few words may be said about the role of *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* amongst the refugees. One may mention that female refugees were more susceptible and more eager to talk against the establishment (government). They had to go to gather food or to borrow money. Moreover they had to face tantrums of their children. Thus they readily accepted the members of *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti*. These members of *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti*

¹¹ Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*, p.47.

¹² Gargi Chakravarty, 'Emergence of Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti in the Forties – Calcutta Chapter', in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta, The Stormy Decade*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2015, pp.177 – 203.

¹³ West Bengal State Archives(Kolkata), IB File.

provided the women with comfort. Majumder brought the *Samiti* amongst the refugees and visualized it a 'Trojan Horse' within the enemy territory.¹⁴

The Emergence of Leftist Women in the Colonies and the camps

One could identify the leftist women in the camps and colonies. The names of Jiban Pratiba Devi of Titagarh camp number 1 and Kamala Tanti of camp number II, may be mentioned.¹⁵ During the time of the refugee movement, Kamala Tanti's name had become well-known to the IB Department.¹⁶

In the year 1950, the refugee organization United Central Refugee Council came into being.¹⁷ The presence of women in its meetings and processions was a new feature of UCRC. UCRC brought women refugees to the streets of Calcutta as protestors.¹⁸

The Colonies and the Refugee Women

Gradually education expanded amongst the refugees of the colonies. In course of time the women began to work outside. It was a new development. Their activities as bread-earners also influenced the women of West Bengal.¹⁹ Social tensions created by the emergence of refugee women, was reflected in the films made by Ritwick Ghatak and Satyajit Ray.²⁰ The poor refugee women could not engage themselves in the role of bread-earners in a respectable manner. They became entangled in prostitution.²¹ This too was reflected in films and novels. After the partition of India, refugee women emerged as competitors of their male counterparts.

¹⁴ Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*, pp.49 – 50.

¹⁵ Gargi Chakravarty, *Coming Out of Partition*, p.44.

¹⁶ WBSA, IB File.

¹⁷ WBSA, IB File Number – 165/1924.

¹⁸ Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*, p.93.

¹⁹ Joshodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph*.

²⁰ Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal*.

²¹ Shibaji Pratim Basu, 'Mobilising the Migrants: Role of the UCRC in the Indian State of West Bengal – A Critical Assessment', *Vidyasagar University Journal of History*, Vol.VI, 2017 – 2018, pp.20 – 31.

According to Urbashi Butalia, partition had destroyed a whole generation. At the same time, it provided opportunities to many to move into the public sphere hitherto unprecedented to them. In West Bengal, the historic assertion of refugee women as tireless bread-earners changed the digits of family aspirations of the Bengali *bhadramahila*.²² Thus it is evident that the female refugees who lived in the colonies, mainly contributed to the social and economic life of West Bengal.

The Colonies: The Social and Economic Lives of Refugee Women

According to Joya Chatterji, the most significant change that took place in the lives of the refugees was the position of women. Many refugee families sought shelter with their patrilineal and patrilocal relationships. It challenged the taboo about the role of women. In consequence, the status and influence of women underwent changes. As mothers, wives, sisters, or mothers-in-law, became a key link in the change of migration. In the process, displaced kin sought to rehabilitate themselves. As refugee women quickly became literate and joined in jobs, the working *bhadramahila*, was a new feature in urban West Bengal. There was also a growth of poorer women, employed in domestic service and informal sectors of Bengal economy. Displacement was not automatically the harbinger of progress. It was not emancipation or empowerment of refugee women. The working women did not have control over the wages they earned. Although the women contributed to the families' economy and became wage earners, but their own lives were by no means controlled by them. Some refugee women only got freedom and opportunities by joining paid work force or by gaining education. It changed the structure of caste Hindus. Traditionally, 'decent women' were placed in *antahpur*. Now

²² Urbashi Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*, cited in Joshodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph*, p.14.

they came out in the big world and changed Hindu middle-class notion of female propriety and respectability.²³

The Women Refugees and the Refugee Camps

The voices of women refugees of the camps are heard from their interviews with Subhashri Ghosh and Debjani Dutta. One of the inmates of the Dhubulia camp Bimala Das told the interviewers how sheer economic necessities forced them to go out of their houses to work in nearby cities and villages. They engaged themselves in *bidi* or papermaking. Shishubala Das's interviews also showed this economic aspect. But the women refugees were always afraid that government might stop their dole any time. Bimala Karmakar of Dhubulia camp described the living conditions of the camps. Lilabati Dutta of the same camp gave a detailed description of the rate of child mortality in the camp. Shurubala Das and Sarajubala Bal also provided us with an analysis of the women refugee movement in the Bhadrakali camp (in Hooghly). From the account of Binodini Halder, a resident of Assansol camp, it becomes clear that the women refugees were politically organized.²⁴ From the IB reports, it is learnt that the Mahila Samiti, was established in Cooper's Camp.

Agitation of Refugee Women in Various Refugee Camps

The refugee women participated in numerous struggles in various camps of West Bengal (Nadia, Bardhaman, Hooghly). Mahila Samiti worked with male members in the district of Nadia. Sarala Devi was the prominent member of the Mahila Samiti. She was assaulted in the camp and arrested.²⁵

²³ Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, pp.153 – 154.

²⁴Subashri Ghosh and Debjani Dutta, 'Forgotten Voices of PL Camp' in Joshodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph*, 2009,p.199.

²⁵ WBSA, IB File Number – 165/1924.

A hunger strike took place in the district of Bardhaman, in 1954 at Panagarh Airfield Accommodation Center and Shibkola Accommodation Camp, P.S Kanskha. It was orchestrated as a mark of protest against the government policy. A female refugee called Sukhuda Bala participated in this hunger strike. There was a struggle between the police and the refugees. In the process, the protesting refugees were brutally struck by the police. The refugee women were also injured. Sobharani Das and Nirmal Bardhan were amongst the ones who were injured.²⁶

The case of Bhadrakali camp (in the Hooghly district) may be cited. In 1954, a Mahila Samiti was established in Bhadrakali camp. The women refugees of the said camp fought for political rights. Their main discontent was against the camp superintendent. He was harsh to the inmates. He would transfer the refugees and stop their doles. There was large scale torture on the inmates.²⁷ The Police hired some outside hooligans to come inside the camp on 19th and 20th October of 1954. Some inmates became injured due to this intrusion. The camp was in reality attacked by these anti-social elements. No heed was paid to the legal demands of the refugees. 17 families were punished and their doles were subsequently stopped. Moreover Saraju Bala Bal, was the organizer of the Mahila Samiti. All of a sudden, her name was struck off from the register. A meeting was held on 25th August 1957. Earlier, Subarna Sengupta presided over a meeting on 19th February 1955. Pran Krishna Chakraborty (CPI) was a speaker. He highlighted the fact that the camp authorities had instigated an attack by some anti-social elements. In the meeting of 25th August 1957, several speakers spoke on the issues. It focused on the tortures that were perpetuated on the camp inmates and their struggle for the restoration of doles. Some women refugees such as Saraju Bala Bal, Sishu Datta, Prafulla Datta, Manjulika Brahma,

²⁶WBSA, IB File Number – 1483/1932.

²⁷ Tusshar Singha, *Maranjayi Sangrame Bastuhara*, Kolkata: Dasgupta's, 1999, p.29.

Mahamaya Chakraborty, Kasturi Biswas, Priya Bala Dey and Laxmi Das were arrested within a few days.²⁸

The atrocities of the government did not end here. Ten or twelve police vans and the District Magistrate of Sreerampur entered the Bhadrakali camp of Hooghly. They arrested Shishu Datta, Sura Bala Seal, Manjulika Brahma, Priya Bala Dey, and underage children of Shefali Das. They took these women and children to some unknown place. One van holding Shishu Datta, Sura Bala Seal, and Manjulika Brahma reached Peardoba. But they were separated from their children. This led to great discontent amongst the refugees.²⁹ A great agitation started in this Bhadrakali camp. Some inmates resorted to hunger strike. They demanded the removal of camp superintendent.³⁰ The second glaring complaint of the refugees was that their children were missing. Thus they demanded that no inmate or their children should be forcefully transferred to other refugee camps. Secondly they demanded that those refugees, who had already been sent to other camps, must be brought back to Bhadrakali camp. Further they added that their older male offspring should be transferred to rehabilitation centers. Saraju Bala Bal must be allowed to enter the camp and should be provided with clothes and other essential things. The refugees also wanted that action should be taken against corruption.³¹

Unfortunately the government took the hunger strikers and their allies away in a van and later even arrested some of them. However Anupama Roy, Sura Bala Seal and Niroda Debnath, conducted a hunger strike while still in custody.³² The refugee women of other camps supported the women refugees of Bhadrakali camp. Subsequently a meeting was held on 16th

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹ *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, Dated 12th August 1957.

³⁰ WBSA, IB File – 1483/1932. See also, IB File – 854/1930.

³¹ *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, Dated 29th August 1957.

³² *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* Dated 14th September 1957.

September 1957 at Subodh Mallick Square.³³ The Bhadrakali refugees demanded that the superintendent should be removed and affairs of the camp should be settled peacefully. The struggle of this camp continued till 1958. Later (1958) a batch of female refugees came to Subodh Mallick Square. The female refugees of Haringhata, Palashi, Titagarh, and Kashipur joined them. Some leaders of the UCRC supported the refugees of Bhadrakali camp, for example, Pran Krishna Chakraborty.³⁴ This struggle demonstrated the strength of the female refugees. This agitation in course of time became a part of anti-Dandakaranya scheme.

Satyagraha Movements of Camp Refugees 1957 – 1959

The refugees continued to agitate during the years 1957 – 1959. They agitated against the dispersal policy of the government. In this respect the role of Bettiah Satyagraha may be also mentioned. The Bettiah Camp was established in 1956. Mostly the Scheduled Caste refugees were sent there. The refugees had to live for a long time in transit camps. Pashchim Banga Samaj Sevi Sangha, a relief organization operated at Howrah Maidan. The refugees demanded more relief. Despite repeated requests, the volunteers paid no heed to their demands. As a result an altercation developed between the volunteers and the refugees. A large number of refugee women snatched three bags of rice, weighing six mounds. The whole case was reported to the District Magistrate of Howrah.³⁵

It becomes evident that women regularly participated in the Bettiah Satyagraha. Seventy women and eighty children were arrested by the administration on 7th May 1957. They also arrested hundred women refugees two days later. The government further arrested two hundred women refugees and ten children on 10th May 1957. One Bimala Roy got arrested on 14th May

³³ WBSA, IB File – 1483/1932

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ WBSA, IB File – 329/1927.

1957.³⁶ Apart from this, Nihar Rani Roy was also arrested. Later a large number of women were also arrested on various other occasions. The condition of Nihar Rani Roy became serious. She had become unconscious during the time of the satyagraha and her arrest. After regaining consciousness, she had to surrender to the police.³⁷

The government implemented their dispersal policy for the refugees of Bankura district in December 1957. Notice was served to hundred refugees of Basudevpur Camp for dispersal to Rajasthan. At Basudevpur camp the UCRC planned to protest against the dispersal policy. An incident took place at Basudevpur camp (I). About twelve inmates armed allegedly with deadly weapons attacked the storekeeper. The storekeeper lodged a formal complaint. A Case no 1, section 147/148/380/307/354 IPC was lodged against some female refugees based on the complaint. Panchi Bala Goldar, Ghari Bala Biswas, Raj Laxmi Biswas, and Banshi Bala Biswas were amongst the women refugees.³⁸

The women's role during the time of Bishnupur Satyagraha (12th March 1958) as well, may be mentioned in this article. Usha Rani Bhattacharya took a leading role. She was the main organizer of the working committee. But there was some difference of opinion about her.³⁹ The refugees conducted an anti-Dankaranya satyagraha agitation in March–April 1958. Both CPI dominated UCRC and PSP's refugee wing SBBS, conducted this movement. During the years 1958 to 1959, we see women participating in this movement.

In February 1958, Jogendranath Mandal (ex-minister of East Pakistan) a member of SBBS, protested against the establishment in different camps. He also made a plan for Bardhaman district. He wanted to select captains from refugee volunteers. Amiya Narayan Prachanda

³⁶ WBSA, IB file – 353/1924.

³⁷ *Jugantar*, Dated 14th May 1957.

³⁸ WBSA, IB File – 1483/1932.

³⁹ WBSA, IB File – 1483/1932, IB Correspondence.

wished that his wife Sushila Bala would lead the female volunteers. She was a liberal and educated woman. Hence Mandal accepted her husband's proposal.⁴⁰ Additionally the women refugees participated in the satyagraha in Bardhaman despite their husbands' unwillingness.⁴¹ The following table will demonstrate that several female refugees were arrested during the satyagraha of 1958 and 1959.

Table No. 1.1: Number Of Refugees Arrested in the Staygraha Movement Of 1958.

YEAR	MALE / FEMALE REFUGEES ARRESTED OR FINED	DATE	SOURCE
1958	1 FEMALE	18 th MARCH	JUGANTAR
1958	36 FEMALES (NEAR RAJ BHAWAN)	NO DATE	JUGANTAR
1958	117 MALES AND 1 FEMALE.	20 th MARCH	JUGANTAR
1958	65 MALES AND 8 FEMALES	21 st MARCH	JUGANTAR
1958	298 MALES AND 17 FEMALES (CALCUTTA)	21 st MARCH	JUGANTAR
1958	2 FEMALES (COOPER'S CAMP)	28 th MARCH	JUGANTAR

⁴⁰ WBSA, IB File – 96/1950.

⁴¹ WBSA, File – 353/1924.

1958	56 FEMALES, 4 BOYS AND GIRLS AND 5 BABIES(ESPLANADE EAST)	25 th MARCH	JUGANTAR
1958	301 MALES, 17 FEMALES, AND 7 CHILDREN (NEAR BAGJOLA, GHUSURI AND SONARPUR CAMPS)	21 st MARCH	THE STATESMAN
1958	172 MALES AND 14 CHILDREN (NEAR BAGJOLA, GHUSURI, AND SONARPUR CAMPS)	22 nd MARCH	THE STATESMAN
1958	161 MALES, 30 FEMALES, AND 17 CHILDREN	26 th MARCH	THE STATESMAN
1958	TOTAL 82 MALES AND FEMALES(NEAR RAJ BHAWAN)	26 th MARCH	THE STATESMAN
1958	106 MALES, 32 FEMALES, AND 23	1 st APRIL	THE STATESMAN

	CHILDREN(NEAR EAST ESPLANADE)		
1958	MALES AND FEMALES (NEAR HOWRAH)	8 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN
1958	1 FEMALE (IN MIDNAPUR COURT)	8 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN
1958	353 MALES AND 81 FEMALES (NEAR MURSHIDABAD, BERHAMPUR)	8 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN
1958	421 MALES, 16 FEMALES, AND 25 CHILDREN (IN CALCUTTA)	9 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN
1958	63 FEMALES AND 2 CHILDREN	9 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN
1958	35 FEMALES (OUTSIDE CHINSURA COURT)	9 th APRIL	THE STATESMAN

Table No. 1.2: Participation of Female Refugees in UCRC led Movement of 1959.

YEAR	MONTH, DATE, AND PLACE	NAME OF WOMEN REFUGEES	SOURCE
1959	13 th JANUARY, BEHALA	HEMANTA BALA DATTA	WBSA, IB FILE – 165/1924
1959	7 th JANUARY, RANAGHAT	CHAYA NEOGI, MANARAMA DATTA, UMA CHAKRABORTY, AND MALINI DEY	SWADHINATA DATED 9 th JANUARY
1959	16 th JANUARY, ASSANSOL	7 FEMALES	WBSA, IN FILE – 397/1939
1959	11 th JANUARY, ASHRAFABAD	ULLASHINI SARKAR	SWADHINATA DATED 13 th JANUARY 1959

By way of conclusion

The refugees, especially the female refugees, who migrated to West Bengal from East Pakistan had been the survivors of torture in East Pakistan. Their journey toward West Bengal was marred by multiple factors. They were further tortured en route to West Bengal. Later, the Namasudra families left East Pakistan. Atrocities were perpetuated by Muslim men on a pregnant woman causing her immediate miscarriage. The Ansvars and the police of East Pakistan forced the Namasudra women to visit their camps at night. Earlier other higher caste

Hindu women were also coerced in similar fashion. When the migrant women reached the Indian Union, they initially had to stay in transit camps like Sealdah Station. Later they were shifted to various relief camps. During the period 1949 to 1950, a section of middle-class, educated refugees, forcibly occupied inhabited lands of Calcutta. There was a squatters' colony in Dhakuria. This colony became engrossed in a skirmish with the landlords of this area. One pregnant refugee woman named Binapani Mitra was killed in this skirmish. It appears UCRC organized the refugee women under their aegis. Even in 1950, the women refugees of Titagarh camp, protested against their transfer to a camp in Midnapur. They resorted to hunger strike. It becomes clear that female refugees protested against the government policies in the camps during the years 1954 to 1957. After 1957, they participated in the satyagraha movements. Even in 1961, they continued to be tortured. The refugees of the Bagjola camp resorted to hunger strike against the government policy of rehabilitation outside West Bengal. Police entered the camp number 7 of Bagjola. The female refugees like Binodini Samaddar, Braja Bala Biswas became the police's targets. Thus we may conclude the female refugees were the targets of police atrocities from 1949 to 1961. *Abbreviations*

CPI – The Communist Party of India

UCRC – United Central Refugee Council

MARS – Mahila Atmarakhsha Samiti

PSP – Praja Socialist Party

SBBS – Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmela

Rangpur Dhing of 1783: A Reassessment of a Peasant Rebellion in Bengal

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Abstract

In article, I shall attempt to discuss the background and the causes of the Rangpur rebellion of 1783 and shall also try to delineate the contours, the nature, and consequences of the rebellion. The two Commissions were set up by the government as a direct consequence of the *dhing*. We shall discuss how the outcome of the investigations did nothing for the peasants and how the principal accused got away with a mere slap on the wrists.

Keywords – Devi Singh, *Dhing*, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Paterson.

Introduction

There are no dearth of resistance movements against various authorities in Bengal during the rule of the Company state and later under the Crown's administration. In this article we shall discuss the Rangpur rebellion of 1783. Before we begin our discussion of the rebellion, we must consider the physiographic and geographic features of the area – Rangpur and Dinajpur, the two hotspots of the disturbances. Rangpur lies between 25 degrees 4 minutes and 26 degrees 19 minutes north latitude and 88 degrees 46 minutes and 86 degrees 55 minutes east longitude bounded on North by Jalpaiguri, on North East by Cooch Bihar, East by river Brahmaputra and the districts of Goalpara and Mymensingh, South by Bogra, and South West and West by Dinajpur.¹

¹Amrita Sengupta, *Sannyasi-Fakir, Chuar, Rangpur Rebellions, in Late Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Century Bengal*, New Delhi: Kunal Books, 2021, p.260.

Dinajpur on the other hand, lies between 24 degrees 55 minutes and 26 degrees and 23 minutes north latitude. It falls between 88 degrees and 2 minutes and 89 degrees and 19 seconds east longitude. According to Buchanan Hamilton, Dinajpur signified the abode of beggars (from the word Diiwaj) It runs 5374 miles.² The district was bounded by Jalpaiguri on the North East, Purnea on the North West and West, Rangpur on the East, Bogra on South East, Rajshahi on South and Malda on South West. Karatoya river separated it from Rangpur for about 50 miles South East. The general appearance of the country is flat, sloping gently South West. In the South and West, old alluvium landmass makes an appearance. The country is interspersed with ravines. The elevations are not worthy of the name of hills, highest ridge not exceeding 100 feet. However, it altered the appearance of the country. The area is elsewhere a Gangetic delta. The ravines vary from shallow stretches of land, ideal for rice cultivation. There are deeper depressions called *kharis*. The ridges are covered with scrub jungles and stunted trees. There are many tanks of varying size to hold water, especially in the south. Hills are absent. Therefore it is difficult to trace the natural divisions. However, there are still differences between the north and south of the district.³ There are no mountains in Dinajpur, but, some parts are more elevated than others. For instance, there is a long road extending from Dinajpur to Kantanagar (Kantonogor). There was a considerable elevation in the north-east, from Nalogola, on the banks of Brahmani river. The lands on the riverbeds of Nagar, Mahananda

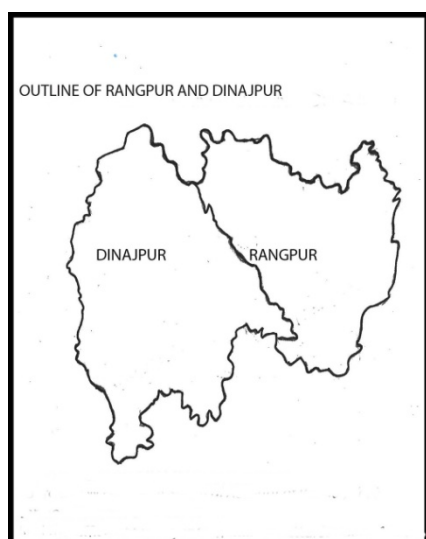
²Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of the District or Zilla of Dinajpur in the Soubah of Bengal*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1833.

³F. W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Dinajpur*, Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1912, pp.1-43.

See also, W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, London: Trübner & Co, Vol.1-20,1875- 1877. pp.355- 365.

and Tangan are low and during Buchanan-Hamilton's time, were susceptible to inundations. People had to dig tanks and raise the levels of the lands to save their houses from floods.⁴

From the description of the land and terrain of these two areas, it may be concluded that these were primarily agriculture based areas. The people though had various occupations, professionally there were *koeris* (cultivators), *gareri* (pastoral people), *chasa* (peasants), *dhopa* (washerman), *gannar* (seller of parched rice), etc.⁵ Mostly they were peasants or ryots. Thus we must proceed with this premise that the *dhing* of 1783 was a peasant rebellion. In the following sections, we shall discuss it in details.



Source: Amrita Sengupta, *Sannyasi-Fakir, Chuar, Rangpur Rebellions, in Late Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Century Bengal*, New Delhi: Kunal Books, 2021, p.387.

Historical Backdrop of the *Dhing*

⁴Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *A Geographical Statistical Description of District of Dinajpur*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1833. p.3.

⁵W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, pp.171-240.

During the time of Akbar, Bengal was sub-divided into 24 *sarkars*. Dinajpur contained Punjra, Tajpur, Janatabad, Ghoraghat, Barbakabad, and Bazuha.⁶ Rangpur, on the other hand, was part of Cooch Behar, which was conquered by the Muslim rulers, and used to consist of six *chaklas* Patgram, Purrabhag, Boda, Fatehpur, Kankina and Kazirhat.⁷ In 1582, during the time of Todar Mal, the revenue collection was called *asaljama*⁸ *tomar*, estimated at Rs.10,693,152. He collected the arrears from the *ryots* with the aid of *kanungoes*.⁹ The ancient *tomar* and *taksim*¹⁰ long since ceased to serve. They used to deliver the accounts to the *kanungoes*.¹¹ During the Mughal times, there were *subedars*, *faujdars*, to collect revenues and to maintain peace.¹² Todar Mal made the settlement with the rich, powerful and numerous *zamindars* of Bengal. The *zamindari* system was strengthened during the time of Murshid Kuli Khan. During Alivardi's time, the arrears were realised properly. In 1776, Kriparam Saha, a *kanungo* of Hooghly, gave a vivid description of the *zamindars*. He described that they were not dispossessed of their lands for balances and arrears; neither were the lands sold. Even though Murshid Kuli Khan used to impose newer taxes on them, those were not particularly

⁶Francis Buchanan Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical*, p.25.

⁷Baboo Gopal Chunder Dass, *Report on the Statistics of Rungpore for the Year 1672-73*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1874, pp.40-58.

⁸*Jama*- revenue assessment, based on measurement of land.

⁹N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal, from Plassey to Permanent settlement*, Vol.1, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1962, pp.1-5.

¹⁰*Taksim*-distribution of land rent.

¹¹Francis: Minutes of Governor General, in W.K. Firminger, *Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of Fifth Report*, Calcutta: R. Cambray and Co., 1917, p. 41.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 44.

burdensome on the *zamindars*. The *abwab*¹³ did not amount to more than Rs.258,857. Shuja-u-din imposed Rs.1,914,075, while Alivardi imposed Rs.1,531,817.¹⁴ The *zamindars* passed on these demands to the *ryots*. However, there were no remissions or balances. In Rangpur and Midnapur, *faujdars* collected revenues. *Amils* were not permanently settled in the districts. In the *zamindari*, several *talukdars* disbursed money, brought the land into a state of cultivation, sold lands etc. The following table will indicate that there was a substantial rise in revenue demands.

Table 4.1. Talukdari jama

Name of the districts	Jama of 1740s and 1750s (in Rupees)	Jama of 1765 (in Rupees)
Rajshahi	3,70,879	24,51,022
Nadia	17,059	10,97,454
Dinajpur	20,000	18,26,140
Burdwan	65,000	31,00,433

Source: N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal, - From Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, Vol 2, Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970, p.13.

In addition to paying land revenue, the *zamindars* were also entrusted with maintaining law and order in the countryside. They were responsible for robberies in their estates. There were numerous smaller *zamindaries* and *taluks*. In the days of Murshid Kuli Khan, there were 100,000 villages, 1600 *parganas*, 34 *sarkars*, 13 *chaklas*, each under a separate administration

¹³*Abwab*- It signified all irregular or illegal financial impositions on the peasants above the established assessment of land in the *pargana*. It is basically - a kind of tax imposed by a chief on a landowner.

¹⁴N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal*, p.5.

of a *faujdar* or *amil*. The older subdivisions were called *sarkars*. He encouraged the formation of big *zamindaries* which were eventually under the Company state's rule. There were still quite a few smaller *zamindaries*. When the big *zamindaries* were formed, it is believed the older smaller *zamindaries* were mostly consolidated with one another. It was later alleged that smaller *zamindars* and *talukdars* were in direct touch with the *ryots* and were efficient. However, the *ryots'* condition was better under this system of big *zamindaries* than the tenants at will. They could not be dispossessed at will. There was a sense of security. There was a mutual interchange between the peasants and their *zamindars*. However, John Shore saw the big *zamindars* were incapable of doing their tasks. They were ignorant. There were cases of frauds and concealments. It was then that he proposed a 5-year plan admitting the need for the efficiency of the smaller *zamindars*. In 1772 the 5-year farming system was introduced. Even then, the smaller *zamindars* were quite popular. In June 1772, Hastings introduced a new system in Nadia, which was soon to become a model for the entire province. Farmers were invited by advertisement. The terms were low, so it was done through a public auction. The farmers' *amalnamas*¹⁵ gave them the right to take possession of the lands. The *ryots* were given *pattas*.¹⁶ The settlement was made for 5 years. *Talukdars* and petty *zamindars* paid their revenues directly at Murshidabad. The *zamindari* system gave way to this type of farming in Bengal. Nadia became the model for the farming system. At the same time, they also felt that the *zamindars* garnered a certain loyalty from the people. So, the government thought it was desirable to entrust them with revenue collections as well. In some cases, like Rani Bhawani of Rajshahi, the *zamindar* was turned into a revenue farmer. The terms (5 years) remained the

¹⁵*Amalnama*- a written order or warrant sent out to an *amil* to take possession of land on behalf of the government.

¹⁶*Pattas* - a title deed to a property.

same. In Hooghly also, this policy was adopted. In Rangpur, the local inhabitants farmed the lands at that time.¹⁷

So, at the initial stages of the Company's administration in Bengal, every settlement was made by 'trial and error' method. They wanted to implement an effective method of settling the revenue of the lands. After several experiments, they decided to implement the farming system. The farming system was first introduced in Burdwan. The Company believed the system of leasing out lands for five years would improve cultivation. They kept the rent flexible; to be increased or decreased upon the paying capacity of the *ryots*. It proved to be a successful plan, as Burdwan added more revenue to the Company's exchequer.¹⁸ There was some evidence that was contrary to this rosy picture. Charles Stuart, the Resident of Burdwan, wrote 'From the late severe drought, famine, desertion of the *raiyats*, all the farms, to the northern and eastern quarters of the districts are greatly in decay and farmers have suffered so considerably that if put up at sale, a great decrease of revenue is to be apprehended'.¹⁹ However, these distressing reports failed to have any impact. The farming system was slowly implemented all over Bengal. We find Warren Hastings writing in a self-congratulatory tone,

I found the farming system already established throughout the country. All the orders of the company all without exception enjoined it. I made it general and received their commendation. I lengthened the period of the leases which before was annual to five years. This was considered by many as a bold, innovation. The farming system appeared to the committee the best calculated to promote the flourishing state of the country.²⁰

¹⁷N.K. Sinha, N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal*, pp. 60-90.

¹⁸West Bengal State Archives(Kolkata), Letter from Floyer, dated 23rd April 1771, 1st April –30th May 1771
Comptrolling Committee of Revenue, PV Vol.1A.

¹⁹WBSA, Letters from Charles Stuart, 1st April 1771-30th May 1771, Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue.

²⁰WBSA, 23rd April 1771, Proceedings of Controlling Committee of Revenue.

Thus, the revenues were settled according to this new system.

However, abuses continued to occur between 1772-1777. They faced problems identifying the right position of the *zamindars* in the Indian landholding system.²¹ However, overassessment was one of the glaring features of the 5-year revenue farming in Bengal. Nadia and Rajshahi set the tone for the entire province. For example, in 1769, the *jama* of Nadia was Rs. 833,467, in 1769-70, Rs. 843,917, in 1770-1771, Rs. 827,420, but the actual collections were Rs. 701,778 in 1768-69, Rs. 605,928 in 1769-70, and Rs. 736,899 in 1770-1771.²² Rani Bhawani also petitioned to the government that suddenly her revenue had become Rs. 2,227,817.²³ In Purnea in 1772, the *jama* amounted to Rs. 1,122,643. There was to be an annual increase, and the settlement was made for 5 years. They thought the district yielded Rs. 1,091,117 in 1771-72. They imagined they would be able to pay the Company's revenues and make a profit at the same time. However, the country was in a ruinous state. The farmer's agents failed. There was a great deficiency in 1772-73. They could not meet the revenue demands and requested remission of 1 lakh from their *jama*.

Similarly, Birbhum's revenue was overestimated. This overestimation was also a feature of the Quinquennial settlement. The *zamindars* were expected to become revenue farmers, but the government and their agents overestimated the *zamindars'* lands without informing them about it. This system was perhaps the most unjust of them all. Even Mir Kasim had not set aside the *zamindars*. Eventually, the whole province was let out to farm to volunteers. Eventually, the *zamindars* were unable to outbid their competitors. There were very

²¹N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal*, pp.70-85. See also W.K. Firminger, *Historical Introduction*, pp.40-50.

²²N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal*, pp.72-73.

²³*Ibid.*, p.74.

few *ijaradars* or farmers bidding higher than the local *zamindars*. According to N.K. Sinha, this paved the way for the Calcutta *banians* to invest in lands.²⁴

Another feature of the 5-year farming system was extortion. Rani Bhawani had to pay Rs.40,432 to Kanto Babu (Hastings's *banian*), Rs. 47,000 to Sitaram Sinha (Middleton's *diwan*), and Rs. 34,400 to Bhowani Mitra (Graham's *diwan*).²⁵ This farming system brought with itself a train of principal farmers, nominal farmers, securities, agents, and *kutkinadars*.²⁶ This drove the business of revenue collections into a state of confusion. The intricacy of the *ryots*' accounts made it difficult for the farmer. However, at the same time, it rendered it possible for him to demand more than his due.²⁷ In 1777, this farming system was withdrawn.²⁸

The failure of the 5-year farming system led to the institution of the *Amini* commission in 1776. It made an elaborate enquiry into the value of lands and farmers' accounts. It was given the special task to pay attention to the problem of protecting the *ryots*. Hastings justified this commission on the grounds of needing a new system of land revenue settlement. The 5-year settlement had failed to provide *pattas* to the *ryots*; farmers had fallen in arrears. The plan had failed.²⁹ Afterwards, the revenue settlements of Bengal and Bihar for the years April 1781-April 1782, September 1781-1782 were concluded after inspection. A commission confirmed that revenue extracted matched the estimated value of the revenue. This, it can be said the Company officials believed in the districts' capacity to pay them. There was, however, some

²⁴Ibid., p.78.

²⁵Ibid., p.81.

²⁶*Kutkinadar*- a variant of underfarmer.

²⁷N.K. Sinha, *New Economic History of Bengal*, p.86.

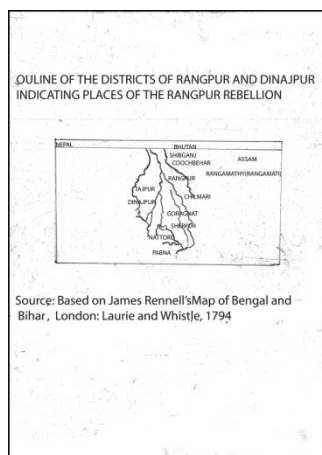
²⁸Ibid., p.89.

²⁹Ibid.

variations in the manner the revenue were collected. This time, leases for revenue farming were never given out for more than 3 years. In many districts, revenue was collected without any intermediate agency. For instance, the settlements were made with the *zamindars*, *talukdars*, farmers, *wodadar*, of Burdwan, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, and Nadia. These were the biggest *zamindaries* of Bengal. It can be speculated that this change allowed people like Devi Singh to intrude in Bengal revenue politics.

Devi Singh was the revenue farmer of Rangpur and Dinajpur. He had previously been appointed as a revenue farmer in the early 1770s. He was reappointed as a farmer in 1780-81 because of his local knowledge and his vast experience. He belonged to an aristocratic family from Bijapur in Deccan. He was introduced as a revenue farmer in Rangpore/Rangpur by the Company state. Richard Goodland, on the other hand, was the Collector of revenue in this area.³⁰ In the following sections we shall see how Devi Singh as complicit in the oppression of the peasants and how his repressive ways led to a bloody *dhing* in the areas he governed.

The Contours of the Rebellion



The Committee of Revenue summed up the events. The *dhing* appeared to occur out of nowhere and without the least warning. That led to Gouri Mohan Chowdhury's death. Goodland sent a

³⁰ Amrita Sengupta, *Sannyasi-Fakir, Chuar, Rangpur Rebellions*, p.268.

parwana to which they paid no heed. They assembled in formidable numbers, stopping collections for 2 months. They wanted to pay their dues after 2 months. They claimed Gouri Mohan Chowdhury had demanded more than what was just. Goodland asked them to pay the revenue at the 1780's rate. Tranquillity was temporality restored. On 17th, *ryots* assembled again in even more significant numbers and compelled *ryots* of Cooch Behar and Dinajpur to join. This time Goodland sent military against them and the second general revolt was quashed. Rangpur Commission was set up afterwards under the leadership of J.D. Paterson.³¹

The *zamindars* claimed Raja Devi Singh's cruelty did not wane even during the *dhing* itself. His people tortured the *ryots* during the *dhing* as much as they did before the commencement of the *dhing*. The rigour and cruelty of collections implemented by Devi Singh had induced many *ryots* to flee into the jungles. The *ryots* had initially decided to go to Devi Singh for redress. However, he had refused to hear their pleas. However, one unnamed *ryot* left Krishnaganj and went to Rangpur and informed Devi Singh that the *ryots* of Kazirhat had assembled and started an insurrection. Devi Singh tried to seize them, confine them and put them in jail. He killed many *ryots*, hanged them and plundered their villages.³² Thus, he remained a figure of wanton destruction throughout the 'insurrection'. The sepoys also inflicted violence on the *ryots*. It was the middle of November. The incursions of the people of Lalbari were of such a nature that the late *diwan* Bhagwant Roy repeatedly requested J. Williams to order the sepoys to fire upon them and in every respect to treat them with severity as the only way to put a stop to their 'ravages'. During their expeditions on 28th November 1783 at Lalbari, they seized some principal *ryots*, confined them in such a manner that even the *naib* failed to

³¹WBSA, 3rd-20th March 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.24.

³²WBSA, 2nd-26th June 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.28.

get them released. Goodland eventually ordered them to be freed as he believed their confinement would prevent the disturbances from subsiding.³³

Unfortunately for the peasants of Rangpur-Dinajpur, the government refused to believe that they had any legitimate cause to rebel. They cited a few causes why the peasants had no reasons to be so aggrieved. Alternatively, they stripped the peasants off their active role in the *dhing* by blaming the *zamindar* and the *busneahs* for instigating the rebellion, implying the peasants had no minds of their own.

Goodland's so-called leniency began to wane when he realised that the rebels might not be pacified by the handouts he was offering. They wanted more, and that was when he realised that the *busneahs* could even question the Company state's authority, unlike the ordinary *ryots*. So, he did not take any chances there and razed their villages to the ground and destroyed the rebels. The second phase ended on a bloody note.

The Inception and the Causes of the *Dhing*

Several reasons induced the peasants to swap the plough for a sword. When the *ryots* rebelled against Devi Singh, they listed many grievances against Devi Singh that included the forceful imposition of a special tax at *anna* and a half, confinement and physical abuse of their person on non-payment of revenue etc. These bled out economically; leaving them without any assets for the next year. On top of that they were also forced to pay their revenues in a currency they were not familiar with – it had been changed from Naraini rupees to French Arcot. This change was also instrumental in their destruction. Moreover, to make matters worse, they were even unable to harvest a crop like tobacco to supplement the income. In order to give in to these incessant revenue demands, the *ryots* were forced to sell their women and children. However, when it became impossible to do so anymore, they broke into a rebellion. The *zamindars* too

³³WBSA, 19th January-5th February 1784, Committee of Revenue, Vol.36, Part 1.

had a few grievances of their own. They wanted two years to pay their balances, but Devi Singh refused without any ‘orders’ from the East India Company’s government. The government stopped their *mashahara* until their dues were paid off.³⁴ This was the beginning of the Rangpur rebellion of 1783.

When the Rangpur Commission was set up after the *dhing*, J.D. Paterson, the commissioner also cited a few causes. He referred to the following:³⁵

- 1) The imposition of an increase of Rs.162401(appx) on the *jama* of 1780 on the people of Rangpur.
- 2) Instituting certain taxes for realising the revenue.
- 3) The imposition of illegal taxes: *derinwallah*, *batta*, *hoonderan*, *rusum* (‘rusoom’), *mustajir* (‘mustageer’) on the peasants.
- 4) The infringement of the year’s engagement entered into by Devi Singh and forcing *zamindars* to pay their rents in French Arcot rupees. It resulted in a loss of revenue on the part of the *zamindar*.
- 5) Altering *Kistbandi* in the middle of the year and charging additional *batta*.
- 6) Compelling the *zamindars*, *naibs*, *amla*, to pay sums they could not possibly pay. Beating them if they refused.
- 7) Houses and effects of *ryots* are seized, ploughs and oxen were put up for sale, silver was sold at 10anna, brass and copper at 8annas, cattle were sold at 1.5anna. *Ryots* were forced to pay interest at 5gundas per *dam* on a rupee.
- 8) *Zamindari taluk* was sold for less than a year’s rent, then separated from the year’s *jama* at less than the *hustabud* rate. The deficiency was charged to the *zamindar*’s *khamar*.

³⁴WBSA, 1st-29th October 1781, Committee of Revenue, Vol.8.

³⁵WBSA, 1st-17th July 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.29.

- 9) Lands of the *zamindars* were sold, and some of this land was given in fees to the *mutasuddies*.
- 10) That by these severities Devi Singh compelled the *Alumindazamindar* of Chowdranee of Conknea, Taotorgan of Mintonna (or Mintoma), Mir Mohan *zamindar* of Tepah, Ragubir of Bapettee, Sham Chowdhury and Ram Kant Chowdhury of Kazirhat, Kali Prasad of Fatehpur to flee the country.
- 11) Use of corporal punishment for non-payment of revenues.
- 12) The charge of cruelty against different persons employed in the collections like Krishna Prasad, Hareram, Surajnarain, Bahadur Singh.
- 13) Devi Singh left the farming of Conknea and Tepah to Surajnarain of Punga and Basettee to Ray Judamuddin and the appointment of Sheikh Mohammad *Sezawal* of Kazirhat.
- 14) The nomination of Gouri Mohan Chowdhury to the farm of 'Kharije' *mahals* at a newly increased sum amounting to Rs.100,195 (appx).
- 15) Settling of Bedah, Patgong, Baikanthapur, and Perabhanj at a *jama* of Rs.127,668 (appx) to Mirza Taki. Paterson cited it as a cause.
- 16) Imprisonment of *zamindar* Shiv Chand Chowdhury and putting him in irons for complaining to Paterson. about *batta* and *derinwallah*
- 17) Devi Singh collected balance of *ryots* who absconded from those who remained contrary to the general orders of the government.

There are multiple testimonies regarding the rebellion. Some depositions were taken by the administration from the *paiks* or officials of Devi Singh. Some depositions came from the *ryots* themselves. They do not match. For instance we have an affidavit from the *ryots* 'we are *ryots*; you are chief. If *derinwallah* for 2 years is excused us, the Naraini currency established, and the collection stopped the next two months we may return with satisfaction to our houses. You

are the head of a country; we have a thousand countries to go. You are chief; we are ryots; you will order us justice'.³⁶ On the other hand, we have an official's testimony. According to Nazir Gomani, 'you made the disturbances to obstruct the revenue in the *mofussil* government.'³⁷ Ratiram Das in his poem depicted a miserable condition of the ryots. His poem also held Devi Singh responsible.³⁸

Rangpur Fatehpur prakando chakela.

Raja Ray raja tayeachilo akela...

Companyramolete Raja Debi Singh.

Shey somoye mullukey hoilo bar dhing.

Jemon jedebotar murti gothon.

Temni hoilo tar bhushonbahon.

Rajar papeteyhoilomullukaakal.

Shiyore rakhiya taka grihi mara gelo.

Koto je khajna paibey tar neka nai.

Koto paretotoneyaaro bole chai.

Deo deo chai chai ei matro bol.

Mairerchototeotheykrondonerrol.

Manir sommannaimanijomindar.

Choto boro nai sobe kore hahakar.

Soyari toh choriya jai paik marey jota.

³⁶WBSA, 24th March-7th April 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.25.

³⁷WBSA, Testimony of 5 Paiks of Manik Chand, 11th-29th December 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.35.

³⁸Ratiram Das, 'Rangpur Jager Gaan', *Rangpur Sahitya Parisad Patrika*, Rangpur, B.S.1315, cited in Narahari Kaviraj, *A peasant uprising in Bengal 1783: the first formidable peasant uprising against the rule of East India Company*, Delhi: People Publishing House, 1973, Appendix.

Debi Singh er kache sobe holo bhota.

Parenaghataycholtejhui bouri.

Debi Singh er loke naye take jor kori.

Purno koli obotar Debi Singh raja.

Debi Singh er upodrobeyprojabhajahaja...

Debi Singer ottyachar ar nahishoye.

Rangpur er achilotejekjomindar.

Sobakey likhilopotrosethateashibar.

Nij elakar r bhinnolakar...

It diya paitka diya patkelay khub.

Chari bhiti hathey pore koriya jhup jhup.

Itay dheler chotey bhangilo karo harr.

Debi Singh er barrihoiloitarpaharr.

Debi Singh palailo diya gaon dhaka.

Keu bole Murshidabad keu bole Dhaka.

[Summary of the verse extract in English: In this poem it is implied that Devi Singh's monstrous nature and the cruelty that he inflicted on both the ryots and the *zamindars* made them terrified of him. There was a massive uproar against him. There was chaos and widespread terror because of him. When his cruelty became unbearable, the ryots rose up in a rebellion. Moreover, eventually, Devi Singh had to flee to either Murshidabad or Dhaka.]³⁹

³⁹Amrita Sengupta, *Sannyasi-Fakir, Chuar, Rangpur Rebellions*, p.245.

Thus when the Rangpur commission was set up to investigate the causes of the rebellion, it was expected to investigate the complicity of Raja Devi Singh. In the next segment we shall discuss the investigation conducted by the Rangpur Commission under J.D.Paterson.

The Aftermath of the Dhing: The Establishment of the Rangpur Commission

As a direct consequence of the insurgency, the Rangpur Commission was set up in 1787 headed by J. Paterson by the Company state in order to determine the causes of the rebellion and the charges that were brought against the revenue collector Devi Singh.⁴⁰ It is pertinent to mention here that charges against Devi Singh had been made as early as 1773.⁴¹ There was an allegation of cruelty brought against Devi Singh, and there were counter allegations brought against the *zamindars* by Devi Singh who deemed them as the main instigators of the disturbances.⁴² Consequently, Paterson was sent to inquire into all these allegations. By the time Paterson arrived, the country had become tranquil, the alleged rioters had dispersed, and the commanding officers had arrested some of the rebels.⁴³ Paterson investigated the matter and subsequently Paterson wrote two formal reports on 17th May and 10th June. He cited oppressions as the cause of Rangpur rebellion. On 24th March he addressed the Committee of Revenue informing them that the voice of the whole people exclaimed against Devi Singh's oppression. On 17th June he wrote that he was setting out for the Presidency with 600 papers on the *dhing*, its causes and progress. From a letter of 8th August, it appeared he proceeded to Dinajpur from Rangpur. There

⁴⁰WBSA, Letter to honorable John McPherson, from C. G. Pole et.al dated 23rd March 1787, 21st-30th March 1787 Revenue Department, Governor General in Council Proceedings, Vol.107. See also WBSA, 1st-17th July 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol. 29.

⁴¹WBSA, January 2nd-26th 1773, Committee of Circuit Dinajpur.

⁴²WBSA, Letter to honorable John McPherson, from C. G. Pole dated 23rd March 1787, 21st-30th March 1787, Revenue Department, Governor General in Council Proceedings, Vol.107.

⁴³WBSA, Letter from Paterson to the committee, Rangpore, 6th March 1783, March 3rd – 20th 1783 Committee of Revenue.

he initiated another enquiry relating to one Englishman Mr Feake who held a farm in Dinajpur under Devi Singh. Devi Singh had allegedly driven away Feake from the region. It had nothing to do with the insurrection. However, it may be assumed that Devi Singh was involved in some unusual activities and Paterson intended to investigate. Paterson eventually arrived in Calcutta in September and was to attend the Committee. On 22nd, he sent a new report, but unfortunately, the Government found it unsatisfactory as they claimed it was without evidence. Paterson on his part also claimed he had apprehended the principal rioters, but they were less to be blamed than it first appeared. He claimed he did not want to condemn anyone's character without evidence as it surely would turn him into a delinquent.⁴⁴ In his report, he stated:⁴⁵

- 1) There were confusion and loss in the district.
- 2) *Ryots* were crying for redress.
- 3) The complaints were universal.
- 4) Paterson found these financial transactions to be scandalous.
- 5) At the commencement of 1781, Raja Devi Singh farmed the districts.
- 6) He took the pseudonym Kamal-ud-Din.
- 7) He also assumed his brother Roy Bahadur's name in Dinajpur.
- 8) He stood security for the payment of the revenues.
- 9) He executed engagements with the Government, including in Bihar, Rangamati, and Bahrampur for 1781-82.
- 10) He had promised to be fair and provide justice to all *ryots* and to encourage cultivation and resettlement of the ryots.
- 11) He was to pay revenue to the Government according to the terms of the settlement and *kistbandi* instalments.

⁴⁴WBSA, Mr Short's Remarks, 25th September -3rd October 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.33.

⁴⁵WBSA, 1st-23rd September 1783, Committee of Revenue, Vol.32.

- 12) He had promised not to collect any new taxes from the *ryots* or any interests or *batta*.
- 13) He had promised to collect according to the original rent, authorised and customary at the end of 1780.
- 14) He had promised not to collect old debts or balances unless ordered by the Government.
- 15) He promised not to resume lands, gardens, tanks, *debatter*, *brahmotter*, etc. or fix rents or rent-free lands.
- 16) All losses were his responsibility.
- 17) He was to protect the travellers from highwaymen.
- 18) The Government forbade the grant and use of *morcha* and *bazameen*.
- 19) He was not to object against discharging the revenue due to the Government on any plea - draught, flood, the encroachment of river, desertion, or any other.
- 20) The losses incurred from these were his responsibility.
- 21) Whatever advantages shall arise from the extent of cultivation of the district, the profit shall be his, but he was not to increase his demands. *Mofussil jama* of Rangpur was Rs. 994,238 (appx) and *sadrjama* Rs.911,824 (appx) in 1780 (1187). Paterson discovered there was an excess of *mofussiljama* at the *khalsa* approximately Rs.82,414.
- 22) The Government had increased its *sadarjama* by Rs.70,000 *Naraini rupees*. That there remained an excess of Rs.12,414 (appx).
- 23) Devi Singh was to derive his profits from the expansion of cultivation, not from imposing new taxes on *ryots*.
- 24) *Zilla* of Rangpur was at the commencement of his lease in arrears for the year 1780, but Singh had not investigated the matter and had increased it further by Rs.142,599 (appx).
- 25) He added to this increase, two additional taxes - *mustajiry*, *rusum*.

26) He made deductions from the payment of revenue under different heads of taxes “*berawirt (battywirt/battywird), dewanee, carbanee, bisaag, sazawal fees*” etc. The interest in them was to be paid to Balram.

27) Devi Singh had also increased the revenue demands. He imposed high interests upon them if the instalments were not regularly paid to him. He justified this claim of interest by referring to the *kubuliyats* of the *zamindars* which had bound them to pay interest upon failure to pay their *kists* beyond the allotted time.⁴⁶

However the administration of the Company state remained unconvinced. They had complaints coming from several quarters regarding the veracity of the report. These complaints discredited Paterson and his commission. Ultimately the administration set up a second commission. They took both their reports while making a judgment.⁴⁷ They concluded that in Rangpur and Dinajpur, which were the areas under Devi Singh, the *zamindars* who had been complaining against Singh’s oppression had themselves oppressed people once, long before Singh had entered the scene. However, Singh’s conduct was not innocent either. The Government could have distinguished between the crimes committed by Hareram and the ones Devi Singh had committed. It was apparent Devi Singh was aware that in some cases oppression was being committed. The Government felt that he must be held responsible for them. As for Hareram, they concluded, “the proofs are specific and he as the most culpable merits the greatest punishment”.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷ Amrita Sengupta, *Sannyasi-Fakir, Chuar, Rangpur Rebellions*, pp.314 – 319.

⁴⁸WBSA, Letter to John Shore from Cornwallis, Fort William December 1st 1788, 13-20 January 1789, Board of Revenue proceedings Vol.58, Part 2. See also Letter to M. G. Hutch. See also Letter to McDowell, the collector of Rangpore.

About the complaints against Devi Singh, the Company resolved –1) The lands purchased by Devi Singh in the name of his household Brahmin, Devi Dutt Dube and by Kushal Chand were declared invalid. They were to be returned to the *zamindars* without compensation. 2) Similarly, land bought by Hareram or his men were to be restored to the *zamindars*. 3) Singh must be compelled to repay the purchasers of the land the balances of 1781, excepting Canknea, and the lands must be restored to the *zamindars* once again. 4) They (*zamindars*) should not be held accountable for collections during that time, and the distribution would take place every Bengali year. 5) Mortgage bonds were to be declared invalid and destroyed. 6) Devi Singh must refund the following lands taken by him under *amalnama* fee – Rs.2911 (appx), *rusum* and *mustajiry* - Rs.1,375 (appx), *chundah*- Rs.393 (appx) *batta* (on *Naraini* rupees) Rs.10,100 (appx). He was directed to refund the excess *batta* as well. 7) He was to be compelled to pay Ganga Narain, the *gomasta* of Kali Prasad, *zamindar* of Kazirhat, the sum of Rs.1000 as the damages for the severity used towards him. 8) It was suggested that Singh was to be made accountable for the charges lodged by Paterson from February 1783 to the appointment of a new commission on 11th April 1784. 9) The amount he was to pay should be deducted from the security money he had deposited for the balance of Rangpur for the years of 1781 and 1782. 10) The rest may be returned to him after a sum is deducted from the account of Dinajpur. 11) Hareram⁴⁹ may be compelled to refund the *zamindars* the amount on account of seven *parganas*. 12) Hareram must be jailed in *faujdari* jail for one year. He was to be released after that period, but he should not be taken to Rangpur or Dinajpur. Whatever money he owed, that was to be paid immediately even if it meant selling off his property. He was to be declared incapable of holding the office of collections for the Government. He also had to pay Sab Chand Chowdhury, Gouri Mohan *gomasta* of Kazihat, Bhabani Sarkar the *gomasta* of Sab

⁴⁹Hareram is spelt as Hurram in original documents. In some secondary sources, it is spelt as Harram. It is the same individual.

Chand, Krishna Chand Gupta *gomasta* of Brahmin *daroga*, Kalu Choudhuri *gomasta*, Amos division Fatehpur or Fattapur, Jugal Das *gomasta* of Tepah, Ram Kishore *gomasta* of Purnea, and Gobind Majumder *Naib* of Gouri Mohan, for cruelty and punishment. 13) That the sums Singh was required to pay by 5th resolution must be paid to the Government, and be added to the credit of the *zamindar* of Rangpur, in part payment of the balances due from them, on account of 1782, the remaining balances after deducting this sum was to be claimed from the *zamindars*. However, after that, they would not be held responsible for that period again. 14) Drijinarain was to be released from confinement, but he should never return to Dinajpur or Rangpur again, or else he would be jailed again. 15) Raja Sunder and Kanak Sarkar were to be released but banned from Rangpur and Dinajpur. Kriparam and Ramnarain, two people, found guilty of cruelty in Dhee Jumla were to be whipped 20 times and then forever banned from the Jumla.⁵⁰ However, Devi Singh was later elevated to being a Maharaja from a Raja. According to Demetrius C. Boulger, the Government bestowed him with numerous *khillats* of honour. He lived for another twenty years but he had nothing to do with taxes or revenue anymore.⁵¹ So, the Second Commission succeeded where the First Commission failed. It found a readymade criminal in Hareram who was made to shoulder all the blame while Devi Singh was let go with a mere slap on the wrist. Paterson's reputation was entirely ruined.

A Brief Overview of the Nature of the *Dhing*

It is evident from the archival sources that the Rangpur *ryots* initially attempted to use the method of prayer and petition to put forward their demands. In this stage, their struggle took

⁵⁰WBSA, Letter to John Shore from Cornwallis, dated 1st December 1788, Fort William, 13th -20th January 1789, Board of Revenue proceedings, Vol.58, Part 2. See also Letter to M. G. Hutch. See also Letter to McDowell, the collector of Rangpore, 13th -20th January 1789, Board of Revenue proceedings, Vol.58, Part.2.

⁵¹Demetrius C. Boulger, *Maharajah Devi Sinha and the Nashipur Raj*, London, Bloomsbury Square, 1912 (no publisher's name is available), pp.87-88.

the form of ‘everyday form of resistance’⁵² though it was not totally ‘covert’.⁵³ However, when they hacked a *gomasta* to death, their collective action/outbursts turned into collective violence. Naturally, their everyday form of resistance also transformed into an open, ‘overt’ form of rebellion.

There were two distinct phases of the Rangpur rebellion. In the first phase, the peasants rebelled. In the second phase, the *busneahs* revolted. The peasants chose *zamindar* Drijinarain as their ‘*nawab*’ who had some grievances of his own against Devi Singh as well as the Company state. Rangpur rebels chose their *Nawab*, levied a tax to defray the expense of the *dhing* known as *dhing kharcha* and established a kind of Government, without any instigation from the *zamindars* or anyone from the ‘elite’ classes. It was their choice and a conscious decision. There is a tendency to strip the rebels’ agency by making the *zamindars* as instigators of the rebellions. It cannot be denied that all these rebellions had influential leaders, but they were not the main motivators. This fits well with the paradigm of insurgency that begins with the people making prayers and petitions, then the rebels slowly getting involved in violent riots, which eventually transforms into a full-fledged rebellion.

Did it repeat itself like a ‘cycle of contention’? Unfortunately, after the suppression of the movement, the Rangpur peasants did not cause any further trouble for the Company state. However, the Rangpur rebellion in a way negates the assumption that the subordinates tend to

⁵²James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

⁵³Ibid. See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

comply with domination.⁵⁴ They did not comply with the system. They tried to hold the intermediaries responsible for their miseries. They did revolt against excessive taxation, cruelty and corporal punishment by Devi Singh and wanted to hold him accountable. However, they never questioned the revenue farming, the cause of their problems. They never wanted to oust the revenue farmers who arrived from outside Bengal. They, of course, did not resist the Company state. For them, they were the saviours. Why would they risk rebelling against the Company state when the chances of accomplishing anything were negligible? They did not want to transform Bengal or make revolutionary changes in the established order. If they thought they could get away with it, it was because their demands were not extreme. Since they were neither challenging the Company state's rule nor its legitimacy, they were not concerned about any retaliation on the Government's part. Their demands could be construed as merely asking for 'concessions'.

Conclusion

The peasants of Dinajpur and Rangpur rose up in resistance against excessive taxes imposed on them by the intermediary Devi Singh. The Company state was unable to ensure timely payment of revenue from the *zamindars*. Nadia *zamindari* had an arrear of Rs.3,14,112 (appx) and 24 Pargana of Rs, 1,47,865 (appx) in 1781. Since the Company state could not ensure punctuality of payment, they confined the *zamindars* and *naibs* in order to induce them to pay their revenues. Interestingly even though the smaller *zamindaries* too had balances; it was never such a huge amount.⁵⁵ The Company state used strictness in realising their revenue from the *zamindar*, but these methods usually did not yield any results. For example, Casijura *zamindari* had an excess of Rs 173924 as arrears. Similarly, other *zamindaries* such as Birbhum

⁵⁴Charles Tilly, "Domination, Resistance, and Compliance. Discourse", *Sociological Forum*, Vol.6, (September, 1991), pp.593-602.

⁵⁵WBSA, 20th February-5th April 1781, Committee of Revenue, Vol.1.

and Fatehsingh also fell into arrears. Sometimes corporal punishment was used or troops were deployed to induce the ryots to pay their dues. These methods were widely implemented in various parts of Bengal by both the Government and their agents. It proved to be detrimental for the overall revenue collections.⁵⁶ The Rangpur *zamindar* and other landlords thus had a legitimate cause of grievance. The disgruntled landlord of Rangpur joined in with the peasants' cause, often leading the Company government to presume that he was indeed the instigator of the uprising, even though the peasants never really needed any prompting from their *zamindars*. However, they did recognise their Drijinarain, a well to do landlord as the 'nawab' and genuinely wanted him to lead them against Devi Singh. It is pertinent to mention that during the period under review, peasants of numerous districts were oppressed by different kinds of intermediaries - *gomastas*, revenue farmers, even *zamindars*. The *zamindars* were also infamous for hiring robbers to oppress the *ryots*. The Company state was aware of all this. Interestingly none of those areas witnessed any significant rebellions. Similarly, famine devastated parts of Bengal. Rangpur although was not unaffected, it was not so severely affected. Other peasants from famine-affected areas did not rebel. However, Rangpur peasants did. It is interesting to note that the Rangpur peasants had rebelled once before on account of the severity of the collections. Goodland had used this incident as a point of reference. He had argued (in 1783) that if peasants had any genuine grievances, they would have gone to Calcutta to seek redress as their predecessors had done earlier. Also, these facts tend to corroborate with the assumption that there is no clear inevitable link between hardship and collective violence.⁵⁷ Eric Stokes said that peasant rebellions are essentially against heavy taxation. However, he also warned us not to overlook any other underlying, albeit less important causes

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Bernard A. Nkemdirim, "Reflections on Political Conflict, Rebellion, and Revolution in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.15, No.1 (March,1977), pp.75-90.

that might cause the peasants to protest.⁵⁸ Rangpur rebellion was a most definitely a peasant rebellion where the peasants rebelled against excessive and unfair taxation. However, we should not overlook the fact that in addition to heavy taxation, they were physically tortured. They were unable to save their children, wives and seeds for next year. Thus they witnessed their dignity being slowly stripped away from them. These factors must also be taken into account while writing the history of peasant insurgencies. Thus, we may rule out misery, exploitation, and relative deprivation were the sole causes. The Rangpur rebellion, in many ways, seemed to be unique.

Jon Wilson opines that the Rangpur peasants were trying to negotiate with the Company state. I want to conclude that though essentially a peasant rebellion, it was not anti-Company. They were not against their *zamindar* as well, as demonstrated by the participation of Drijinarain and the involvement of Ramakanta *zamindar* in the movement, even though the Government wanted to pass it off as ‘elite instigation’. It can be divided into two phases. The Rangpur rebellion which started with prayers and petitions eventually turned violent and escalated into a more form of peasant war where banditry and violence, murder and arson were the chief characteristics like in most peasant conflicts in the world. The peasants took a conscious decision to commit ‘riots’. The movement did not become anti-Company and remained anti-Devi Singh. The peasants selected their targets; these were not random attacks. Their violent actions met with brutal counter-action by the Company state. This is how the Rangpur rebellion came to a sad and tragic end. The *zamindars* were compensated by getting their money back. The *ryots*’ conditions did not improve even after the insurrection was over and the subsequent charade of the two commissions. That was the tragedy of the Rangpur peasants.

⁵⁸ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed. The Indian Revolt of 1857*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986 pp. 213-215.

TOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENT IN INDIA

Sriparna Biswas

Abstract

Tourism has become one of the most important service sectors contributing to National Income of India. The tourism sector development occurs around mountain, beaches, deserts, forests, wild life, water bodies & islands etc and thus includes environmental issues. Development of tourism is of prime concern of many developing countries. Tourism in India is the fastest growing service sector and source of foreign exchange earnings and employment for many developing countries. For ecological balance and preservation of the living systems of the earth, and wild life conservation is essential. One more important aspect is the eco-tourism which has gained immense popularity among the travellers all over the world. This paper aims to analyse the impact of tourism on the environment in India and to ensure sustainable development in this regard. This paper also analyses how to mitigate harmful effects of tourism on the environment and to protect the environment.

Key words: Ecotourism, sustainable development

Introduction

Tourism has become an important growing sector now a days in India. Huge number of people are interested in going out throughout the year. Many tourist lodges are built to cater this huge number of tourists. The positive part of this increasing trend of tourism is the revenue earning from this sector. There are many tourist lodges and eco-tourism type of farm house in every state of India, which attract people providing various facilities. The negative part of this ever-growing tourism is the fact that the environment gets polluted to a great extent. The beautiful mountains, the vast sea, green valleys, are the parts of environment. Eco tourism has become an important aspect in respect of travelling to natural areas determined by local people, sustains their wellbeing using local natural resources, creating employment opportunities by engaging local people and conserves the environment.

Literature Review

The related literatures are reviewed to understand the impact of tourism on environment in India. Following are the some of the reviewed studies:

Ugur Sulu (2003) reported that the quality of the environment both natural and man-made is essential to tourism.

Butler (1980) Environment impacts of tourism became the sole concern of tourism researcher in the 1980.

M. Ramdas (2014) reported that is to review conceptually and theoretically on the interrelation between impact of tourism towards environmental attributes of small islands.

Poya Moli (2007) points out the eco cultural tourism in Indian islands.

Dhanasekaran (2005) stated “protection, development and improvement of the various constituents of the environment are among basic conditions for the harmonious development of tourism”.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the impact of tourism on environment and how to protect it.

The other objective is how to ensure sustainable development considering the environmental issues due to huge impact of tourism in India.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary data. Secondary data have been collected from various sources like journals, manuals, books, reports, magazines, business newspapers and relevant websites, etc.

Analysis

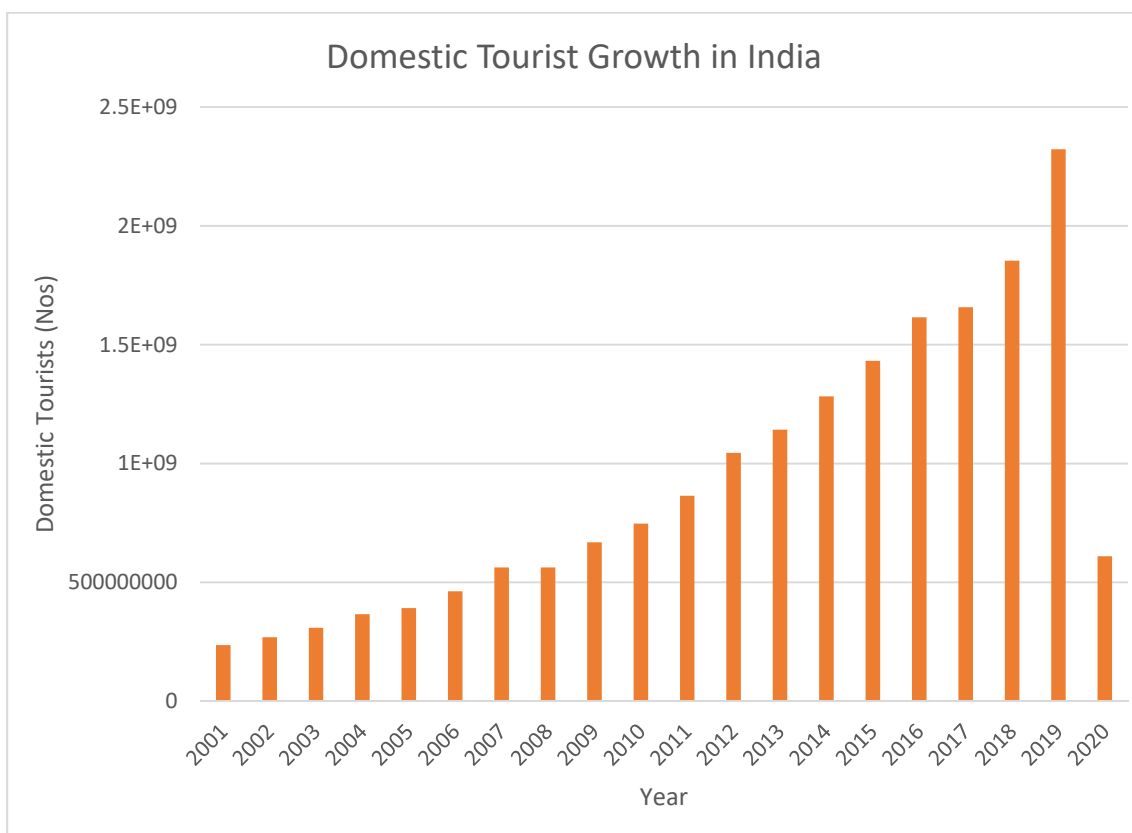
Tourism and Environment are interdependent of each other. Tourism increases the knowledge and information of different historical places, culture, artistry, cuisine etc. People now consider tourism to overcome the tiredness of daily life and to enjoy fresh air going to different places. As a result more tourist places are developed. This sector provides more employment opportunities for the local unemployed persons. Thus, the earning potentiality also increases leading to increase the demand for the various goods. Thus, there is the scope of various other industries to come up through the forward linkage effects which is very important for the economic development of any country.

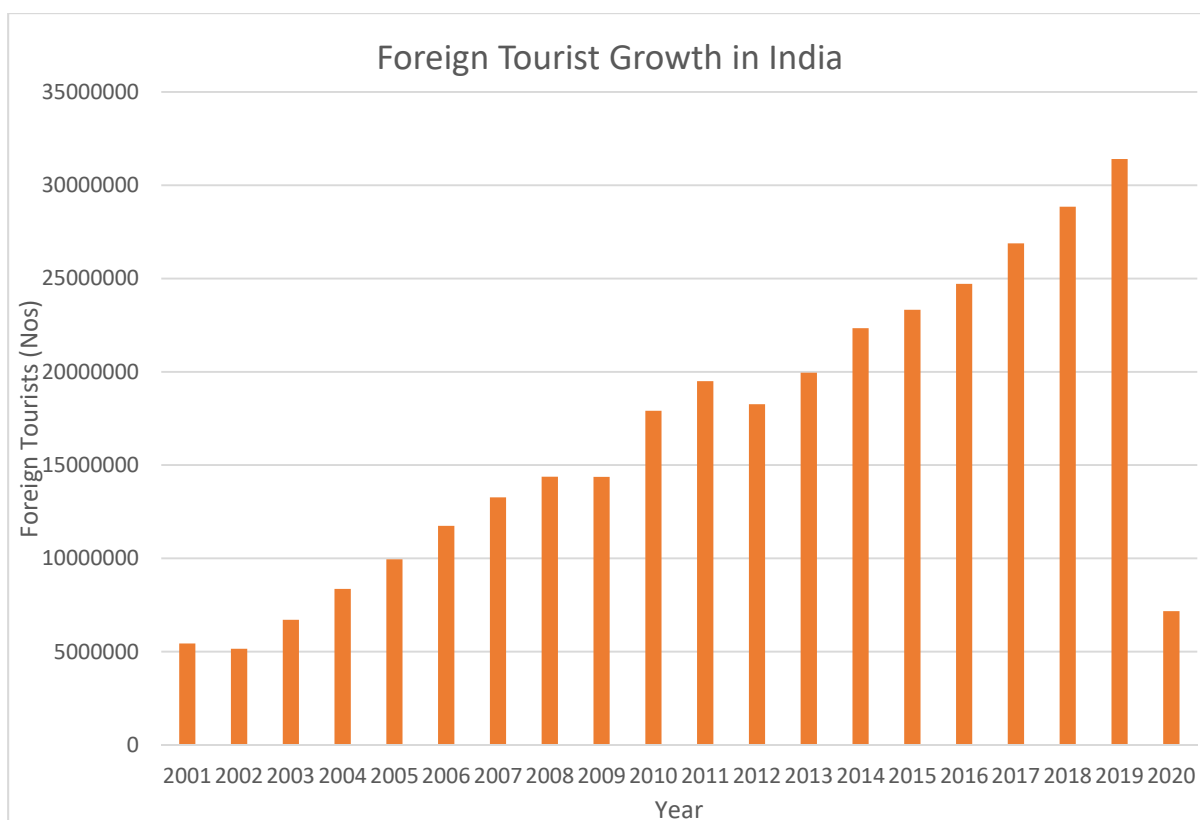
The following table shows the annual growth rate of domestic and foreign tourists in India and pictorially given in diagrams on the next page.

Year	Tourists visit (Nos)		Annual growth rate	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
2001	236469599	5436261	-	-
2002	269598028	5157518	14.01%	-5.13%
2003	309038335	6708479	14.63%	30.03%
2004	366267522	8360278	18.52%	24.62%
2005	392044495	9949671	7.04%	19.01%
2006	462439634	11747937	17.96%	18.07%
2007	526700493	13267612	13.90%	12.94%
2008	563034107	14380633	6.90%	8.39%
2009	668800482	14372300	18.79%	-0.06%
2010	747703380	17910178	11.8%	24.6%

2011	864532718	19497126	15.6%	8.8%
2012	1045047536	18263074	20.8%	-6.3%
2013	1142529465	19951026	9.3%	9.2%
2014	1282801629	22334031	12.8%	11.9%
2015	1431973794	23326163	11.6%	4.4%
2016	1615388619	24714503	12.8%	5.9%
2017	1657546152	26886684	2.6%	8.8%
2018	1853787719	28851130	11.8%	7.3%
2019	2321982663	31408666	25.3%	8.9%
2020	610216157	7171769	-73.7%	-77.2%

Source: Ministry of tourism Government of India





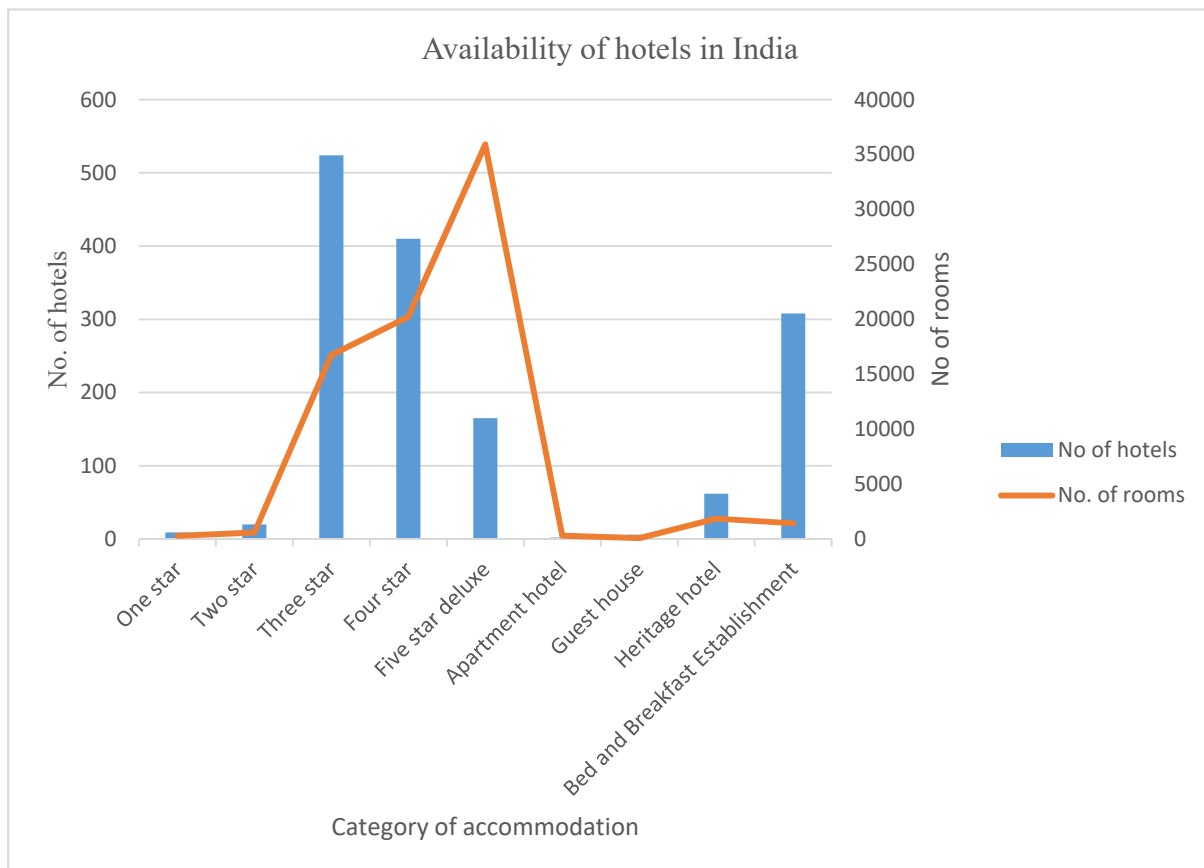
It is seen that there was a continuous increase in the number of tourists in India during the period 2001-2019 except in 2020 due to global outbreak of covid-19 pandemic and its subsequent effects.

To accommodate more tourists there is the need for more tourist accommodation. This leads to build more tourist lodges, hotels, guest houses etc. The following table shows number of tourist lodges to accommodate tourists in India during 2020.

The number of approved hotels and availability of hotel rooms in India as on 31st December, 2020 is given in the table and graphically shown in the figure hereunder.

Sl No.	Category	No of Hotels	No of Rooms
1	One star	9	286
2	Two star	20	593
3	Three star	524	16743
4	Four star	410	20233
5	Five star deluxe	165	35915
6	Apartment hotel	2	297
7	Guest house	6	80
8	Heritage hotel	62	1854
9	Bed and Breakfast Establishment	308	1433
10	Total	1702	102154

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India



Now this huge number of lodges can be built by cutting of mountains, using grass lands, cutting of trees and exploiting the natural resources. This hampers the ecological balance in the environment. It is seen that tourists are attracted more to different adventure tourism. But uncontrolled tourism can lead to environmental degradation. Depletion of natural capital and resources, pollution, and emission of greenhouse gases have severe impact on the environment.

The forest eco system gets disturbed when more jeep safaris are allowed near the core areas of the forest. The jungle tourism leads to loss of natural habitat and there will be more pressure on endangered species. Indiscriminate cutting of trees and its use as fuel, home construction, furniture, lead to hamper the forest ecosystem. Besides, more tourists in the forest area mean more sound pollution which is not at all desirable for the wildlife. Wild animals get unduly disturbed by the noise of visitors.

More footfalls from increased influx of tourists leads to increased environmental degradation. The soil and the grazing land become degraded leading to destroy of the grass land eco system. The primary consumers get deprived of having proper food because of negative impact of tourism on grass land eco system.

Huge tourism leads to increased amount of waste generation in the environment by way of use of more amount of plastics, non-biodegradable items by the travellers which results in environmental pollution.

Some places in India have gained popularity in tourism sector due to promotion of water based adventure tourism which results in attracting more tourists who use boat ride, rafting, scuba diving etc which affects water ecosystem. The marine animals such as sharks, whales, different

types of fishes get disturbed due to this water-based tourism. This has negative impact on water eco system causing danger to water based flora and fauna.

Thus, tourism often puts more pressure on natural resources which are scarce through over-consumption. It is seen that tourism puts enormous stress on local land use, and can lead to soil erosion, increased pollution, and natural habitat loss. These effects can gradually destroy the environmental resources on which tourism itself depends. The better way to conserve the environment considering the huge pressure of tourists is the ecofriendly tourism.

Eco-tourism and sustainable development

Eco-tourism is an alternative tourism. It involves the activities which are environment friendly using the local resources and helping the local communities. It helps the economic and social development of local communities. Eco-tourism is the tourism with an ecological conscience. According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), eco-tourism can be defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”. It involves visiting relatively untouched or unexplored natural areas. Eco-tourism is non-extractive and non-consumptive in nature. The aim of promoting eco-tourism is to preserve forests, wildlife and an animal's natural habitat and it also helps local communities to earn their livelihood.

The main challenges of eco-tourism are to:

- build adequate infrastructure such as transport, power and communication system
- use the scarce resources more efficiently so that there will be no excessive use of natural resources may be renewable or non-renewable.
- provide adequate sanitation facilities,
- ensure proper disposal of campsite sewage in rivers,
- conserve the wildlife,
- generate awareness amongst local people,
- encourage planting more trees and not to cut the trees in the forest areas
- obey the environmental policies for protecting the environment from any kind of pollution.

Considering the above challenges, the eco-tourism can pave the path of sustainable development in India. The sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The sustainable development in tourism is to preserve natural wildlife, to protect the local culture of different states of India and to provide social and economic benefits for residents. The local people can be employed in the hotels following eco friendly tourism. Thus, they can earn their livelihood and run the family. Thus, there is a very close connection between the eco-tourism and the sustainable development.

Considering the global issues of environmental problems, the United Nations designated 2002 as the year of Eco tourism and the Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD) mandated the UNEP and the World Tourism Organisation to carry out the activities to protect the endangered eco system.

Steps to protect environment without discouraging the tourism

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has initiated a programme that aims at integrating environmental sustainability with tourism industry in India. We are to make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute the basic element in tourism development to maintain essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity. To consider and implement the effective approaches for developing strategies and environmental policies for more sustainable tourism keeping the view to protect the eco system there can be several recommendations.

The Central and State Government should allocate necessary fund for the purpose to improve the roads, transportation and to ensure clean environment and to allocate separate budget for development of Eco-tourism.

Steps to be taken to ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all considering stable employment, income-earning opportunities, and poverty alleviation.

Steps to be taken effectively to restrict the use of plastics

Steps to be taken to ensure that our eco-tourism activities are undertaken in a sustainable manner. Ecotourism can be sustainable only if it is well planned. There should be some welfare programme for protection and conservation of bio diversity.

Steps to be taken to incorporate environmental knowledge into planning which contributes significantly to sustainable tourism planning.

Lastly, to ensure public private partnership to provide enough room for most important sector that is the tourism sector and to minimise the negative impact of tourism on the environment.

Conclusion

Tourism is undoubtedly the most potential industry in view of earning revenue not only in India but all over the world. UN Environment research has indicated that the tourism sector uses the key resources like energy, water, land and materials. There is generation of solid waste, sewage, loss of biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions. The inflow and outflow of tourists would lead to more traffic movements which will produce carbon di oxide and concentration of green house gasses. This may contribute to climate change which can be a big problem for the environment. According to UNEP report tourism would generate an increase of 154% in energy consumption, 131% in greenhouse gas emissions, 152% in water consumption and 251% in solid waste disposal by 2050. In order to avoid that we need to focus more on the eco friendly tourism and this will ensure the sustainable tourism with increase in local employment, efficient use of natural resources and awareness to protect our environment and natural habitat and to ensure go green environment.

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Facts and Fiction - A Critical Evaluation of the Historical Works of Saradindu Bandopadhyay

Adrija Chatterjee

Abstract

Historical fiction is commonly known as a literary genre in which a fictional plot takes place in the setting of a particular real historical events. All events described do not necessarily need to be real. But the proportion of fiction and real historical facts used needs to be balanced. The historical fiction series of Saradindu Bandopadhyay are considered to be milestones in Bengali literature and popularly adored by readers. But the question arises whether these stories are based on true historical events or not. The purpose of this paper is to study the writer's work critically, to analyse historical references and try to relate those to specific historic events. The motive is to analyse whether these renowned works of literature pass historical grounds.

Keyword: Historical Fiction

Introduction

There has always been a deep connection between history and literature. History has been passed down in the form of literature by the earlier generations for thousands of years and is being passed down even now. On the other hand literature all over the world has always been influenced by history in terms of both style and content. Bengal is no exception. Bengali writers for several generations have been inspired to write about their past. It mainly starts from the ballads and folklores written in the praise of gods and goddesses during the medieval period. The remarkable interpretations of the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by poets *Krittibas Ojha* and *Kashiram Das*, which are still read in almost every household in Bengal. The different ballads composed by bards all over Bengal and the prominent *Mangalkavyas* - *Manashamangal*, *Annyadamangal* and *Chandimangal*, are some of the finest pieces of historical fictions of Bengal. The modern writers too gifted a number of historical fictions to Bengali literature. Notable among them are *Anadamath*, *Durgeshnandini* and *Devi*

Chowdhurani by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Chandragupta* and *Shah Jahan* by Dwijendralal Roy and *Pratham Aalo* and *Sei Shomoy* by Sunil Gangopadhyay.

Saradindu Bandopadhyay is a renowned author, mostly known for his fictional novels, short stories and his famous detective series. Of course, he is not the first person to write historical stories in Bengali, however the popularity gained and range of historical references he used, in his collection of five novels and twenty one short stories is incomparable to that of the other writers of his time. He covers almost every era of Ancient Indian history and a considerable backdrop of Medieval Indian history in his stories.

Objective of Study

Saradindu Bandopadhyay always claimed his work to be "historical fiction and not fictionalised history". However, when studied in-depth, a number of proper evidences and facts about the historic times and empires portrayed, can be found in some of his novels and stories, while cannot be found in some. The purpose of this paper is to analyse his work and gather as many historical references as possible, to claim his plots as "historical" and to identify any controversial statement made by the author about any specific historic era.

Discussion and Analysis

As already mentioned, there are five novels and twenty one short stories in Bandopadhyay's historical collection. A list of all the novels and stories of the collection are provided.

The novels are - Tumi Shondhar Megh, Tungabhadrar Teere, Gaudmallar, Kaler Mandira and Kumarsambhabar Kobi.

The short stories are - Ashtam Shorgo, Mritprodeep, Rumahoron, Bishkanya, Bagher Bachchha, Pragjyotish, Chuachandan, Taqt Mubarak, Setu, Shankha Kankan, Reba Rodhoshi, Rakto Shondhya, Amitabha, Chandan Murti, Maru O Shangha, Indratulok, Shadashiber Adikando, Shadashiber Agnikando, Shadashiber Dourodouri Kando, Shadashiber Hoi Hoi Kando and Shadashiber Ghora Ghora Kando.

All the novels and some of the stories are elaborated, specifically because they contain more historical references than the others. The rest are described briefly.

Tumi Shondhar Megh

Down the timeline of India, one can find the Kalachuri dynasty of Chedi. The second king of this dynasty was Lakshmikarna, also referred to as Karna (1047-1073 CE). Throughout his reign the ruler of Tripuri raided the nearby kingdoms in several occasions. One of the most prominent raids among them was his conflict with Nayapal of Gaud. This conflict is exactly what this novel revolves around.

In the story, Lakshmikarna raided the territories of Nayapal, but after being almost defeated and chased by the Pala army, Karna sought refuge in a Buddhist Vihar. There the great monk Atish Dipankar engineered a peace treaty between the two kings. The treaty involved a matrimonial alliance between Karna's younger daughter Yauvanasree and Nayapal's son and later successor, Vigrahapal. Although when the time came he broke the treaty. To take revenge, Vigrahapal along with his friend Ananga went to Tripuri in disguise to kidnap the princess. There they were helped by Veerashree and Jatavarma, Karna's elder daughter and son in law, and Karna's mother Ambika Devi. After a tremendous climax in the *swayambar sabha*, the heroic stunts of the Pala prince and the willingness of the Kalachuri princess to flee, Karna was successful in stopping Vigrahapal's quest. Finally both declared war against each other, which however, ended without bloodshed. The alliance was successful and there was peace between the Palas and the Kalachuris.

From the accounts of Buddhist scripts by Atish Dipankar himself, namely Vimalaratnalekha, his letter to Nayapal, it is evident that there indeed was a treaty and a marriage alliance between the Palas and the Kalachuris. The two kings were Lakshmikarna and Nayapal and the prince supposedly was Vigrahapal III and the princess was Yauvanasree, which has been confirmed by historians R C Majumdar in his work History of Bengal and V.V. Mirashi in his works on the Inscriptions of Kalachuri-Chedi Era. Accounts of the same incidents can be found at the Siyan stone slab and a pillar inscription in Paikore of Birbhum, in west Bengal.

The story also talks of Atish Dipankar who incidentally travels to Tibet after the treaty, accounts of which can be found in the ancient Buddhist and Chinese scriptures.

Also the elder daughter of Karna, Veerashree and son in law Jatavarma (1046-1085 CE) supposedly belong to the Varman dynasty, who ruled present day Bangladesh region, during that period (1035- 1150 CE).

Other than these, the kingdom of Chedi is identified to be in the Dahala region of present day Madhya Pradesh.

However, according to historical records, the Palas ruled Gaud and not Magadha. Actually the Palas ruled some parts of Bihar, including Magadha during Nayapal's reign. Although the

centre of the kingdom was Gaud. This clarifies why the writer took the liberty of calling Vighrahapal the "Prince of Magadha".

Although the reference of this treaty has been found, there is no trace of all those heroic attempts of the Pala prince found in the story. The conclusion can be drawn from here, that the idea to kidnap Yauvanasree, the attempts and affairs relating to it, are a work of fiction on the writer's behalf.

Tungabhadra Teere

The novel revolves around the matrimonial alliance between the King of Kalinga Bhanudeva VI's daughter and king Devaraya II of Vijayanagara.

In the story, the constant battles between the Gajapatis of Kalinga and the Sangam dynasty of Vijayanagara come to an end with a matrimonial alliance between Devaraya II and Gajapati princess Vidyunmala. The two princesses of Kalinga, Vidyunmala and Manikankana, are sent to Vijayanagara. The novel has another angle of a common warrior Arjunvarma, who escapes from the "*mlechchha*" kingdom next to Vijayanagara in fear of forceful conversion. This man is saved from drowning by the guards of the princesses of Kalinga, after which he becomes a deck man at the Kalinga ship. After a long and eventful journey of three months, they reach Vijayanagara on the banks of Tungabhadra. Time flies as the princess worships Lord Pampapati (Shiva) for a month as a ritual. Meanwhile Arjunvarma becomes a trusted soldier of Devaraya. There is another friend of Arjunvarma, Balaram Karmokar, a blacksmith from Kalinga, who came along with the princesses to Vijayanagara as a guard as well. The blacksmith, Balaram made artillery for the Vijayanagara army. He and Arjunvarma, helped Devaraya to win a battle against the Bahamani kingdom. After many heroic victories of Arjunvarma and other events, the tale comes to an end with a shocking twist.

A contemporary drama, *Saluvabhyudaya* written by Rajnatha Dindima, who was a prominent writer and Sanskrit scholar patronised by Devaraya II, possibly clarifies some of the incidents in the novel. The drama supposedly is written using fictional names for real people and places and portrays a similar conflict between Vijayanagara and Kalinga. However, contradictory claims about the characters and incidents have been made by P. Sree Rama Sharma in a paper published in the 34th volume of the Indian History Congress Journal.

Accounts of Bhanudeva IV (1414-1434 CE) of Kalinga losing the Battle of Kondavidu against Devaraya II of Vijayanagara can be found. However, it is not clarified in history whether Devaraya married the daughter of Bhanudeva, Vidyunmala as an alliance.

The "mlechchha" kingdom from where Arjunvarma fled, is supposedly the Bahamani kingdom next to Vijayanagara. The war in which Arjunvarma helped Devaraya II, against the Bahamani kingdom, can be traced in history as a series of conflicts between the two kingdoms in the 1430s.

In the novel, Devaraya won this battle with the help of surprising weapons (artilleries). Presumably, the war took place between 1427-36. However, it is popularly known that artillery was introduced by Babur during the First Battle of Panipath in 1526 C.E. There is a gap of almost 90 years between the two events. Hence one does not know from where a common blacksmith acquired the skill of making artillery. In the novel the blacksmith asserted that he had learnt it in Bengal which was his motherland. However, no historical link could be gathered to sustain the writer's claim. Still the question that remains unanswered is whether the knowledge of guns and gun powder was known to the people of this land and was not imported via Babur.

Gaudmallar

This novel revolves around a boy named Bajra from a distant village, who comes to know that he is the grandson of Shashanka, the king of Gaud and takes place somewhere between 626-650 C.E. He sets on a journey to Karnasubarna, the capital of Gaud, to find his father, prince Manava of Gaur.

Bajradev grew up without the knowledge that he was the rightful heir to the throne of Gaud. Years ago when Shashankadev was defeated in a battle against the Varmans of Kamrup and Harshavardhana of Kanauji, his son Manavdev succeeded him. However he had to flee his capital Karnasubarna when he could not resist the attacks of Vaskaravarman of Kamrup and Harshavardhana. Manavdev sought refuge in Betashgram, a village at the borders of his territories. Here he married a local girl named Rangana and lived there for some days, after which he disappeared. Rangana gave birth to Bajra who became a skilled warrior. At the age of eighteen Bajra came to know his real identity, he set out on a mission to find his father. On his way to the capital, Karnasubarna, he came across a group of sanyasi rebels, who worked under the name of Jaynag and wanted to overthrow the king of the Varman dynasty. In the capital, he met Kodondo Misra, an official of his grandfather, who after coming across Bajra's true identity, planned a secret rebellion. Before the Jaynags could overthrow the king, Bajradev under the guidance of Kodondo Misra, killed the flamboyant king and seized the throne. However the story holds that Braja became the king of Gaur only for a day, after which the

band of rebels under Jaynag, toppled him. With a heavy heart Bajra returned to his village. Finally the story ended with a rather unexpected climax.

Though most of the events appears to be realistic, the climax was presumably fictionalised by the writer. As history records Shashankadev the valiant ruler of Gaur was succeeded by his son Manavdev who was overthrown by Vaskaravarman of Kamrup and Harshavardhana of Kanauj, and that he was the last ruler of his dynasty. Reference of these facts can be found from the scripts of Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang, according to historian Nitish Sengupta's *The land of Two Rivers*⁵. Historian Niharranjan Ray's *Bangalir Itihash* and Sukumar Sen's *Prachin Bangla o Bangali* holds similar facts. However, no evidence can be put forward in favour of the assertion, that there was another ruler of that dynasty after Manavdev.

Evidently, the story of Bajradev and his mission is very controversial and appears to be a work of fiction.

The story held some unique information, that there were Buddhist Vihars in Bengal after Shashanka's reign, who comes across in history as a staunch Hindu ruler intolerant to Buddhism and plundered all sorts of Buddhist monuments during his reign. Where his grandson took shelter for safety during his journey. Though an event of irony, it can be true because approximately 20 years had passed after Shashanka's reign and the Varman rulers were not known to be intolerant as Shashanka.

Kaler Mandira

This novel is based on the life of a lost Aryan prince who comes back after many years as a orphan Hun soldier.

Chitrak Barma came to a Hun kingdom in the hilly regions of north-western India. The kingdom, then, was ruled by the Huns, which was quite unusual as the territories were a part of the Aryan empire of Magadha. There he got romantically involved with princess Ratta Jashodhara. In the due course of events, Chitrak came to know his real identity, that this was his ancestral kingdom and the day the Huns had attacked their kingdom they had stolen the baby prince. He got to know that his mother was kept in the dungeons for all these years. Finally after several plot twists he won his kingdom back.

Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay's book, *Banglar Itihash* (vol 1; 2nd edition) informs, after the death of Kumaragupta, Skandagupta protected his father's territories from the continuous attacks of the Huns. He chased the Huns passed Kapisha and Gandhar, where they remained for several years. However, after 465 CE the Huns returned and attacked the Gupta territories several

times. This is the only available information that supports the author's plot about a forgotten Hun kingdom on the borders of the Aryan empire. The rest of story is simply a work of fiction.

Kumarsambhabher Kobi & Ashtam Shorgo

Kumarsambhabher Kobi is a novel, that revolves around the life of great poet Kalidasa and takes place approximately around 380- 415 CE. It tells the tale, with a little twist of fiction and a bit of exaggeration, of a commoner who becomes the court poet of Mahararaja Vikramaditya of Ujjain and how he composes the great verses that the world still endures.

On the other hand Ashtam Shorgo is a short story, taking place in the second half of Kalidasa's life. In this story, the poet suffers a dilemma, whether or not to write the eighth chapter of his epic. He finally gets the inspiration to complete his composition from Priyadarshika, a lady of admirable intellect.

In both the cases the references of Vikramaditya's court and kingdom, the nine gems of his court and the incidents of the poet's life can all be verified from several books of ancient Indian history, such as Emperor Vikramaditya by Adity Kay. However the identity of this mysterious lady named Priyadarshika cannot be traced.

Shadashiber Kando

It is one of the most well known children's story series by the author. Though not considered a part Bandopadhyay's historical works, Shadashib's series is one of the most detailed literary works on the Maratha empire in Bengali. The series comprises of chapters of Shadashib's life, published as five different stories - Shadashiber Adikando, Shadashiber Agnikando, Shadashiber Dourodouri Kando, Shadashiber Hoi Hoi Kando and Shadashiber Ghora Ghora Kando.

The story revolves around Shadashib, an orphan from a distant village in the Maratha province. He is exiled by his village headmen because of a false allegation of theft. He leaves the village and joins the army of Shivaji, where he works as a trusted soldier. He carries on guerrilla operations on the enemies, conquers fortresses, saves Shivaji's father from getting beheaded and many such assignments, within a very short period of time. In the end he chooses the life of a soldier, a life of adventure and does not settle as a simple farmer.

This series has clear references of Shivaji, his parents Jijabai and Shahaji Bhonsle, his generals Tanhaji Malhusare and Jesaji Kank. Their base in the Torna fort, the capture of Chakan fort and construction of the Raigar fort, Shivaji's conflicts with the Mughal empire and the

Nizams, are all well known incidents and are verified from books like The History of Medieval India by Satish Chandra and Rise of the Maratha Power by Mahadeo Govind Ranade.

Mritprodeep & Rumahoron

These are two interrelated short stories during the reign of Chandragupta I (319 - 335 CE or 319 - 350 CE). In Mritprodeep princess Somdutta, daughter of Pushkaran king Chandravarman, disguises herself and reaches the palace of Chandragupta, where she marries the king and stays there as her father's spy. Ishanvarma is a trusted general and the right hand of the king, however he envies the king and joins hands with Somdutta to ruin the Chandragupta. As planned Somdutta passes the information to her father and Chandravarman attacks Magadha. Though Chandravarman captures Magadha he does not get hold of Chandragupta, Kumaradavi or the little Samudragupta as Somdutta helps them escape. Ishanvarma expects a reward from Chandravarman as the price of his treachery, however he is thrown away into a deep well and locked with iron wires.

Here comes Rumahoron which is an autobiographical recollection of his life by Ishanvarma as he is locked in the deep well in the palace of Patuliputra. He recalls different incidents of his life which includes remembering Chandragupta, Kumaradavi, Somdutta, his life as a general the days of his adolescence and youth. This is where the author introduces new plots and characters, like Ruma and Titti.

Though evidences of Chandragupta, Kumaradavi, Samudragupta, Chandravarman, Somdutta and Ishanvarma's existence and the incidents described in the story Mritprodeep can be gathered from books like India's Ancient Past by R S Sharma, there is no accessible information to support the authenticity of Ishanvarma's life story.

According to historians R.C. Majumdar and Dilip Kumar Ganguly, Chandragupta's empire included both northern and southern Bengal, the *samatata* and the parts drained by the Ganges and hence included Chandravarman's kingdom. This supports the claim of the story Mritprodeep, about the long drawn conflict between the two kings. However the development of the plot on Somdutta and her role as a spy or the king's second wife comes across as controversial due to the lack of evidence.

Bishkanya

The story is about a girl named Ulka, who goes to Magadha as the representative of Vaishali, approximately in 400-370 B.C.E. She was supposed to take revenge secretly. She was the daughter of the autocratic king Chanda of Shishunaga dynasty but was ordered to be killed

soon after birth by her father himself. Her mother was killed though Ulka was saved by an official of the King's court, who escaped to Vaishali and raised her to take revenge. Later in the story the protagonist killed the imprisoned king Chanda, who in due course of time, was toppled by another member of his family, Senjit. Ulka wanted to kill King Senjit as well, but later committed suicide herself.

History has records of the Shishunaga dynasty as the fourth dynasty to rule Magadha (413- 345 BCE) and its secondary capital was Vaishali. But the author claims Magadha and the Vajji clan to be two separate kingdoms during the Shishunaga reign. There is no available information to support this claim and no records of King Chanda or King Senjit, as the rulers of the Shishunaga dynasty. Hence it stands as a fictional plot.

Bagher Bachchha

This is a short story that, that has been portrayed as conversation between the little Shibba Rao (Shivaji) and his grandfather Maloji Bhonsle. As his grandfather tells Shivaji of the valour of the Marathas and his father's line, he also talks of his maternal house. He claims with much pride, that his daughter in law comes from the great Jadav dynasty of Devagiri, and speaks of their valour in the Deccan.

As a matter of fact, it is evident from the books, Shivaji the Great Maratha by Ranjit Desai and Mata Jijabai by Priya Ghatwai, that Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, was the daughter of Mahalasabai and Lakhuji Jadav of the famous Jadav dynasty of Devagiri, exactly as described by Bandopadhyay.

Others

Other than the ones already mentioned and elaborated, the rest of the stories are covered in this portion. It is because the proportion of facts and fiction used in their making is not balanced. Either they are absolute works of fiction taking place in a specific historical period or there is not enough information available to identify any character or incident and tag them as real.

To start with, **Pragjyotish** is a story of two Aryan friends Pradyumna and Maghoba, who conquer the kingdom of the native Kodandas, however neither wants to become the king. As the name suggests it talks of the time when humans were not acquainted with the system of time or calendar. The only facts that can be gathered about the time when history was not even written properly, is the Aryan race and their traits and behaviour with the Dravidians.

Chuachandan is one of the most popular stories of the lot and takes place in 15th century Bengal. In the story, Nimai Pandit helped a sailor businessman rescue a girl from being

sacrificed. The great religious figure Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya Deb, before his salvation taught children as teacher and was referred to as Nimai Pandit in Nabadweep, Bengal. Although this is a well known fact and is evident from Srichaitanya Charitamrito by Krishnodas Kobiraj , the rest of the story is absolutely a work of fiction.

Taqat Mubarak is the story of Shah Shuja , the third son of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his struggle to acquire the throne. Most of the characters are well known faces of the history books, namely, Shah Shuja, Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan and Shuja's companion Alivardi Khan. But there are a few unknown faces who are likely the fruits of the author's imagination and the events appear to be rather fictionalised.

The story **Setu** takes place in Ujjain during Kanishka's reign, the stories **Shankha Kankan** and **Reba Rodhoshi** take place in Alauddin Khilji's reign and **Rakto Shondhya** is a fictionalised thriller about Vasco Da Gama and other Portuguese travellers of the 15th century . However the protagonists or the plots are all works of fiction in these cases.

The rest of the stories in the list, namely - **Amitabha, Chandan Murti, Maru O Shangha and Indratulok**, are not specifically about any prominent historical character or incident. Their plots are based on a historical time period, a ruler's reign or takes place in a known historic kingdom, which are not very clear. There are no other instances of reality in these stories.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to bring to light the facts involved in these popular historical fictions. In due course, several references could be gathered to support the plots of the stories and it could be identified which parts were actually fictionalised by the author. In some cases the entire story had to be labelled imaginative or the controversies had to remain unanswered because of lack of proper information or available proof. It must be made clear once again, that the purpose was to research on the historical elements used in this glorious literature. The idea was to critically analyse the stories and find the amount of truth involved in each case. There cannot be any question about the writer's efforts to use as much historical information as possible. The rest is of course, the author's freedom of imagination. In spite of a few controversial statements made by the writer, this collection without any doubt can be called an exceptional work of literature and to be considered as "historical fiction".

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Weaving the lives of the Subaltern in Sunderbans -through the lens of Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

Dr. Manjari Ray

Abstract :

The *Hungry Tide* is set in the Sunderbans. Famous for mangroves, Royal Bengal Tigers, Irrawaddy dolphins, this mysterious and enchanting land is also the home for the poor people who lead a precarious existence. In a masterly manner Amitav Ghosh depicts how the tempest, tides, myth, culture, history, and political considerations colour the lives of the hapless inhabitants of this hostile land.

Key words-tide country, morichjhapi, refugee, dolphin,

Amitav Ghosh (1956-) 'is perhaps the finest writer among those who were born out of the post-*Midnight's children* revolution in Indian English fiction.'ⁱ The strength of his writings lies in his effortless move through national and international boundaries and through generations, and also in exposing the issues which are central to the post colonial debates. Strongly attached to the Subaltern Studies, Ghosh likes to present those historical events, which are ignored or sidelined in the government records, from the perspective of the Subalterns. In his own words, 'I'm drawn to rural India, to marginal India, I'm drawn to marginal people in India, I'm drawn to marginal people around the world...to obscure figures, defeated figures and people who salvage some sort of life out of wreckage...these characters appeal to me, they interest me.'ⁱⁱ 'Part of the idea behind *The Hungry Tide* was to shine light on this area that is little known within India. But even within Bengal, the Sunderbans is really a kind of darkness. People don't think of it, they don't write about it, they don't look at it'.ⁱⁱⁱ This book explores some of the problems and dilemmas which are central to both colonialism and globalisation. The predicaments of the individuals are explored in larger historical canvas.

Written in 2004, *The Hungry tide* opens in a set which may be defined as subaltern. Barely hundred kilometres away from Calcutta, the tide country is an archipelago of hundreds of scattered islands which are 'the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringes of her sari, the *achol* that follows her, half- wetted by the sea'.^{iv} Situated between the sea and the

land of Bengal this archipelago stretches for almost three hundred kilometres , from the Hooghly river in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh. It is an untamed area where the Ganga emptied into the Bay, where there is no border to divide freshwater and salt, and the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, creating a diverse natural habitat where tigers, snakes crocodiles and sharks roam free. This is a place where floods continually inundate the land and whole forests lift their heads above the tides and then disappear. It is a liquid landscape where surging cyclones can wipe out thousands of lives with the flick of one giant wave, where animals, and humans, myth and reality imperceptibly merge into each other and struggle for survival.^v

The settlement on this hostile land started when a British idealist, Daniel Hamilton, who strongly believed that labour conquers everything, purchased from the British Sarkar in 1903 ten thousand acres of tide country which included famous islands of Gosaba, Rangabellia, Satjelia and fictional Lusibari. At that time there was nothing but forest, no people, no embankments, no fields, just mud and mangrove. At the high tide most of the land vanished under water and the predators-tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards roamed freely. Hamilton invited impoverished people to come and populate the place, free to them on one condition- there would be no caste system, no petty little divisions and differences. Despite the fear of death at every step of life and despite the fact that they were farmers and would now have to become fishermen, many poor people heeded to the call and arrived. They moved to this commune in three waves- in 1920s, in 1947 after partition, and in 1971 after the Bangladesh war, and they helped Hamilton to establish a semi communist region where the inhabitants shared possessions. Daniel later arranged for electricity, generator, telephone lines, Central Bank even a Gosaba currency. He dreamed of a place where a man and woman could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenter in the evening. Daniel's dream however ended in a failure as after his death in 1939, the estate passed into the hands of his nephew who took it as a business and had very little interest in it. Soon it went into the hands of the management. The funds earmarked for clinics, education and public works went to the estate's managers, and the overseers' henchmen savagely beat settlers who dared to resist or protest against this. The methods were those of a penal colony and the atmosphere that of a prison camp. It was under this management that Nirmal, a Marxist college teacher, took the job of a school master and came to live there with his wife Nilima. Within a few years the *zamindars* were abolished and large land holdings were broken up by law and Hamilton Estate was crippled by lawsuits. Nilima however founded a *Mohila Sangathan* which

subsequently developed into Badabon Trust and offered some medical, paralegal, agricultural help to the local people.^{vi}

The destitution of the tide country however continues as before as hunger and catastrophe are a way of life. After decades of settlement, the land has still not been wholly leached of its salt. The soil bears poor crops and cannot be farmed all the year round. Most families subsist on a single daily meal. Despite all the labour that has been invested in the embankments, there are still periodic beaches because of flood and storms. Each such inundation render the land infertile for several years at a time. The settlers are mainly of farming stocks. Hunger drive them to hunting and fishing and the results are often disastrous. Many die of drowning, and many more picked off by crocodiles and sharks. Thousands risk death in order to collect meagre quantities of honey, wax, firewood and sour fruits of Kewra tree. No day seems to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, snake or a crocodile.^{vii}

The tapestry of *Hungry Tide* is woven with two threads. One is the most shameful and bloodiest chapter of the history of Sunderbans, the Morichjhapi incident revealed through the diary of Nirmal; and the other thread moves round Piya, Kanai, and Fokir, and weaves a web of their relationships through marine biology, myth, history, geography, climatology, economics, environmental studies and anthropology in a masterly but effortless manner.

Amitav Ghosh sincerely believes that border creates subalterns since it is the site of a contest between the individuals who legally or illegally cross it and the authorities that make and man it. The refugees of the delta region of Bangladesh, the poorest of rural people, oppressed both by the Hindu upper caste and Muslim communalists, were deported to the resettlement camp in Dandakaranya in central India which was a rocky red land. The resettlement camp at Dandakaranya was more like a concentration camp as the refugees were surrounded by the police and forbidden to leave. The local people treated them as intruders and attacked them with bows and arrows. They tried to adjust themselves in this hostile land but ultimately decided to march to Morichjhapi, one of the islands of Sunderbans, which had already been declared to be a reserve forest for the Royal Bengal Tiger. At the heart of hearts they had a faint faith that Left Front Government who had recently came to power in West Bengal after championing the cause of the refugees would support them. Their hopes however got belied as the Left Front Government after assuming power resolved to stick to the earlier declaration of protecting the Morichjhapi island as a reserved land.^{viii}

Among the refugees from Bangladesh who came to settle in Morichjhapi, there were some local landless persons too. One of them was given flesh and bones by Ghosh as Kusum. Kusum's father was killed by a tiger and her mother was sold by a local pimp who had eyes also on Kusum. Being a brave and courageous lady, Kusum managed to escape and went to Dhanbad where she met a good man Rajen, married him and had a child, Fokir. After the premature death of her husband, Kusum one day saw that thousands of ghost like persons with children on their shoulders and bundles on their back were heading to Morichjhapi. Kusum did not waste time and joined them to come to her birth place.

The settlers at Morichjhapi made the island some sort of commune dividing the entire land into five wards and people in charge of these wards took decisions and helped organise every essential activity. They cleared the paths, built huts, shacks and shanties with mud, thatch and bamboo in a planned manner. They created their own government, organisations and institutions. Each family of settlers had been given five acres of land. Within a short span they even planted tube wells, started a bakery, a workshop for boat building, a pottery, a shop for iron smith, little marketplaces where all kinds of goods were sold. In spite of all this they knew that all their efforts would go in vain if the public, press did not approve of their activities. The pressure must be put on the government to leave them alone, because that island was already declared a reserved land for the tigers and trees. So the settlers arranged a sumptuous lunch for the writers, intellectuals, journalists and invited them to see how they diligently changed this hostile land. The intellectuals did come, had lunch, made long speech, even discovered the seeds of a Dalit nation, a place of true freedom for the country's most oppressed, knowing fully well what was going to happen. On being asked regarding the fate of the refugees on that island, an intellectual from Kolkata laughed in the cynical way and shamelessly said, 'You can't make an omelette without breaking the egg'. The visiting psychiatrist from Kolkata, who came to examine Nirmal, captured the mentality of the educated class. He told Nilima, 'Oh these refugees!...Such a nuisance. But of what concern is this to your husband? Does he know anyone on that island? What are they to him and he to them?'^{ix} Even Nilima suspected her husband's concern for the refugee was due largely to Kusum for whom he had a special feeling in his heart.

The apprehension of the settlers however came to be true as, 'Thirty police launches circled the island, thereby depriving the settlers of food and shelter, they were also tear gassed, their huts razed, their boats sunk, their fish and tube wells destroyed, those who tried to cross the river were shot at... several hundred men and women and children were believed to have died

during that time and their bodies thrown into the river.’^x Before she was gang raped, murdered and thrown into the water, Kusum made this question to which the literate world failed to give any answer:

‘the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them to say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. “This island has to be saved for the trees, it has to be saved for the animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by the people from all around the world.”...Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?...do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers?... this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as humans have, from water and soil. No human being could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived- by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil.’^{xi}

This hostile and difficult to live in land is however rich in flora and fauna, particularly the Royal Bengal Tiger, Irrawaddy dolphin which attract national and international interests. An American scientist Piya Roy comes to this land to study the Irrawaddy dolphin. Being a reticent, sober, self reliant and practical scientist, Piya is devoted to her work and yet very sensitive to the people and their environment.^{xii} But the forest guard proves to be of no help as he has very little knowledge of this subject and is interested only in squeezing money. At this juncture Piya makes a chance acquaintance with Fokir, the son of the soil, the truest soul of the land, who not only saves her life but guides her to the desired destination. It turns out that it is almost impossible to do the research work without the help of Fokir who possesses more knowledge of the rivers and the wild life of the Sunderbans than any one from outside. The ebb and flow of the waters of the tide country match the flow of blood in his veins. The sky, the winds and the waters are his teachers.^{xiii} The problem of communication between an illiterate Fakir and the English speaking American lady is however bridged up by Delhi based Kanai who is intelligent, snob, knows six languages and a self centred careerist.

As the novel unfolds, love, respect, trust and lack of it start to colour the relations of the characters. Kanai starts to feel love for Piya and cannot understand why Piya is fond of Fakir. ‘You shouldn’t deceive yourself, Piya: there wasn’t any thing in common between you then and there isn’t now. Nothing. He’s a fisherman and you’re a scientist. What you see as fauna he sees as food. He’s never sat in a chair, for heaven’s sake. Can you imagine what

he'd do if he was taken on to a plane?"^{xiv} Amitav Ghosh finds that the rising India has two faces. There is one part that is very much plugged into the modern world, and this is mainly the urban centres that work to a certain rhythm; and there are the other parts- the rural areas- which are almost on another continent. Kanai is someone from modern India. His world is moving so quickly. He is rich and making money. Yet, Kanai can't forget that there is this other India, represented by Fokir. It is always at the back of his mind. Except for interpretation, his urbane traits, sophisticated knowledge come to no use to Piya who is irresistibly getting closer to Fakir primarily for his first hand knowledge of that locale. This makes Kanai jealous of Fokir. In spite of high confidence in words and languages, Kanai cannot read the eyes of Fokir, and whenever he looks at him he feels that Fokir sees in him a representative of the outside world, 'someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother'.^{xv} The face off between the two represents how the educated elites view the Subaltern. To Kanai, Fakir is less than an animal who plans to kill him and Gorjontola incidence brings out the worst of him:

Suddenly the blood rushed to Kanai's head and obscenities began to pour from his mouth: '*Shala, banchod, shourer bachcha* .

His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from the sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village. He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve.^{xvi}

Amitava Ghosh sincerely believes that, 'words are just air... When the winds blow on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real rivers lies beneath, unseen and unheard...' It is sincerity, complete devotion to work, mutual respect and something else which bridge the gap between Piya and Fokir though they never exchange a word. In every odds, Piya finds the safe hands of Fokir to save her. Even on that fateful night he protects her from behind when a very big and heavy stump breaks his neck while they are sitting on the trunk of a tree tied by a sari.

She recalled the promises she had made to him. In the silence of her heart, and how, in those last moments, with the wind and the rain still raging around them, she had been unable to do anything for him other than to hold a bottle of water to his lips. She remembered how she had

tried to find the words to remind him of how richly he was loved- and once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words.^{xvii}

Amitav Ghosh is, of course , ‘a historian in his own right, as virtually all of his work up to this point testifies...in fact all his “fiction” has had a vigorous and rigorous grounding not just in “facts”, but in serious research as well.’^{xviii} Ranajit Guha once remarks in one of his writings that the “ordinary apparatus of historiography...designed for big events and institutions, is most at ease when made to operate on those larger phenomena which visibly stick out of the debris of the past...A critical historiography can make up for this lacuna by bending closer to the ground in order to pick up the traces of a subaltern life in its passage through time.”^{xix} Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, though written in the format of a novel, does that job perfectly well. In his own words, ‘According to Forest Department in the Indian Sunderbans, tigers kill several dozens of people each year. Anthropologists there think that the figure is massively underreported, that as many as 200 people are killed there each year...In any other part of the world, this would be considered a major national problem. So this is just an index of the fact that the impoverished people dying are extremely poor and don’t have a voice. They can’t make themselves heard and understood, and that is why we pay no attention to their plight. Incredible.’^{xx} The honesty and empathy with which Ghosh draws the lives of the impoverished people of Sunderbans, would certainly make *The Hungry Tide* an invaluable document in the annals of the tide country.

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THE DIVINE DANCE: A BRIEF STORY OF CHHAU

Dr. Madhuparna Chakraborty

Abstract

In this article I shall look into the evolution of Chhau Dance, the ‘masked’ dance of Eastern India and its impact on the socio-cultural life of the inhabitants of the region. India is a country rich with various traditions and vibrant customs of varied cultures. Every corner of India has multiple approaches to safeguard those social customs, for example, folk songs, traditional dances and music. As a method of communication folk dances, traditional music and dances assume an integral part of the Indian culture. Chhau dance-drama of Eastern India is one of the folk art that is acted in India. To comprehend the meaning of this Chhau art of India, it is critical to initially comprehend the components and the sources of the Chhau. The Chhau is exceptionally important to the Indian culture since it is both a strictly disciplined as well as fanciful practice that has been gone on through numerous ages. The Chhau is utilized as an approach to impart an ethical message by the depiction of stories from Indian folklore and epics. The depiction of stories is the place where the dramatic viewpoint comes into the image. The Chhau characters are quite so accordingly; character development and covers are utilized rather than discoursed to show certain feelings and emotions to bring the story to life. The investigation of the history & origins, ensembles, organizing, music, and entertainers brings forth this reality.

Keywords - Chhau – Seraikella – Mayurbhanj – *Rarh* - Paik – *akhada*.

The eternal origin of classical dances of India or *Shashtriya Deveshⁱ* can be traced back to the Sanskrit text of *Natya Shashtraⁱⁱ*. The various forms of dance that come under this elaborate umbrella have their roots in Hindu religious musical theatre. The Sangeet Natak Academy recognises eight classical dance forms in India, namely *Bharatnatyam*, *Kaathak*, *Kuchipudi*, *Kathakali*, *Odissi*, *Mohiniyattam*, *Manipuri* and *Sattriya*. Folk dance on the other hand, is a part of the indigenous tradition of one particular region or a host of kindred

regions. Mostly performed during special occasions, festivities and ceremonies, the folk and classical dances of the Indian subcontinent in unison reflect the diverse and therefore a distinctive cultural tradition of the country. India has also been the cradle of the most remarkably multifaceted and diverse theatrical cultures of the world. The geographical magnanimity, different ecological circumstances, racial diversities, the presence of various regions and languages, the compound religious beliefs as well as ritual practices and the obvious elaborate social structure have all contributed in drawing the most colourful panorama of dance and dance-drama traditions. The focus of the present attempt is on one such folk dance-drama tradition -the Chhau dance of the mountain and forest belts of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha.

Before delving into further details regarding this dance form, it is critical to initially comprehend the components and the starting points of the Chhau. The Chhau is important to the Indian culture since it is both a strict and fanciful practice that has been going on for ages. Not exclusively is the Chhau dance dramatization utilized for happy festivals but at the same time is utilized as an approach to impart an ethical message by the depiction of stories from Indian folklore. The depiction of stories is the place where the dramatic angle comes into the image. The Chhau is a culture that isn't just utilized for entertainment purposes yet additionally as a method of correspondence with the local area to pass on specific messages by utilizing fanciful stories. The word Chhau comes from the Sanskrit, "Chhayi" (picture, shadow or dream) in view of the utilization of covers in certain types of Chhau Dance, for example, the popular style found in the Purulia District of West Bengal. The Chhau is generally performed for a group of people that is commonly Indian including children and little girls of Indian soil raised with regular Indian qualities.

The Chhau dance, additionally spelled as Chau or Chhaau, is that form of Indian dance that began in the Purulia region of West Bengal with the ancestral and people traditions, with roots in eastern India. It is found in three styles named after the area where they are performed, for example:

The Purulia Chhau of West Bengal,

The Seraikella Chhau of Jharkhand

The Mayurbhanj Chhau of Orissa.

Basically Chhau is the traditional dance from of the *Rarh* district. It might have gotten its name

from Sanskrit “Chaya” (shadow or masked). Others interface it to the Sanskrit root “Chadma” (camouflage or covered). In Seraikella it is said that Chhau takes its name from the Sanskrit words *chhiyii* (shadow) and *chhadma* (False, simulatory) because of the masks used in the dance.ⁱⁱⁱ Sunil Kothari writing in *Marg* (Vol. XXII, 1968) opines that *chhadma* rather than *chhaya* is likely to be the source of 'Chhau' since in Assam dance-masks are called chhau, and the Assamese word is derived from *chhadma*.^{iv} In Mayurbhanj the interpretation is that Chhau derives from *chhauni* - military camp-because the dance is related to martial arts which were practised in military camps. Ashutosh Bhattacharya in his book *Chhow Dance of Purulia* (Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta) opines that the word derives from *sang* (late Sanskrit)- one who dresses to represent another person, or a clown.^v P. P. Mahto in an article writes that Chhau comes from *chho*, an Austric word, meaning gesture or movement imitating verbal and non-verbal signs.^{vi} Some scholars of Mayurbhanj claim that the word combines *chha tabka* (six gaits) and *uphli*, the basic techniques of Chhau dance (*chha + u*). On the other hand Girish Chandra Mahanta, a Chhau activist of Bamanghati subdivision of Mayurbhanj (who organizes an annual Chhau dance festival at Rairangpur), believes that Chhau came simply from the Oriya word for six.^{vii} There are six basic movements or division in Chhau: *chal* (gaits), *chakkar* (circling movement), *digbaiji* (vault), *ghura* (Whirling movement), *uphli* (jump) and *rangbaji* (costume and make-up). These arguments seem untenable and unnecessary when we note the meaning of the Oriya word *chhau* as well as words etymologically related to it. Chhau is a pure colloquial word in Oriya meaning skill, dexterity as well as crouching, pouncing, etc., as recorded in the *Pumachandra Oriya Bhasakosh* (Vol. 3) and *Pramod Abhidhan* (Vol. 2) - the two most authentic Oriya lexicons.^{viii} Words and phrases related to chhau are: *chhau mariba*, to pounce upon prey; *chhauri*, armour, coat of mail; *chhauka*, clever, cunning, dextrous; *chhauni*, militarycamp. As these words are connected with martial practices it can be said with some degree of certainty that chhau connoted skill and dexterity in battle referring to the martial arts of the communities of the region from which the dance has originated.^{ix}

The Chhau dance is predominantly performed during celebrations in the Indian states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Orissa, particularly the spring celebration of *Chaitra Parva* and in which the entire local area participates. The Purulia Chhau dance is commended during the *Vasanta Utsav*. Veiled structures appear as necessary pieces of Chhau dance in Purulia and Seraikella styles. The information on dance, music, and cover making is communicated

orally. However, the Chhau found in northern Orissa doesn't utilize covers during the dance. The Purulia Chhau is a folkish dance, full of vigorous movements. In Seraikella and Mayurbhanj, on the other hand, this dance has developed into an art of great sophistication and expressiveness, through years of cultivation under royal patronage.^x While the Seraikella and Purulia styles use elaborate masks, the Mayurbhanj style has dispensed with them.

The tunes used in Chhau are in many cases based on the *ragas* of Hindustani music; in some cases they are borrowed from the compositions of outstanding Oriya poets of the past, such as Upendra Bhanja, Kabi Surya and Uddita Narayana, while there are also items which use folk melodies.^{xi} Usually at least two distinct airs are used in a dance item, and when the melody changes so does the rhythm of the dance. The steps of the dance are governed by patterns of rhythmic syllables played on the drums, and any change of tempo is prefaced with a *katan*, a rhythmic flourish played three times in succession.^{xii} The items of Chhau have a set choreographic framework, but the number of times particular sequences are to be rendered in a presentation is governed by the exigencies of time and space; for this reason, it is a part of the Chhau technique that whenever the dancer desires to change from one sequence to the next, he indicates this to the musicians through a subtle nod or some similar discreet cue.

In case of Saraikella Chhau, the themes of the dance are taken from mythology, everyday life, aspects of nature, and, at times, the dance is simply the delineation of a mood, state or condition. In Chhau the mask is the focal point of the dance, for in it is concentrated the quintessence of the particular mood or theme. When the mask is worn the dancer loses the most sensitive and potent instrument of expression, the face, and so the onus of creating and projecting moods and emotions is transferred to the body. The mask mirrors the basic, dominant *rasa* of a dance; the body qualifies it. The totality of feeling or emotion pertinent to a theme is crystallised in the mask; the body gives it animation. The mask wears a static expression, but in the magic of the Chhau every flexion and every thrust of the head, coupled with total body dynamics, contributes to create a form of mime that adds a new dimension to the concept of *abhinaya* as it is generally understood.^{xiii} The making of Chhau masks involves much more than mere workmanship. Each mask is first visualised by studying the character it is to represent, and then given shape and substance. Almost all masks are painted a flat pastel shade, and in some cases the colour is chosen to augment the overall effect of the disguise. The stylised contours of the eyebrows, eyes and mouth are painstakingly

painted, for they bring into vivid relief the distinctive character with which a particular mask is associated. Thus, in *Ratri*, (Night) the mask has half-closed eyes, heavy with sleep and in *Banaviddha* (The Injured Deer) the eyebrows are knotted in anguish. To really appreciate the mimetic potentiality of the Chhau mask one has to enter the world of this dance, for it is a world in which the human face is capable of absorbing and mirroring the innate urges and passions of all living beings.^{xiv} In Chhau the mask has a human face, but it can, when necessary, take on the salient characteristics of any living being, as visualised in the theme of a particular dance. For this reason in dances like *Mayura* (Peacock) and *Hansa* (Swan), though the masks have human features, the modelling is stylised to suggest the visage; at times even the emotional make-up of the creatures is represented. The repertoire of the Chhau dance, broadly speaking, falls into three categories. Firstly, there are the simplest dances, like *Hare-Vishnu*, *Madana Gopala* and *Krishna-Balarama*, generally performed by children in which the choreography has little, if anything, to do with the themes of these dances. The steps and movements, at best, touch upon the rudiments of the Chhau technique, and the dances are invariably performed without masks. To the second category belong dances such as *Arati* (Offering of Light), *Dheebhar* (Fisherman), *Astradanda* (Sword-Play) and *Sabara* (Hunter). In these, the theme is literally followed through in the choreography: there is very little extraneous movement or mime to detract from the actual narrative. In the third category is what one may call the sophisticated and intriguing compositions of the Chhau repertoire. Here, in every dance, there are two specific aspects: the outward, and apparent kinaesthetic expression; and the inner, esoteric, allegorical, even philosophic, interpretation. *Mayura*, *Banaviddha*, *Nabik* and *Chandrabhaga* are perfect examples of this.^{xv}

Mayura is the dance of the peacock, but it is so highly stylised that it bears very little resemblance to the natural traits and mannerisms associated with the bird. It can be called a choreographic fantasy, for, apart from etching a few movements characteristic of the peacock, the dancer exploits to the fullest the qualities of vainglory and self-adulation and uses these as a springboard to project his own personality. By employing, for example, a startling contraction and release of the lower torso, an almost primitive pelvic impulse, a very primeval element is brought into focus: *Mayura* might be a bird or man in his most exuberant, sensuous mood. *Banaviddha* tells the simple story of a deer shot through the heart by an arrow. The movements of the dance project the sprightliness of the animal, but a palpable undertone of pain permeates the whole composition. Allegorically, one can read into

it the remorse of a being unwilling to give up life, or the tragedy of unrequited love, or even a bitter commentary on the hunt and a subtle plea for *ahimsa*. *Mayura* is the dance of the peacock, but it is so highly stylised that it bears very little resemblance to the natural traits and mannerisms associated with the bird. It can be called a choreographic fantasy, for, apart from etching a few movements characteristic of the peacock, the dancer exploits to the fullest the qualities of vainglory and self-adulation and uses these as a springboard to project his own personality. By employing, for example, a startling contraction and release of the lower torso, an almost primitive pelvic impulse, a very primeval element is brought into focus: *Mayura* might be a bird or man in his most exuberant, sensuous mood. *Banaviddha* tells the simple story of a deer shot through the heart by an arrow. The movements of the dance project the sprightliness of the animal, but a palpable undertone of pain permeates the whole composition. Allegorically, one can read into it the remorse of a being unwilling to give up life, or the tragedy of unrequited love, or even a bitter commentary on the hunt and a subtle plea for *ahimsa*. *Nabik* has the simple theme of a man and woman setting out in a boat, getting caught in a storm, and surviving it. For one who can perceive deeper, the philosophical implications in this dance are many. The boat, for example, stands for security, and when they are caught in the storm, it is as if they are dragged into the very vortex of life, and this brings out woman's innate desire to yield and submit to man, and her dependence on man whose duty and privilege it is to protect her. *Chandrabhaga* is the story of a maiden pursued by the Sun God. It has the quality of an epic tragedy, and is considered the piece de resistance of the Chhau repertoire. *Chandrabhaga* is bathing in the ocean and is caught unawares by the Sun God; he makes odious advances to her which seem so repugnant that *Chandrabhaga* is left with no other alternative but to plunge into the ocean and commit suicide. The sacrifice of *Chandrabhaga* glorifies the virtue of chastity which cannot be violated even by the gods.^{xvi}

In Saraikella, though the Chhau is a dance that has been in existence for centuries, it owes its present form and repertory almost entirely to one man: Bijoy Pratap Singh Deo. A younger brother of Aditya Pratap Singh Deo, who, till his death in 1969, was the Maharaja of Seraikella, Bijoy can be ranked as one of the truly great choreographers in Indian classical dance. He was not a performing artiste, but practically all the compositions used in Chhau today are his creations. Next to Bijoy, the most substantial contribution to the Chhau art has been by Maharaja Aditya Pratap Singh Deo and his three sons, Suvendra, Brijendra and Suddhendra.^{xvii} As long as he was alive, the Maharaja was the arbiter of taste in all matters

connected with the Chhau dance and many of the masks which are in existence today were designed and given finishing touches by him. Suvendra and Brijendra were virtuoso dancers and among the finest in the Chhau tradition. Both of them, unfortunately, died very young. In case of Mayurbhanj, origins of Chhau dance can be traced back to the *Paik akhada*, the gymnasium and the martial art of the Paik soldiers who made up the armies of the kings of Orissa in the conquest of Jharkhand, and eventually settled there. Through the passage of time even though the swords and shields and bows and arrows became obsolete with the introduction of guns in Warfare, the Paik *akhadas* remained a living tradition in Orissa, and thrived in Mayurbhanj and Seraikella where the Paiks had settled. The martial art gradually took root in this new soil. The daily training in an *akhada* is divided into four categories of exercises: *danda* (ground exercises), which are of twenty-five varieties; *sunā*, (aerial) acrobatic exercises; *kusti-kasrat* (wrestling and weightlifting); and *khela* (play with weapons). *Sunā* includes various exercises like *mankadchiti* (front capriole), *Hanuman uli* (back capriole), *sun chiti* (somersault in the air), *naga-phasa* (literally, serpent's noose), etc.^{xviii} In the latter exercise the performer holds three cane rings joined together, takes a quick somersault and puts his head and legs into the rings. In the exercise called *mundi*, two persons lock themselves at the waist and perform caprioles. Various sizes of human pyramids are also formed, from the top of which a performer takes a vault. In *kusti* and *kasrat* the trainees lift heavy round stones, heavy iron chains (*nizam*) and iron balls, and work with *mudgars*, wooden clubs. The last category of exercises, *khela*, is play with sticks and swords. Various techniques of wielding the sword and stick are taught. To gain control and precision in handling a weapon there are exercises such as cutting a green banana with a single stroke of the sword placed on the abdomen of a person lying on the ground, breaking a coconut placed on the head of a person with a single stroke of a big stick (*lathi*) or an axe, and breaking a stone placed on the chest with a single strike of a hammer. These and other exercises with weapons are performed with dance movements and the utterance of rhythmic syllables.

If we closely study the techniques of Chhau dance and compare them with the exercises and movements of the Paik *akhada*, it is easy to see the relation between the two. The *Hanuman uli* and *mankadchiti* of the Paik *akhada* are the two important acrobatic stunts of Purulia Chhau. The *paintaras* (sideways movements) of performers when they confront each other have also been adopted from the Paik tradition. The *paltiis* (turns and flings) and *hana* (action of killing with a sword) movements of the Paik *akhada* are two important movements in Mayurbhanj Chhau. Moreover, the basic gaits and movements (*tabka* and *uphli*) are

practised with sword and shield in both traditions, and the movements with weapons are called *hatiar- dhara* (holding arms). The place of practice of Chhau is called *akhada* after the Paiks' gymnasium and the teacher is not called guru, but *ustad*, after the teacher at a Paik *akhada*. All the paik *akhada* exercises-gymnastics, swordplay, mock-fighting, acrobatics-are performed with intense drumming of the *Dhol* which is the basic percussion instrument of all the styles of Chhau dance. The *Dhumsa* is essentially a war-drum which is again used in all the three forms of Chhau. (It should be mentioned that the Paiks also have their own dance, *Paikali*, which is performed with *Jhoomar* music and bears a resemblance to Chhau; it is still prevalent in Singbhum, Ranchi and Purulia districts. The dancers, dressed in traditional Costume, perform with swords and shields in their hands). In addition, The Chhau is performed mostly by male artists, around evening time in an open space, called *Aakhada* or *Asar*. The Chhau dance is cadenced and set to customary society music, played on the *Mohuri* and *Shehnai*.^{xix} The subjects for these moves incorporate nearby legends, fables, and scenes from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The Chhau goes from praising hand to hand fighting, trapeze artistry, and games acted in happy subjects of the dance, to an organized hit the floor with strict topics found in Shaivism, Shaktism, and Vaishnavism. The outfits shift between the styles, with Purulia and Serakeilla utilizing covers to distinguish the character. The accounts sanctioned by Chhau artists incorporate those from the Hindu sagas the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and other Indian mythological texts. The Chhau is generally performed by male group, provincially commended especially during spring each year, and possibly a syncretic dance in the structure that arose out of a combination of old-style moves and the customs of antiquated local clans. The dance is stunning and unites individuals from different financial foundations in a merry and strict spirit. The antecedents of Chhau dance (mainly Purulia style) were *Paika* and *Natua*, yet *Nachani* dance additionally assumed a significant part in giving Chhau its current personality.^{xx} Chhau dance acquires the female strides and developments from the *Nachani* dance solely. The female dance components in the Chhau dance presented the parts of *Lasya Bhava* from the *Natya-Shastra* that brought sensuality, and magnificence in the dance structure, while, the virile male dance development is credited to the Shiva's *tandava* style of dance. The Seraikella Chhau is performed with representative covers, and as the acting builds up the job of the entertainer is playing. The Purulia Chhau utilizes broad covers moulded as the character being played; for instance, a lion character has a face veil of lion and body ensembles too with the entertainer strolling on all fours. These

covers are made by potters and are basically sourced from the Purulia region of West Bengal.^{xxi} The Mayurbhanj Chhau is performed without veils and is in fact similar to the Seraikella Chhau.

The Chhau Dance is supported by the government. The Sangeet Natak Akademi has set up a National Center for Chhau Dance at Baripada, Orissa. Purulia Chhau Dance is listed on UNESCO. The principle distinction between the Purulia Chhau and Odisha Chhau is in the utilization of the masks or the cover. Purulia Chhau utilizes veils in dance, yet Orissa doesn't have covers or the masks consequently adding outward appearance with body developments and gestures. Purulia Chhau artists wear the natural and dramatic veil which addresses the fanciful characters. Subsequent to making the state of the veil with mud, it is hued and enhanced with *Shola* and different things. As the essential distinction of Purulia Chhau, the covered mask is one of a kind of customary. These Chhau veils are made by the *Sutradhar* people.^{xxii} The creation of a veil experiences different stages. Eight to Ten layers of delicate paper, submerged in the weakened paste, are glued consistently on the shape before the mud form is cleaned with fine debris powder. An exceptional layer of mud and fabric is applied and the cover is then sun-dried. After this, the shape is cleaned and the second round of sun drying is done prior to isolating the layers of fabric and paper from the form. In the wake of completing and boring openings for the nose and eyes, the veil is hued and embellished. Purulia Chhau dance, not at all like the other two dance styles are described by extremely enormous and vivid covers and expand outfits portraying legendary characters from strict writings (Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas legends, and Puranas). Documentation about the beginning of Chhau dance is scant and its root has consequently not yet been solidly settled.

Chhau dance is associated with the religious culture of Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal are practised mainly by low-caste Hindus and the hinduized tribes. This is explained by the fact that under the spell of *Tantrism*, Hinduism became more liberal and the cult of Shiva and *Shakti* developed as a mass religious culture. This cult also assimilated the rituals of tribal communities to expand its base. This dance is therefore a synthesis of various belief systems prevalent in the region. Chhau dance is significantly more than one of the praised performing expressions. It is as a traditional method for entertainment and information. Chhau Dance includes the whole body, and the body can be an incredible specialist of correspondence.

The music used in Chhau also entertains and connects the people together. Chhau Dance is one of the critical types of traditional dance drama forms. Communication through Chhau dance is more than passionate. It can shoot an inclination that can't be portrayed in words.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ It is an umbrella term indicating various performing arts rooted in Hindu religious musical theatre styles whose theory and practice had its roots in the Sanskrit text *Natya Shashtra*. Julius Lipner, Routledge(2010) *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge, New York,p.206.

ⁱⁱ *Natya Shashtra* ascribed to Bharata-Muni, the ancient Indian theatrologist and musicologist is a detailed treatise and handbook on dramatic art that deals with all aspects of classical Sanskrit theatre.

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^{xii} Ibid.

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^{xv} Kaushik Dutta Sharma(1989)The Calcutta International Theatre, Dance, and Martial Arts Seminar and Festival: A Week of Revelation and Confusion, *Asian Theatre Journal* 6, no. 2, 194-201.

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^{xvii} Mohan Khokar(1987), *Dancing for Themselves: Folk, Tribal and Ritual Dances of India*, Himalayan Books in Collaboration with Continental Press, Singapore.

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^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} AndrewTsubaki, and Farley P. Richmond. (1990) *Chau* in Richmond, Farley P., Darius L. Swann, and Phillip B. Zarrilli (eds.), *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance* Vol., 359-381. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Roman identity in transition: Contested legacies

Swarnadeep Sen

Abstract

In this paper, it has been endeavoured to seek and ascertain out, by means of a selected number of contemporaneous sources, to comprehend how the identity of ‘being Roman’ was appropriated by ‘other groups’, ethnic or otherwise, since the termination of late antiquity and how in multifarious ways, the connotations of being ‘Roman’ transformed from time to time and finally what this phenomenon signifies to distant posterity about the discourse and implication on ‘fluid identity’ formulation and its discordance.

Despite its apparent collapse in 476 *CE*, the political and cultural ideas associated with the Imperium Romanum did not wither away as a result of its political demise in western Europe. The tradition of Roman rule and governance and administration of polity flourished vigorously in its still surviving eastern half, the so- called ‘Byzantine Empire’ [1] and most importantly, in the post-Roman ‘barbarian’ polities which were established in modern day France, Italy, Britain, Spain and Belgium on the ruins of the old imperium in the west.

Yet, it ought to be questioned, what became of the ‘Roman people’ or the ‘Populus Romaus’ in its western half which were then in occupation by the ‘Germanic’ ‘barbarian’ hordes and where effective Roman imperial sovereignty had ceased to exist? Did any mass scale ethnic cleansing took place of the provincial ‘Roman’ population so as to make way for the new conquerors and settlers? Or, did the new conquerors gradually amalgamated with their subjects and lost their own identity?

It must be emphasized that though there were violent political upheavals yet the certain aspects of erstwhile Roman rule were maintained and even cherished, for instance, the church, and miniscule remnants of the senatorial aristocracy especially of Italy and Gaul, by the new political masters, who often strove to imitate the earlier regime. It, of course, cannot be truly ascertained whether the fall of the Roman rule in western Europe resulted in the victory of ***religion and barbarism*** [2], especially the process of rampant and persistent ‘de-urbanisation’ with the elegant villas and aqueducts falling into neglect and disuse, and

perhaps the demise of a socio-political and economic order which had given peace to the Mediterranean world for centuries.

Now, coming to the moot, it is worthwhile to ascertain, what it *really meant to be Roman* prior to the ‘barbarian’ conquest and occupation of the western part of the imperium. For indeed, ever since the time of Augustus, the very notion of being a Roman had assumed a legal connotation and had gradually lost the earlier ethnic meaning and significance. Roman identity during the time of the Punic Wars meant a definite ethnic group, in the times of the early emperors, a legal identity concerning Roman citizenship and by the time of Constantine the great, merely the *populace and denizens of the empire orbis terrarum*. [3] For in 212 C, under an imperial decree of Emperor Caracalla, *all the free provincials* were bestowed with Roman citizenship, thereby making bestowing a common identity on the entire populace of the empire. [4]

So, the historical and ecclesiastical chronicles from Late Antiquity onwards always depict the erstwhile provincial population as ‘Roman’, whether of Gaul or Egypt. For instance, the massive ecclesiastical ‘history’ of the venerable Bede [5] uses the term ‘last of the romans’ (*solus romanae gentis*) for describing the exploits of a certain Ambrosius Aurelianus of the erstwhile province of Brittania against the invading Saxons. Indeed, what Bede tries to imply here does not really have any ethnic connotations, but rather cultural, political and legal roots. This Ambrosius Aurelianus, of course, *could not be physically descended* from the early Romans under the principate, but rather merely referred to the ‘Roman’ provincial who had acquired military authority in the struggle against the invading Angles, Jutes and Saxons from the continent. Another source of roughly the same period (late 6th century CE), namely, that of the monk Gildas [6], also writes in the same vein although with a remarkable difference being that of his using the term ‘Roman’ also embracing the military relief efforts under *magister militum* Aetius as a response to the saxon incursions in Britannia. So, it can be emphasized that ‘roman’ identity did not fade into oblivion with the demise of the political fortunes of the empire but rather persisted for a long times until the post-Roman succeeding polities gradually cemented their political authority over the regions under their control. Even though, the invasion and settlement of the various ‘Germanic’ peoples in the western Roman territory has been dubbed as a *volkerwanderung* yet, these migration migrations of these invading peoples *en masse* failed to obliterate the provincial roman populations and therefore led to a sort of forced cohabitation. Indeed, the Visigothic regime of Spain and the Frankish regime of erstwhile Gaul(not yet Francia) issued law codes in which the laws and punishments for offences for Romans were held separate [7], that is, in these instances the state itself maintained that their ‘conquering’ kinfolks were racially different than their subjected Roman population, even though professing the Christian faith(Catholic, not Arian) and hence, the need for separate laws, of course, to the detriment of the latter, for the scales of punishment for the same crime were different for the ‘Roman’ subject population. Also, interestingly though ‘Romans’ were admitted to services under the state, yet no Roman magistrate could try any Visigoth or Frank for any kind of offence, [8] almost resembling the centuries later British colonial judicature in South Asia.

So, the *imperium* in the west fell, but its enfranchised populace remained and became subjects of the various succeeding 'Germanic' polities and assumed, centuries later, new identities under their new masters.

It is indeed noteworthy to emphasise the endeavours of rulers like Charlemagne and Otto I to revive and resuscitate the old Roman rule (by now, a distant memory) under their aegis. The very idea of a *Sacrum Romanum Imperium* seems utterly preposterous to us yet this notion had effective political force behind it for eight long centuries, and ultimately abolished by Napoleon. The real significance lies in the endeavours of these rulers to appropriate the names, titles and outer trappings of Roman rule (or what they perceived so) and bring these concepts as actual competing forces in their contemporary times. Charlemagne's and Otto I's crowning by the Pope does not signify in any way that the fallen western half of the old *imperium* has been somehow revived. Herein lies the inner dichotomy of the political thought of the early 10th century prior to the Crusades, conscious efforts were made to resuscitate the old *imperium* under radically different circumstances and an unwillingness to part with their own 'tribal' and 'group identity'. Also, there were persistent efforts to *deny and denigrate* the Roman legitimacy of their contemporaneous Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) and dubbing them as 'Greeks' and 'schismatics' and 'heretics' especially after the first Schism of 1054 CE.

For instance, the diplomatic mission of Bishop Liutprand of Cremona to the court at Constantinople, on behalf of Otto I in 968 CE for a matrimonial alliance and the exchange of territories in southern Italy. The reaction of Bishop envoy over the denunciation of his master's claim of being a 'Roman' sovereign by the virulent courtiers at Constantinople brings forth this remarkable reply,

'History, teaches that the fratricide Romulus, from whom also the Romans are named, was born in adultery-; and that he made an asylum for himself in which he received insolvent debtors, fugitive slaves, homicides, and those who were worthy of death for their deeds. And he called to himself a certain number of such and called them Romans. From such nobility those are descended whom you call world-rulers, that is, emperors; whom we, namely the Lombards, Saxons, Franks, Lotharingians, Bavarians, Swabians, Burgundians, so despise, that when angry, we can call our enemies nothing more scornful than Roman-comprehending in this one thing, that is in the name of the Romans, whatever there is of contemptibility, of timidity, of avarice, of luxury, of lying: in a word, of viciousness. But because you do maintain that we are unwarlike and ignorant of horsemanship, if the sins of the Christians shall merit that you shall remain in this hard-heartedness: the next battle will show what you are, and how warlike we.' [9]

Even historians of the repute of Gibbon show in this regard a sort of empathy with the violent aspersions of the likes of the envoy of Otto I. As he writes,

‘ An ambassador of the great Otho declared, in the palace of Constantinople, that the Saxons could dispute with swords better than with pens; and that they preferred inevitable death to the dishonor of turning their backs to an enemy.’ [10]

Again,

‘ After the “restoration of the Western empire by Charlemagne and the Othos”, the name of Franks and Latins acquired an equal signification and extent; and these haughty barbarians asserted , “*with some justice*, their superior claim to the language and dominion of Rome”. They insulted the “aliens” of the East who had renounced the dress and idiom of the Romans, and their reasonable practice will justify the frequent appellation of “Greeks”.’ [11]

The failure on their part to accept and co-exist peacefully with the ‘real’ remnants of the imperium played quite a significant role in the Fourth Crusade, though the viciousness of the Venetian Doge Dandolo cannot be ruled out in this regard, which led to the partial obliteration of the Eastern Roman Empire and the creation of a ‘Latin Empire’ over its territories, ruled by the epigoni of the Othos. [12]

Ultimately, this inner dichotomy must be sought out and defined in terms pertaining to the proper historical context. The simultaneous co-existence both the ‘assumed’ Roman identity and their own ‘real’ ethnic identity finally shaped the course of the High Middle Ages. It split Europe into numerous polities with multifarious factions which laid claim and hegemony over different parts of western Europe, supposedly as their own heritage coming from the old imperium. The struggle led to the conflicts between the Guelphs and Ghibilines, with the former being adherents of the Papacy and the latter emphasizing the imperial role of the ‘holy Roman Emperor’ over Italy in contradiction to Papal claim of hegemony. The vision of the latter owed its ideals to a sort of ‘restored’ imperium in Europe, which is, of course, blatantly anachronistic, for the epigone of these ‘Germanic’ peoples had nothing to do with antiquity, however ardently they may endeavour to legitimize their claims.

The chief legacy of the *Imperium Romanum* lay in sustaining a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society bound within the common framework of the Latin and to some extent, Greek, languages, Roman law and a common citizenship. Herein lies its chief grandeur, that is, of moulding a ethnically disparate populace with a common citizenship and the imbibation of a common political culture, almost resembling the modern United States of America, albeit minus the inter-racial tensions prevailing in the latter.

Notes.

1. Of course, the term Byzantine Empire is a misnomer, all the same, it's a useful misnomer. The depiction of the surviving eastern half of the Roman Empire under the old name of its capital city is a monstrous piece of folly, for the old polis of Byzantium was destroyed in totality by emperor Septimius Severus in 194 CE. Constantinople was built on the old site of Byzantium.
2. Gibbon, Edward *The history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 3, pp. 342-43. (London: 1995)
3. Spengler, Oswald *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West), tr. Charles Francis Atkinson, vol. II, pp. 543. (New York: 1999).
4. Gibbon, vol. 1, pp. 124
5. Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, tr. by Bertram Colgrave, ed. Roger Collins, pp. 276. (Oxford: 2008 reissued).
6. Gildas, *On the ruins of Britain*, tr. by J.A. Giles, pp. 53, retrieved from <http://www.heroofcamelot.com/>
7. Gibbon, vol. 2, pp. 121.
8. Ibid., pp. 64
9. <http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/liudprand1.asp>
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11. Ibid., pp. 413
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প্রতীচ্য প্রভাবে বাঙালী মানসে নারীমুক্তির চিন্তার উন্মেষ

ড. তপতী ভট্টাচার্য (ঘটক)

উনিশ শতকীয় কলিকাতার বিশিষ্ট ধনী পরিবারগুলি প্রায় সবই যে ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানীতে চাকরি করে একদিকে প্রচুর অর্থ আয় করেছিল অন্যদিকে তেমনই ইংরাজি ভাষা শিক্ষা করে ইউরোপীয় চিন্তাভাবনার সঙ্গে পরিচিত হয়েছিল তা নীচের সারণি থেকে স্পষ্ট হয়ে ওঠে।^১

নাম	পদ	কর্মসংস্থান
রামমোহন রায়	দেওয়ান	ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানী
দ্বারকানাথ ঠাকুর	কালেক্টর	২৪ পরগণা
ঐ	দেওয়ান	সল্ট এজেন্ট মি. প্লাউডেন
ঐ	ঐ	আবগারি বিভাগ (লবণ ও আফিম)
মতিলাল শীল	মুৎসুদ্দি	বিদেশ থেকে আসা জাহাজ
প্রসন্ন কুমার ঠাকুর	দেওয়ান	তমলুকের সল্ট এজেন্ট
রামকমল সেন	দেওয়ান	টাকশাল, বেঙ্গল ব্যাঙ্ক
ভবাণীচরণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়	দেওয়ান	একাধিক জায়গার দেওয়ান

এঁরা সকলেই যে আমোদ – প্রমোদে ব্যস্ত থেকে পয়সা উড়িয়েছিলেন তা নয়, অনেকেই অবসর সময়ে সমকালীন সমাজ, ধর্ম ইত্যাদি বিষয় নিয়ে চিন্তা-ভাবনা করেছিলেন। ইংরেজদের সঙ্গে ওঠাবসার সুবাদে তাঁরা কিছুটা উদার দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী আয়ত্ত করেছিলেন। সেই সঙ্গে ছিল ইংরেজদের প্রতি সন্ত্রমবোধ। এই দুটি পুঁজি পাথেয় করে তাঁরা আত্মসমীক্ষার পথে অগ্রসর হয়েছিলেন। এই আত্মবিশ্লেষণ তাঁদের চোখে হিন্দু সমাজের অবক্ষয়ের চেহারাটি সংশয়াতীতভাবে তুলে ধরেছিল।^২

যখন ভারতে ব্রিটিশ শাসন প্রতিষ্ঠিত হচ্ছে, ঐ একই সময়ে ব্রিটেনে সংঘটিত হয়েছিল শিল্পবিপ্লব। এর ফলে রক্ষণশীল, অভিজাত-প্রভাবিত একটি প্রধানতঃ গ্রামীণ ও হস্তশিল্প অর্থনীতির দ্বারা পরিচালিত ব্রিটিশ সমাজ শিল্পায়িত হয়ে উঠল। এর ফলে তা রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিকভাবে প্রভাবশালী একটি আত্মবিশ্বাসী সমাজে পরিণত হল। অনিবার্যভাবে এই পরিবর্তন ব্রিটিশ সমাজে এক দ্বন্দ্ব ও উত্তেজনা সৃষ্টি করেছিল, এই পরিবর্তনের ঢেউ ভারতে ব্রিটিশ কার্যকলাপের মধ্যে দিয়ে পরিবাহিত হয়েছিল। উভয় দেশেই পুরাতন সমাজ ব্যবস্থা আমূল পরিবর্তনকামী দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর দ্বারা আক্রান্ত হয়েছিল এবং নতুন ব্যবস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠার আগ্রহ বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছিল।^৭

এই সময় ইংরাজদের মনোজগতের সর্বাপেক্ষা প্রভাবশালী-চিন্তানায়ক ছিলেন উপযোগিতাবাদের প্রবক্তা জেরেমি বেন্থাম। বেন্থামের অনুগামীদের বলা হত উপযোগিতাবাদী। এঁরা ব্রিটেনের প্রতিষ্ঠিত ব্যবস্থার বিরুদ্ধে তীব্র অসন্তোষ পোষণ করতেন। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই ভারতের প্রতিষ্ঠিত ঐতিহ্যবাহী প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলিও তাঁদের চোখে জীর্ণ, অক্ষম এবং দুর্বল বলে প্রতিভাত হয়েছিল।^৮

তখন ব্যবহারিক সুবিধার জন্য ইংরাজি শিখতে গিয়ে বাঙালীরা স্বাদ পাচ্ছে পাশ্চাত্য ধ্যান, ধারণা ও আদর্শের। তারা প্রতীচ্যের আরো পরিচয় পাবার জন্য উন্মুখ হয়ে উঠেছিল। আবার, খ্রীষ্টান মিশনারীরা ধর্মাস্তরকরণের উদগ্র আগ্রহে ও খ্রীষ্টের মহিমা কীর্তনের অত্যাৎসাহে হিন্দু সমাজের ত্রুটি বিচ্যুতিগুলো পরতে পরতে মেলে ধরছিল। এক কথায় সমস্ত দিকেই চলছিল নূতনের আবাহন। এই পটভূমিকায় ১৮১৭ সালে ইউরোপীয় ও ভারতীয়দের যৌথ উদ্যোগে কলিকাতায় প্রতিষ্ঠিত হল হিন্দু কলেজ। এখানে ইউরোপীয় ও ভারতীয় ভাষা ও ইউরোপীয় ও এদেশীয় সাহিত্য ও বিজ্ঞান শিক্ষাদানের কথা বলা হলেও সমস্ত ঝোঁক ছিল ইউরোপীয় ভাষা সাহিত্য ও বিজ্ঞানের দিকে। কালক্রমে হিন্দু কলেজ হয়ে উঠল “পাশ্চাত্য জ্ঞান ভাণ্ডারের উন্মোচক”।^৯

লিওনার্ড এল্‌মহাস্টকে লেখা একটি চিঠিতে স্বয়ং রবীন্দ্রনাথ স্বীকার করলেন যে পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষার ফলে বাংলার সমাজে এক নতুন ধারণা, দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী, মূল্যবোধ, রুচি এবং অনুভূতির অনুপ্রবেশ ঘটেছিল।^{১০} রবীন্দ্রনাথ নিজেই এর উজ্জ্বলতম উদাহরণ। এই নবলব্ধ মানসিকতার চারিত্রিক বৈশিষ্ট্য ছিল যুগ্ম দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী – যার সংজ্ঞা দেওয়া যেতে পারে যুক্তিবাদ ও মানবতাবাদ। রবীন্দ্রনাথ লিখলেন : “যুরোপের সংস্রব একদিকে আমাদের সামনে এনেছে বিশ্বপ্রকৃতিতে কার্যকরণবিধির সার্বভৌমিকতা, আর একদিকে ন্যায়-অন্যায়ের সেই বিশুদ্ধ আদর্শ যা কোন শাস্ত্রবাক্যের নির্দেশে, কোন চিরপ্রচলিত প্রথার সীমাবেষ্টনে, কোন বিশেষ শ্রেণীর বিশেষ বিধিতে খণ্ডিত হতে পারে না।”^{১১}

১৮২০-র দশকে বেন্থাম যে যুক্তিবাদী আন্দোলন গড়ে তুলেছিলেন ইংল্যান্ডে, তার প্রতিধ্বনি ভারতেও এসে পৌঁছেছিল। হিন্দু কলেজের শিক্ষক হেনরী লুই ভিভিয়ান ডিরোজিও তা বাংলায় ছড়িয়ে দিয়েছিলেন। পাঠ্যসূচীর^{১২} চৌহদ্দীর মধ্যে আবদ্ধ না থেকে কলেজের শ্রেণীকক্ষের বাইরে তাঁর “ঘনিষ্ঠ ছাত্রবন্ধুদের” ডিরোজিও বেকন, হিউম, অ্যাডাম স্মিথ, টমাস ব্রাউন, জেরেমী বেন্থাম, ডুগাল্ড, স্ফুয়ার্ট টমাস পেন, লক, রীডের যুগান্তকারী চিন্তাধারার সঙ্গে পরিচিত করিয়েছিলেন। এছাড়াও তিনি সমকালীন

বিশ্বের চলমান কিছু ঘটনাস্রোতের কথা ছাত্রদের শুনিয়েছিলেন। এর ফলে ছাত্ররা এমন এক যুক্তিবোধ অর্জন করলেন, “যা যুগ প্রচলিত বিশ্বাসের প্রতি সংশয়ের জন্ম দিল, অনেক জিজ্ঞাসা তাঁরা তুলে ধরলেন যার প্রচলিত উত্তর অন্তত তাঁদের নবার্জিত যুক্তিবোধের সঙ্গে মেলে না। তাই শুরু হল প্রচলিত ধর্মবিশ্বাস, সামাজিক সংস্কার ইত্যাদির প্রতি তাঁদের আক্রমণ ও প্রতি আক্রমণের পালা।”^{১০}

তবে ইয়ং বেঙ্গল গোষ্ঠীর আগেই বাংলায় যুক্তিবাদের দ্বারা চালিত হয়েছিলেন রামমোহন রায়। ইয়ং বেঙ্গলের সদস্যরা ঐক্যে হাফ লিবারেল বলে বিদ্রূপ করতেন। কিন্তু রামমোহন জন ডিগবি নামে একজন সিভিলিয়ানের ইউরোপীয় ধ্যানধারণার সঙ্গে পরিচিত হলেন। এছাড়াও তাঁর ঘনিষ্ঠ বন্ধু ছিলেন জেরেমি বেঙ্হামের শিষ্য ইয়ং। “ক্যালকাটা জার্নাল” পত্রিকার আমূল পরিবর্তনপন্থী সম্পাদক জেমস্ সিন্ধু বাকিংহাম ও মানবতাবাদী শিক্ষাবিদ ডেভিড হেয়ার ছিলেন রামমোহনের বন্ধুগোষ্ঠীর গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ও প্রভাবশালী সদস্য।^{১১} সামাজিক, রাজনৈতিক ও ধর্মীয় সংস্কারকের যে ভূমিকায় রামমোহন অবতীর্ণ হয়েছিলেন তাতে তাঁর প্রধান হাতিয়ার ছিল যুক্তি। তিনি সর্বপ্রথম তা নারীদের উন্নতির চেষ্টায় প্রয়োগ করেছিলেন। সতীদাহ প্রথার বিরুদ্ধে প্রচার করতে গিয়ে তিনি শাস্ত্র থেকে উদ্ধৃতি দিয়েছিলেন ঠিকই কিন্তু তাঁর আসল প্রহরণ ছিল যুক্তি, যার দ্বারা নারীদের প্রতি প্রচলিত দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী তিনি নাকচ করে দিয়েছিলেন। তিনি মানতেন না যে নারীরা বুদ্ধিবলে সীমাবদ্ধ আর স্বভাবগত ভাবে চঞ্চল তাই বিধবা অবস্থায় বাঁচতে দিলে তার ব্যাভিচারিণী হবে। তিনি যুক্তি দেখালেন যে মেয়েদের বুদ্ধি পরীক্ষা হল কোথায় যে তাদের নির্দিষ্ট অল্প বুদ্ধি বলা হচ্ছে? বরঞ্চ ‘সুব্রহ্মণ্য শাস্ত্রীর সাহিত্য বিচার’ এ তিনি ব্রহ্মবাদিনী মৈত্রেয়ীর উদাহরণ দিয়ে সর্বোচ্চ স্তরের জ্ঞানাভ্যাসে নারীর অধিকার সাব্যস্ত করেছিলেন। সহমরণ বিষয়ক বিতর্কে যখন বিধবাদের পক্ষ থেকে ব্রহ্মচর্য পালনীয়তার কথা বলা হল তখনও রামমোহন তাকে স্থূল অর্থে ধরলেন না। তাঁর কাছে ব্রহ্মচর্য অর্থ ছিল নিষ্কাম জ্ঞানাভ্যাস। ইহজগতে ‘তৈলমাংস মৈথুনাদি’ বর্জন নয়।^{১২} চাঞ্চল্যের কথায় তিনি মাথা গণনা করে দেখতে বলেছিলেন কজন স্ত্রী তাঁর স্বামীকে প্রতারণা করে? তার তুলনায় বিশ্বাস ভঙ্গকারী স্বামীর সংখ্যা ক’জন? বিশেষত: হিন্দুরা বিবাহের সময় পত্নীকে অর্ধাঙ্গিনী বলে স্বীকার করে কিন্তু বাস্তবে তারা স্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে পশুর চেয়েও খারাপ ব্যবহার করে।^{১৩}

রাধাকান্ত দেব ছিলেন রামমোহনের বিরুদ্ধাচারী। রামমোহনের প্রতিটি আদর্শের বিরুদ্ধে তিনি প্রতি-আদর্শ স্থাপন করেছিলেন। রামমোহন কে যদি প্রগতিশীলতার প্রতিভূ বলে ধরা যায় তবে রাধাকান্ত ছিলেন রক্ষণশীলতার প্রতিমূর্তি। কিন্তু তাঁর ভাষাও ছিল যুক্তিবাহিত। উদাহরণ স্বরূপ বলা যায় যে, তিনি যখন সতীদাহ প্রথা সমর্থন করে পাল্টা আন্দোলন গড়ে তুলেছিলেন, তখন তাঁর যুক্তি ছিল এইরকম যে, “বিদেশী শাসক কেন আমাদের ধর্মীয় বিশ্বাসে আঘাত করবেন?”^{১৪} আবার এই রাধাকান্ত দেব স্ত্রী শিক্ষা সমর্থন করেছিলেন এই যুক্তিতে যে জাতির নৈতিক চরিত্র ও সামাজিক সুখবৃদ্ধির জন্যে স্ত্রী-শিক্ষা প্রয়োজন।^{১৫}

যখন বেক্টিঙ্ক ১৮২৯ সালে সতীদাহ প্রথা উচ্ছেদ আইন পাশ করলেন, রামমোহন তাঁকে দ্বিধাহীন ভাবে সমর্থন জানিয়েছিলেন।^{১৬} বহুবিবাহ প্রথার সমালোচনা করে তিনি লিখেছেন: “আর যাহার স্বামী দুই তিন স্ত্রীকে লইয়া গার্হস্থ্য করে, তাহারা দিব্যারাত্রি মনস্তাপ ও কলহের ভাজন হয়, অথচ অনেকে

ধর্মভয়ে এ সকল ক্লেশ সহ্য করে,...”^{১৬} রামমোহন একথাও বলেছিলেন যে কোন ব্যক্তি যদি এক স্ত্রী বর্তমানে পুনর্বীর বিয়ে করতে চায়, তবে আকে ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট বা অন্য কোন রাজকর্মচারীর কাছে স্ত্রীর শাস্ত্র নির্দিষ্ট দোষ প্রমাণ করতে হবে নতুবা সে পুনর্বীর বিবাহ করতে পারবে না।^{১৭}

রাধাকান্ত দেব রক্ষণশীল ছিলেন, কিন্তু স্ত্রী-শিক্ষা বিস্তারের প্রথম পর্বে এই মানুষটির অবদান অপরিস্রব। “তিনি স্বদেশীয় বালিকাদের বিদ্যাধ্যয়নের বিষয়েও পোষকতাচারণ করিয়াছেন। স্মরণ হয়ে যে ১৮২২ সালে আরম্ভকালে ত্রিশজন বালিকার বিদ্যার পরীক্ষা লইতে তাঁহার বাটিতে দেখা গিয়াছে। ... তিনি বালিকাদের যাহাতে বিদ্যাশিক্ষাতে উত্তেজনা হয় এমত অনেক প্রস্তাব্যোদেশ তাহাদিগকে দিয়াছেন এবং বিদ্যালয়ে কীদৃশ উপকার এমতও তাহাদিগকে অনেক উপদেশকতা করিতে তাঁহাকে দেখা গিয়াছে।”^{১৮} কিন্তু রাধাকান্ত কখনো প্রকাশ্য বিদ্যালয়ে মেয়েদের পাঠানো সমর্থন করতে পারেন নি।^{১৯}

যখন বাংলাদেশে পাশ্চাত্য ভাবনার সূত্রপাত ঘটল তখন বাঙ্গালী অনুভব করতে শিখল মানুষের স্বাধীনতাকে, তার পারিপার্শ্বিকতা জয় করার ক্ষমতাকে, তার সামাজিক গণ্ডীর মত ও সিদ্ধান্তকে অগ্রাহ্য করার সাহসকে।^{২০} এই মানবতাবাদী দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকেই উনবিংশ শতাব্দীর প্রথম ভাগে গোঁড়া হিন্দুধর্মের বিরুদ্ধে ধিক্কার দিয়েছিল ইয়ংবেঙ্গল গোষ্ঠী। ঠিক যেমন ক্যাথলিক ধর্মের অনাচার থেকে মুক্তি পাওয়ার জন্য ইউরোপের মানবতাবাদীরা চরমপন্থী হয়েছিলেন সেই রকম কৃষ্ণমোহন বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় খ্রীষ্টান ধর্মগ্রহণ করেছিলেন। মানবতাবাদ দাফিনারঙ্গন মুখোপাধ্যায়কে জন্মগত সাম্যে বিশ্বাসী করে তুলেছিল। তাই যেমন তিনি ভারতবর্ষের দুঃখ-দুর্দশার জন্যে ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানীর শাসনকে দায়ী করেছেন, তেমনই স্ত্রী জাতির দুঃখ মোচনে স্ত্রী শিক্ষা বিস্তারে সহায়তা করেছেন। সংস্কারমুক্ত মন নিয়ে দেশের সমগ্র জনহিতকর কর্মপ্রচেষ্টার সঙ্গে নিজেকে জড়িত করেছিলেন কিশোরীচাঁদ মিত্র। এই উদ্দেশ্যে তিনি প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছিলেন Hindu Theo Philanthropic Society (১৮৪৩)। ১০ই মে কিশোরী চাঁদ মিত্রের গৃহে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছিল এই প্রতিষ্ঠানটি। এর কার্যনির্বাহক কমিটি ও সাধারণ সদস্যপদে নব্যবেঙ্গলগোষ্ঠীর যে সব তরুণ ছিলেন, তাঁদের মধ্যে রাধানাথ শিকদার অন্যতম। বালিকার পাণিগ্রহণে অস্বীকৃত হয়ে তিনি সারাজীবন অবিবাহিত ছিলেন। রামতনু লাহিড়ী বিশ্বাসী হলেন নারীর মানবিক মর্যাদায়। তাই উন্নতিশীল ব্রাহ্মদল স্ত্রী-স্বাধীনতার জন্যে সংগ্রাম করলে তিনি তা সক্রিয়ভাবে সমর্থন করেছিলেন। পূর্বোক্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানটির হয়ে এঁরা বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলন, বহুবিবাহ নিবারণ, নিষ্ঠুর ও অশালীন সামাজিক উৎসব অপসারণ ইত্যদি কাজ করার চেষ্টা করেছিলেন।^{২১} বেথুন সাহেবের সঙ্গে স্ত্রী – শিক্ষা বিস্তারে সহযোগিতা করে হরচন্দ্র ঘোষ নারীর মর্যাদা প্রতিষ্ঠায় নিজের বিশ্বাস কে প্রমাণ করেছিলেন।^{২২}

১৮৩৫ খ্রীষ্টাব্দে প্রকাশিত Hindu Pioneer পত্রিকা ছিল ইয়ং বেঙ্গল গোষ্ঠীর অন্যতম মুখপাত্র। এই পত্রিকায় ‘On Women’ নামক একটি প্রবন্ধে নারীর মানবিক অধিকারের স্বীকৃতির প্রয়োজনীয়তার কথা বলা হয়েছিল। নারীর মানবিক অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা, শিক্ষা এবং পূর্ণ বিকাশের জন্যে পুরুষের দায়িত্ব সর্বাধিক। কারণ, পুরুষের পরিপূর্ণতার জন্যে নারীজাতির উন্নতি প্রয়োজন। তাই নারীকে নিছক পুরুষেরা ক্রীড়নক করে না রেখে তাকে শিক্ষিতা করে পুরুষের সমকক্ষ করে তুলতে হবে,^{২৩} শাস্ত্রের জন্যে মানুষ

নয়। মানুষের জন্য শাস্ত্র – এই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর থেকে ইয়ংবেঙ্গল শাস্ত্রকে দূরে রেখে নারীর মানবিক মহিমার প্রতিষ্ঠা কামনা করেছেন-“কেননা তাঁরা উপলব্ধি করেছেন যে নারীর মুক্তির মধ্যে সমাজ জীবনের অগ্রগতির শক্তি নিহিত আছে, নারীকে পিছনে ফেলে রাখলে নারী আমাদের পিছনে ঠেলে দেবে।”^{২৪}

প্রাচ্য ও পাশ্চাত্যের সংযোগে পুরুষ ও নারীর দেয়া-নেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে আমূল পরিবর্তন ঘটেছিল। “বাঙ্গালীরা ইউরোপীয় ও হিন্দু এই দুই ধারার সমন্বয়ে নরনারী সম্পর্কের যে একটা নূতন ধারণা করিয়াছিল – যাহার প্রকাশ সমস্ত বাংলা সাহিত্য জুড়িয়া আছে এবং যে ধারণাকে নিজেদের ব্যক্তিগত জীবনেও অনেকটা কাজে পরিণত করিয়াছিল, উহা নূতন সাহিত্য, গান, রাজনৈতিক কার্যকলাপ বা ধর্মান্দোলনের মত বর্তমান যুগের বাঙ্গালীর একটা বড় কীর্তি।”^{২৫}

যে অসীম ভদ্রতাবোধ নিয়ে বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র তাঁর উপন্যাস সমূহে মেয়েদের চরিত্র এঁকেছেন তা বাংলা সাহিত্যে অভূতপূর্ব। পরবর্তী লেখকরা তা অনুসরণ করেছিলেন। তাঁর লেখায় মেয়েরা পুরুষদের অধীনস্থ হয়ে না থেকে গার্হস্থ্যের ঘেরাটোপ থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে তাদের নর্মসহচরী হয়ে উঠেছিল।^{২৬} নারীর প্রতি এই নতুন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী ধরা পড়েছে রবীন্দ্রনাথের চিত্রাঙ্গদা গীতিনাট্যে। সেখানে নারী দেবী নয় – যাকে পূজার ছলে দূরে রাখা যায়, আবার সে ঘৃণার পাত্রী নয় যাকে সর্বদা অসম্মানে পিছনে রাখা যায়, সে একজন দরদী বন্ধু, যে সঙ্কটে ও দুঃখে পাশে এসে দাঁড়াতে পারে। এইভাবেই নারীকে পুরোপুরিভাবে বোঝা সম্ভব এবং তার ক্ষমতার পুরো বিকাশ সম্ভব।

“দেবী নহি, নহি আমি সামান্য রমণী।

পূজা করি’ রাখিবে মাথায়, সে –ও আমি

নই , অবহেলা করি’ পুষিয়া রাখিবে

পিছে সে-ও আমি নহি। যদি পার্শ্বে রাখ

মোরে সঙ্কটের পথে , দুরূহ চিন্তার যদি অংশ দাও, যদি অনুমতি কর’

কঠিন ব্রতের তব সহায় হইতে,

যদি সুখে দুঃখে মোরে কর সহচরী,

আমার পাইবে তবে পরিচয়।^{২৭}

অক্ষয় কুমার দত্ত মনে করতেন যে যুক্তি ও সত্যের সমন্বয় ঘটিয়ে ইউরোপ পৃথিবীতে স্বর্গরচনা করেছে।^{২৮} তাই “কর্তব্যানুষ্ঠান বিষয়িনী নীতি বিদ্যা” রচনা করতে গিয়ে তিনি “দম্পতীর পরস্পর ব্যবহার” কিরকম হওয়া উচিত তার উদাহরণ নিয়েছেন পাশ্চাত্য দাম্পত্য জীবন থেকে। অক্ষয় কুমার দত্ত লিখেছেন “সক্স-কোবর্গ নিবাসী লিওপোল্ড ও তাঁহার সমধর্মিনী শার্লট এ বিষয়ের উত্তম উদাহরণ স্থল। ...(তাঁহারা) যেমন একত্র আমোদ প্রমোদ অধ্যয়নাদি করিতেন, সেইরূপ একত্র ধর্মানুষ্ঠানও করিতেন। তাঁহারা নিরূপিত সময়ে পরিবারস্থ অন্য সকলের সহিত একত্র মিলিত হইয়া তদগান্তঃ করণে জগৎপতি জগদীশ্বরের আরাধনা করিতেন। স্ত্রী-পুরুষের পরস্পর কিরূপ ব্যবহার করিতে হয়, এবং উভয়ে সুশিক্ষিত ও এক ধর্মানুরক্ত হওয়া কিরূপ সুখের বিষয়, গুণসাগর লিও পোল্ড ও তাঁহার গুণবতী ভার্যা শার্লট তাহার সুন্দর দৃষ্টান্ত স্থল।”^{২৯}

তবে এই যে বিদেশী শাসন ও সভ্যতা সম্পর্কে মুগ্ধতা তার বিপরীতে কিছু সামাজিক ও মানসিক বাধা কাজ করেছিল। পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষিত বাঙ্গালীদের নতুন ধারণা এবং দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর উৎস ছিল এক ঔপনিবেশিক সরকার, যা তাদের রাজনীতিকভাবে পরাধীন করে রেখেছিল এবং যা তাদের একই সঙ্গে আকর্ষণ করত ও দূরে ঠেলে দিত। ফলে কখনো বা ইউরোপীয় সংস্কৃতিকে মনে হয়েছে যে তা ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতির থেকে অনেক উঁচুদের আবার কখনো বা মনে হয়েছে যে ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতির যে ঐতিহ্য রয়েছে তা অনেক সমৃদ্ধ। বিশেষ করে ধর্মীয় বিশ্বাস এবং গার্হস্থ্য আচরণের ক্ষেত্রে পাশ্চাত্য আদর্শকে সর্বদাই অনুসরণযোগ্য বলে মনে করা হয়েছে, আবার আত্মসমীক্ষা করতে গিয়ে দেখা গেছে যে নিজেদের ঐতিহ্যকেই শ্রেষ্ঠতর বলে মনে হচ্ছে।^{১০} ভূদেব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের রচনার মধ্যে এই টানাপোড়েন চমৎকারভাবে ফুটে উঠেছে। “(১) ব্রাহ্মণ পন্ডিতেরা বৃত্তিবিহীন হইয়া অল্পচিন্তায় বিব্রত হইয়াছেন। তাঁহারা শাস্ত্রের অধ্যয়ন অধ্যাপন পূর্বের ন্যায় মনঃসংযোগ সহকারে নির্বাহ করিতে পারেন না। সুতরাং শাস্ত্রীয় বিধির সম্বন্ধে তাঁহার নিজের এবং জনসধারণের অজ্ঞতা জন্মিয়া যাইতেছে। (২) বিজাতীয় শিক্ষার প্রভাব বৃদ্ধি হওয়াতে শাস্ত্রীয় বিধির প্রতি শ্রদ্ধাহীনতা জন্মিতেছে। এখন শৈশবাবধি যে ইংরাজী বিদ্যার শিক্ষা হয়, তাহাতে শাস্ত্রীয় বিধির কিছুমাত্র উল্লেখ থাকে না, প্রত্যুত সাক্ষাৎ বা পরস্পরা সম্বন্ধে দেশীয় শাস্ত্রজাতের প্রতি অশ্রদ্ধা প্রকাশই থাকে। সুতরাং শিক্ষার কাল হইতেই লোকের মনে শাস্ত্রাচারের প্রতি অবিশ্বাস জন্মিয়া যায়”।^{১১} আশ্চর্য এই যে বিজাতীয় অর্থাৎ ইউরোপীয় শিক্ষার কুফল দূর করার জন্যে ঐ “বিজাতীয় শিক্ষা”র সহায়তা গ্রহণে ভূদেব পরাজুখ নন।

“যেমন মলিন বস্তুর দ্বারা বলবৎ ঘর্ষণে তৈজসাদির পূর্ব মলিনতা বিদূরিত হয়, তেমনি যে বিজাতীয় শিক্ষা আচার মালিন্য জন্মায়, তাহারই সম্যক অনুশীলনে ঐ মালিন্য অপনীত হইবার সম্ভাবনা। ইউরোপীয় বিজ্ঞানবিদ্যার বিশেষ অনুশীলনের দ্বারা স্বদেশীয় শাস্ত্রাচারের সারবত্তা বহু পরিমাণে যুক্তিমুখেও সুপরিষ্কৃত হইয়া উঠে।^{১২} যে সমস্ত গুণ ইংরাজদের এদেশে রাজনৈতিক প্রাধান্য দিয়েছে সেই সমস্ত গুণ অনুসরণ করেই বাঙালীরা শ্রেষ্ঠত্ব অর্জন করতে পারবে – এই মত প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে গিয়ে ভূদেব লিখলেন :

“যে ইংরাজ জাতি এক্ষণে ভারতবর্ষে প্রাধান্য লাভ করিয়াছেন, তাঁহাদের প্রাবল্যের প্রকৃত হেতু কি, তাহা ভাল করিয়া বুঝিবার চেষ্টা করিলেই দৃষ্ট হয় যে ঐ প্রাধান্যের হেতু অনাচার বা অত্যাচার নহে, উহার হেতু তাঁহাদের স্বদেশের ও স্বধর্মের উপযোগী আচার রক্ষা নিবন্ধন শরীর এবং মনের দৃঢ়তা এবং পটুতা জন্মে এবং মনে উদারতা এবং সাত্ত্বিকতা সম্বর্দ্ধিত হয়। সুতরাং শাস্ত্রোক্ত আচার রক্ষা দ্বারাই এতদেশীয় জনগণ ইংরাজদিগের অপেক্ষাও উচ্চতর গুণের অধিকারী হইতে পারেন।”^{১৩}

সুতরাং দেখা যাচ্ছে যে হিন্দু ঐতিহ্য ও বিদেশী সভ্যতা – এই দুইয়ের প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা পোষণ করা হত। উভয় ক্ষেত্র থেকেই শ্রদ্ধার উপাদানগুলি বেছে নেওয়া হত আর উভয় সভ্যতার প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা পাশাপাশি সহাবস্থান করত। প্রথমটি বিকশিত হয়েছিল সমাজের উন্নতি করার মানসিকতার মধ্য দিয়ে এবং উত্তরাধিকার সূত্রে প্রাপ্ত ঐতিহ্যের প্রতি এক বিশ্বাসের অনুভূতি যে ভারত এক বিশ্বব্যাপী সাম্রাজ্যের অংশ এবং এই বিশ্বাস যে ব্রিটিশ সরকারের উদার পরিচালনায় সে উন্নতির পথে দৃঢ়ভাবে অগ্রসর হবে।

“যখন এশীয় দেশগুলি পাশ্চাত্য প্রযুক্তি এবং ধারণা গ্রহণ করেছিল তখন তাদের নিজস্ব পদ্ধতি তারা সম্পূর্ণভাবে ত্যাগ করেনি। তখন বিভিন্ন প্রতিষ্ঠান তাদের ওপর চাপিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছিল, ফলে পুরানো রীতির চিন্তাধারার পাশাপাশি নতুন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি গড়ে উঠেছিল। কিন্তু যে পরিবর্তন ঘটেছিল তার পূর্ণতা বা গতি যাই হোক না কেন এশীয় সমাজসমূহ এমন এক জীবনরীতি সৃষ্টি করেছে বা করেছে যা তাদের আধুনিক বিশ্বসমাজে অংশ গ্রহণের জন্য সম্পূর্ণ পারদর্শী করে তুলেছে।”^{৩৪}

উনবিংশ শতকের শেষ তিন দশকের বাংলা সাহিত্য সমালোচনার ইতিহাস পর্যালোচনা করে প্রায় অনুরূপ সিদ্ধান্তে উপনীত হয়েছে অপর এক ঐতিহাসিক।^{৩৫} দেবেন্দ্রনাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়^{৩৬} নামক এক সমালোচক এই মত প্রকাশ করেছিলেন যে যখন একজন সম্পন্ন বাঙালী ইংরাজী শিক্ষালাভ করে তখন তার সামনে দুটি পৃথক সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্য উন্মোচিত হয়। এর ওপর যদি সে সংস্কৃত ভাষা আয়ত্ত করতে পারে তবে সে তৃতীয় একটি সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্যের পরিচয় লাভ করতে পারে। পণ্ডিত হরপ্রসাদ শাস্ত্রী ছিলেন এমন একজন লেখক যিনি ইউরোপীয় পদ্ধতি অবলম্বন করে সংস্কৃত ঐতিহ্যের ব্যাখ্যার মাধ্যমে বাংলা সাহিত্যের বিশ্লেষণ করেছিলেন ও নিজের মধ্যে ইউরোপীয় মনীষা ও ভারতীয় ঐতিহ্যিক মনীষার সমন্বয় ঘটিয়েছিলেন।^{৩৭}

তবুও উনবিংশ শতাব্দীর সূচনা থেকে বাংলাদেশের সমাজে বিদেশী ভাবধারার যে তরঙ্গাঘাত শুরু হয়েছিল, তাকে উপেক্ষা করার সাধ্য বাঙালী সমাজের ছিল না। ফলে অনিবার্য ভাবে মানসিক জগতে এক অভূতপূর্ব পরিবর্তন দেখা দিল। বোঝা গিয়েছিল যে পুরানো সঞ্চয়, পুরানো বিশ্বাস নিয়ে দিন অতিবাহিত করার সময় ফুরিয়ে গেছে। এক নতুন বিশ্বাস, নতুন জীবনবোধ নিয়ে এল এক নতুন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি। ফলে জীবনের সর্বক্ষেত্রে বিশ্বাসের জগতে এক সর্বব্যাপী পরিবর্তনের সূচনা হল। যার আলো অন্দরমহলের ভেতরে গিয়েও পড়ল। যে অবরুদ্ধ মেয়েরা এতদিন সবার চোখের আড়ালে কালাতিপাত করছিল এখন তারাও এই নতুন দৃষ্টির আলোতে উদ্ভাসিত হল।

এর ফলে আলোচ্য শতকে বাঙালী সমাজে যে পরিবর্তনের সম্ভাবনা সৃষ্টি হল তার কেন্দ্রভূমিতে অধিষ্ঠিত ছিল মেয়েরা। কারণ ইংরাজী শিক্ষার মাধ্যমে পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষা ও সংস্কৃতির সঙ্গে নিবিড় পরিচয় ঘটল। তাই সমকালীন সামাজিক প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলি নিয়ে নতুন করে চিন্তা শুরু করেছিলেন সমাজ সচেতন ব্যক্তির। এই চিন্তাই নির্দেশ করেছিল যে বাঙালী সমাজে মেয়েদের স্থান অত্যন্ত অবহেলিত। কারণ বিদেশী সভ্যতার সঙ্গে পরিচিত হবার ফলে ভিনদেশী সমাজে মেয়েদের অপেক্ষাকৃত উন্নতস্থান বাঙালীদের দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করেছিল। বিদেশী পর্যবেক্ষক, যাঁরা এদেশে এসেছিলেন তাঁদের লেখাতে এদেশের সমাজে মেয়েদের দুরবস্থার ওপর ব্যাপক আলোকপাত ঘটেছিল। এভাবে চিন্তাশীল ব্যক্তির ধীরে ধীরে মেয়েদের সম্বন্ধে চিন্তা করতে শুরু করে দেখলেন যে হিন্দু সমাজকে অবক্ষয়ের পথে নিয়ে গেছে মেয়েদের প্রতি ঔদাসীন্য এবং অবহেলা।

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But whatever the fulness of change that took place or its pace, Asian societies have created, or are creating a way of life that enables them to participate fully in a modern world community. “ G. S. Metraux,” Preface”, The New Asia,: Readings

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৩৫. Lau Raate, The Uncolonised Heart, Orient Longman, ১৯৯৫, যত্রতত্র।

৩৬। দেবেন্দ্রনাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়, “জাতীয় সাহিত্যের আবশ্যিকতা কি ?” সাহিত্য পরিষদ পত্রিকা, প্রথম খণ্ড।
প্রথম সংখ্যা, ১৮৯৪, পৃ.৪৪, উদ্ধৃত, Lou Raate, পূর্বোক্ত গ্রন্থ, পৃ. ১৫

৩৭. Lau Raate, পূর্বোক্ত গ্রন্থ, পৃ . ২২

অগ্নিগর্ভ মণিপুর

তাপস হালদার

ভারতের উত্তর-পূর্ব দিকে যে সাতটি রাজ্য রয়েছে তাদেরকে একসাথে সেভেন সিস্টার্স বলা হয়। মণিপুর হলো উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের একটি রাজ্য। মণিপুরের রাজধানী ইম্ফল। এই রাজ্যের উত্তরে নাগাল্যান্ড, দক্ষিণে মিজোরাম, পশ্চিমে আসাম ও পূর্ব দিকে মায়ানমার, যার পূর্ব নাম ব্রহ্মদেশ। মণিপুরের আয়তন ২২হাজার ৩২৭ বর্গ কিলোমিটার এবং এই রাজ্যের মোট জনসংখ্যা ৩.৩ মিলিয়ন। মণিপুর ৩৫০ কিলোমিটার দূরে অবস্থিত মায়ানমারের সাথে একটি আন্তর্জাতিক সীমান্ত শেয়ার করে। ভৌগোলিকভাবে মণিপুর রাজ্যটি পাহাড়ে ঘেরা। সাতটি পাহাড় দিয়ে ঘেরা এই রাজ্যটির মধ্যে রয়েছে একটি সমতল উপত্যকা।

প্রাচীনকালে এখানে রাজতন্ত্র বর্তমান ছিল এবং এই রাজতন্ত্র কাংলেইপাক নামে পরিচিত ছিল। প্রতিবেশী বার্মা বা ব্রহ্মদেশের আক্রমণের হাত থেকে বাঁচার জন্য ১৮২৪ সালে মণিপুরের তৎকালীন রাজা গম্ভীর সিং ব্রিটিশ সাহায্য চান এবং ইংরেজদের সাহায্য নিয়ে মণিপুর ব্রহ্মদেশের আক্রমণ প্রতিহত করে। এরপর মণিপুরে ব্রিটিশ আধিপত্য ক্রমশই বাড়তে থাকে। ১৮২৪ থেকে ১৮৯১ সাল পর্যন্ত মণিপুর ইংরেজদের আশ্রিত রাজ্য হিসেবে ছিল। ১৮৯১ থেকে ১৯৪৭ পর্যন্ত মণিপুর দেশীয় রাজ্যের মর্যাদায় অধিষ্ঠিত ছিল। এরপর ১৯৪৭ সালে ভারতবর্ষে স্বাধীন হলে ১৯৪৯ সালে মণিপুর ভারতে যোগদান করে এবং একটি কেন্দ্রীয় শাসিত অঞ্চলে পরিণত হয়। ১৯৭২ সালে মণিপুর একটি স্বতন্ত্র রাজ্য হিসেবে মর্যাদা পেয়েছিল।

মণিপুর রাজ্যটি স্পষ্টতই দুটি পৃথক অঞ্চলে বিভক্ত। মণিপুরের ৯০% পাহাড়ি অঞ্চল যেখানে মূলত কুকি ও নাগারা বসবাস করে। অপরদিকে ১০ শতাংশ সমতল বা উপত্যকা অঞ্চলে মেয়েতি জাতি যারা মূলত হিন্দু বা বৌদ্ধ সম্প্রদায় ভুক্ত তারা বসবাস করে। নাগা ও কুকিরা জনজাতি সম্প্রদায়ভুক্ত হওয়ায় তারা ৯০% পাহাড়ি এলাকায় বসবাস করে এবং এরা মণিপুরের মোট জনসংখ্যার ৪৫ শতাংশ। অপর দিকে মেয়েতিরা মণিপুরের মোট জনসংখ্যা ৫৫ শতাংশ। তাই এরা সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ এবং এরা দশ শতাংশ সমতল ভূমিতে বাস করে এবং সেখানে ওরা জমি জমা কিনতে পারে। কিন্তু পাহাড়ি অঞ্চলে তারা জমিজমা কিনতে পারবে না। এটা মেয়েতিদের কাছে অবিচারেরই নামান্তর।

প্রাচীনকাল থেকে মনিপুরের রাজারা জাতিতে ছিল মেয়েতি এবং বংশপরম্পরায় হিন্দু। পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী নাগা ও কুকিরা হল মূলত আদিবাসী সম্প্রদায় ভুক্ত এবং প্রকৃতি পূজারী। যেহেতু মেয়েতিরা সমতলে বসবাস করত এজন্য তারা আর্থিকভাবে অত্যন্ত সবল ছিল এবং ধর্ম এবং সংস্কৃতির ব্যাপারে কঠোর ছিল। ইংরেজরা মনিপুরে প্রবেশ করার পরে তারা খ্রিস্টান ধর্ম মনিপুরে লোকেদের মধ্যে জনপ্রিয় করার চেষ্টা করে। পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী নাগা ও কুকীদের প্রচুর অর্থ সাহায্য দিয়ে তারা খ্রিস্টান ধর্মে তাদেরকে দীক্ষিত করে। কিন্তু মেয়েতিরা নিজেদের সংস্কৃতির ব্যাপারে যথেষ্ট রক্ষণশীল ছিল এবং তারা ইংরেজ মিশনারিদের দ্বারা প্রচারিত খ্রিস্টান ধর্মে কখনোই আকৃষ্ট হয়নি। এর ফলে মনিপুরী খ্রিস্টান ধর্মের প্রসার ঘটে এবং নাগা ও কুকিরা যারা এতদিন প্রকৃতি পূজারী ছিলেন তারা খ্রিস্টান ধর্মে দীক্ষিত হয়। মনিপুরের সরকারি ধর্ম হিসেবে হিন্দু ধর্ম ঘোষিত ছিল। মনিপুরের সমতলে বসবাসকারী মেয়েতি জাতি তাদের নিজস্ব ধর্ম এবং হিন্দু সংস্কৃতির ব্যাপারে আজীবন কটর ছিল এবং তারা এখনো কটরপন্থী রয়েছে।

১৯৬০ সালে তদানীন্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী পণ্ডিত জহরলাল নেহেরু একটি আইন পাস করেন যেটির নাম ছিল ‘মনিপুর ল্যান্ড রেভিনিউ এন্ড ল্যান্ড রিফর্মস এক্ট’। এই আইন অনুযায়ী খ্রিস্টান নাগা ও কুকিরা যদি চায় তবে তারা সমতলে জায়গা কিনতে পারবে ও বসবাস করতে পারবে। পাহাড়ি এলাকাতে তাদের একচ্ছত্র অধিকার কিন্তু এই আইনের দ্বারা সমতলের দশ শতাংশ জমিতেও তারা বসবাস করতে পারবে ও জমি কিনতে পারবে। অপরদিকে দশ শতাংশ জমিতে বসবাসকারী মেয়েতিরা কিন্তু ৯০% পাহাড়ি অঞ্চলে জমি কিনতে পারবে না বা বসবাস করতে পারবে না। এছাড়াও মেয়েতি ও নাগা কুকিদের মধ্যে অসন্তোষের আরেকটা কারণ হলো ব্রিটিশ আমলে মেয়েতিরা তপশিলি উপজাতির মর্যাদা পেতো যেমন কুকি এবং নাগারা পেত। কিন্তু স্বাধীন ভারতে মেয়েতিরা মূলত হিন্দু হওয়ায় তাদের তপশিলি জনজাতির মর্যাদা অস্বীকার করা হয়। কিন্তু মেয়েতিরা তপশিলি জনজাতির জন্য সংরক্ষিত সুযোগ-সুবিধা লাভের জন্য তৎপর হয়ে ওঠে এবং তারা হাইকোর্টে তপশিলি জনজাতির মর্যাদা ফেরত পাবার জন্য মামলা করে। সম্প্রতি হাইকোর্ট এই মামলায় রায় দেয় যে মেয়েতিরা তপশিলি জনজাতির মর্যাদা ফিরে পাবে এবং পাহাড়ে জমি কিনতে পারবে। এই সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে কুকি ও নাগা উপজাতি বিক্ষোভে ফেটে পড়ে। কুকি ও নাগা উপজাতির বক্তব্য এই যে মেয়েতিরা শিক্ষিত এবং দীর্ঘদিন ধরে তারা ক্ষমতায় আছে। এখন যদি তারা তপশিলি জনজাতির মর্যাদা পেয়ে যায় এবং পাহাড়ের জমি কিনতে থাকে তাহলে কুকি ও নাগাদের জন্য আর কোন জমি অবশিষ্ট থাকবে না।

মণিপুরী রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতা মূলত মেয়েতিদের দখলেই ছিল এবং আছে। ১৯৭২ এর পরে নির্বাচন হয়েছিল তাতে মেয়েতিরা সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা পায় এবং তখন থেকে আজ পর্যন্ত মণিপুরের সমস্ত মুখ্যমন্ত্রী মেইতি সম্প্রদায় থেকেই এসেছে ন। অপরদিকে মেয়েতিদের অভিযোগ যে রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতা তাদের হাতে থাকা সত্ত্বেও মাত্র রাজ্যের দশ শতাংশ অঞ্চলে তারা সীমাবদ্ধ রয়েছে। যেখানে কুকি ও নাগারা ৯০ শতাংশ অঞ্চলে বসবাস করে দশ শতাংশ অঞ্চলে জমি কিনতে পারে সেখানে মেয়েটিরা কেন ১০% অঞ্চলে বসবাস করে ৯০ শতাংশ জমির উপরে কোন অধিকার বলবৎ করতে পারবে না। মেয়েতিদের আর একটা উল্লেখযোগ্য দাবি হলো যে ইংরেজ আমলে তারা যে তপশিলি উপজাতির মর্যাদা ভোগ করত সেটা তারা আবার ফিরে পেতে চায়।

অবশ্য এই সামগ্রিক বিতর্কে একটা বাইরের কারণও রয়েছে। আগেই উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে যে মণিপুরের সাথে মায়ানমারের একটা দীর্ঘ সাধারণ সীমান্ত রয়েছে। মায়ানমারে রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি অধিকাংশ সময়ই অশান্ত থাকে। তাই মায়ানমারের খ্রিস্টান কুকিরা অবৈধভাবে প্রায়ই মণিপুরে প্রবেশ করে এবং মণিপুর অঞ্চলে বসবাস করতে শুরু করে অবৈধভাবে। ১৯৭০ সাল থেকে বর্তমান সময় পর্যন্ত এই অনুপ্রবেশ চলছে। সম্প্রতি মায়ানমারের একটি সামরিক অভ্যুত্থান হয়েছে। এর ফলে মায়ানমার থেকে অবৈধভাবে অনুপ্রবেশকারীরা মণিপুরের পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে বসবাস শুরু করেছে। এটা নিয়ে মেয়েতিদের মনে যথেষ্ট আপত্তি রয়েছে। তারা মনে করছে এইভাবে খ্রিস্টান কুকিরা যদি মণিপুরে সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ হয়ে যায় তাহলে মপুরে আর হিন্দু মেয়েতিদের কোন গুরুত্ব থাকবে না।

শুধু তাই নয় এই বিতর্কে মাদক ও আফিংয়েরও একটা দিক রয়েছে। মণিপুরে আফিং একেবারে নিষিদ্ধ কিন্তু মণিপুর সরকার বলছে যে মণিপুরে আফিংয়ের অবৈধ চাষ করা হয়। বিগত কয়েক বছরে মণিপুর সরকার মোট ১৫ হাজার একর জমিতে আফিংয়ের অবৈধ চাষ খুঁজে পেয়েছে। এই অবৈধ চাষের জমির প্রায় ১০০% ই খ্রিস্টান কুকি ও নাগা উপজাতি অধ্যুষিত পাহাড়ি অঞ্চলে। এই আফিংয়ের অবৈধ চাষ বন্ধ করতে সরকার ব্যাপকভাবে অভিযান শুরু করেছে। গত কয়েক বছর ধরে সরকার এ ধরনের সমস্ত জমি দখল করে নিয়েছে। এর ফলে কুকিরা অসন্তুষ্ট হয়ে উঠেছে এবং তারা মনে করছে যে সরকার উদ্দেশ্যমূলকভাবে তাদের জমি কেড়ে নিচ্ছে।

চলতি বছরের ফেব্রুয়ারি মাসে পরিস্থিতি আরো তিক্ত হয়ে ওঠে যখন সরকার কুকিদের জমি দখল করে নিতে শুরু করে। এর ফলে পরিস্থিতি আরো জটিল হয়ে ওঠে। মার্চ মাসে মণিপুরের

থমাস ময়দানে সমাবেশ করে নাগা এবং কুকি অধিবাসীরা সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ জানায়। এই প্রতিবাদ শেষ পর্যন্ত সহিংস রূপ ধারণ করে। এই সংঘর্ষে ৫ জন নিহত হয় যদিও রাজ্য সরকার এই আন্দোলনকে আমল দিতে চাইছে না। মণিপুর সরকার ঘোষণা করেছে যে বেআইনি আফিং চাষ সরকার কোনভাবেই বরদাস্ত করবে না। যেহেতু কুকিরা তাদের জমি সম্পর্কে খুবই সংবেদনশীল এবং সরকার প্রধানত মেয়েতি সম্প্রদায়ের লোক দ্বারা গঠিত, সেই কারণে এই পদক্ষেপটি কুকি এবং মেয়েতিদের মধ্যে ভাবাবেগের লড়াইয়ে পরিণত হয়েছে। এর ফলে মণিপুর কিন্তু একটু একটু করে উত্তপ্ত হতে শুরু করেছে। এরপর ১১ই এপ্রিল সমতল অঞ্চলে অবস্থিত ইফলে কুকিদের তিনটি গির্জাকে অবৈধভাবে নির্মাণ আখ্যা দিয়ে সরকার ভেঙে ফেলে। এই গির্জা ভেঙে ফেলাকে কুকিরা নিজেদের উপর হিন্দু মেয়েতি সরকারের আক্রমণ হিসেবে ধরে নেয় এবং এর ফলে যে আবহাওয়াটা আগে থেকেই উত্তপ্ত ছিল সেটা আরো জটিল হয়ে ওঠে। এই ঘটনার নয়দিন পরে ২০ এপ্রিল, ২০২৩ মণিপুর হাইকোর্ট রায় দেয় যে মেয়েতিদের তপশিলি মর্যাদা আবার ফিরিয়ে দেওয়া হবে যার ফলে আগে থেকেই মেয়েতি ও কুকিদের মধ্যে যে আগ্নেয়গিরি ছিল তা আরো ভয়াবহ হয়ে ওঠে। এর আট দিন পরে ২৮শে, এপ্রিল মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এন.বীরেন সিং এর একটি জিমের উদ্বোধনের জন্য মণিপুরের চুয়াচাঁদপুর জেলায় যাওয়ার কথা ছিল। কিন্তু উদ্বোধনের একদিন আগেই ২৭শে এপ্রিল কুকি বিক্ষোভকারীরা এই জিমটিকে ভেঙে চুরমার করে, জ্বালিয়ে দেয়। এমনকি যেই স্থানে মণিপুরের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর জনসভা করার কথা ছিল সেই জনসভা অঞ্চলে ব্যাপক পরিমাণে ভাঙচুর চালায়। ফলত ওই অঞ্চলে ১৪৪ ধারা জারি করে দেওয়া হয় এবং ইন্টারনেট পরিষেবা তৎক্ষণাৎ বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়।

চুয়াচাঁদপুরের মত মণিপুরের আরো তিনটি উপজাতি জেলাতেও কারফিউ জারি করা হয়, এবং সেখানেও ইন্টারনেট বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়। এরপর ২৩ মে, পরিস্থিতি মারাত্মকভাবে ভয়াবহ হতে শুরু করে। এইরকম একটা উত্তপ্ত অবস্থায়

কুকিদের একটি ছাত্র সংগঠন এ টি এস ইউ এম বা অল ট্রাইবাল স্টুডেন্টস ইউনিয়ন মণিপুর একটি মিছিলের আয়োজন করে। এই মিছিলে সাত হাজারের বেশি কুকিরা অংশ নিয়েছিল। এদের সাথে নাগারাও ছিল। এই মিছিলটি চুয়া চাঁদপুরের তুরবুগু এলাকায় এসে সহিংস হয়ে ওঠে এবং এই সময় কুকি সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষেরা মেয়েতি সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষদের ঘরবাড়ি উপাসনালয় সরকারি সম্পত্তি জ্বালিয়ে দেয় আগুনে, কুকি সম্প্রদায়ের লোকেরা এই সমতল ইফল এর কাছাকাছি জায়গা জুড়ে রীতিমতো দাঙ্গা এবং অশান্তি ছড়িয়ে দেয়। ওরা, মে ঘটে যাওয়া

এই ঘটনায় ৬০ জন মারা যায় এবং ১৭০০ জনের মতো বাড়িঘর নষ্ট হয়ে যায়। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ৪মে, ৩৫৬ ধারা জারি করে এবং এই রাজ্যে নিরাপত্তাকে নিজের হাতে নিয়ে নিলেও দাঙ্গা কারীদের দমন করতে পারেনি। এই ঘটনার ফলে ১৩০ জন মারা গেছে ৪০০ জন আহত হয়েছে এবং ৬০ হাজার জনের বেশি লোক তাদের বাড়িঘর ছেড়ে পালিয়ে যেতে বাধ্য হয়েছে। এই অস্থির পরিবেশে নারীরা হামলা ও অপমানের শিকার হয়েছেন। একটি মর্মান্তিক ভিডিও ফুটেজে দেখা যাচ্ছে যে মেয়েতি পুরুষরা তাদের গ্রাম ধ্বংস করার পর দুই কুকি মহিলাকে নগ্ন করে প্যারেড করাচ্ছে, এবং সংঘর্ষের হিংস্রতার উপকরণ হিসেবে ধর্ষণ এবং যৌন নির্যাতনকে ব্যবহার করছে।

ভারত সরকারের প্রতিক্রিয়া বিলম্বিত হওয়ার কারণে সমালোচনার সম্মুখীন হয়েছে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদী অবশ্যই সে ভিডিওটি প্রকাশের পর সহিংস্রতার বিরুদ্ধে কথা বলেছেন, গভীর উদ্বেগ প্রকাশ করেছেন এবং দলগুলিকে জবাবদিহি করার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন। ক্রমবর্ধমান হিংস্রতার মোকাবিলায় কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার চল্লিশ হাজার সৈন্য আধা সামরিক বাহিনীকে মোতায়েন করেছে। যাই হোক পরিস্থিতি এখনো উত্তেজনাপূর্ণ এবং তার কারণে আরো গ্রামবাসী তাদের বাড়িঘর ছেড়ে পালিয়ে যেতে বাধ্য হচ্ছে।

মণিপুরের হিন্দু মেয়েতিরা অভিযোগ করেছে যেহেতু তারা পাহাড়ে জমি কিনতে পারছে না অথচ খ্রিস্টান কুকিরও নাগারা সমতলে এসে জমি কিনছে তাই মাত্র ১০% জমির উপরেও যে মেয়েতিদের অধিকার রয়েছে সেটাও ক্রমশ হাতছাড়া হয়ে যাচ্ছে মণিপুরে তারা ক্রমশ দুর্বল হয়ে পড়ছে। যেহেতু মায়ানমার থেকে হাজার হাজার খ্রিস্টান কুকি মণিপুরে এসে পাহাড়ে বসবাস করতে শুরু করেছে তাই খুব দ্রুত মণিপুরের জনবিন্যাস পাল্টে যাচ্ছে এবং যাবে। এর ফলে আগামী দিনে পুরো মণিপুর জুড়ে কিন্তু মেয়েতি সম্প্রদায়েরা সংখ্যালঘু হয়ে যাবে। তারা হয়তো আগামী দিনে মণিপুরে বসবাসও করতে পারবে না।

পাহাড় ও সমতল দুই জায়গাতেই বসবাসকারী খ্রিস্টান কুকিরা অবশ্য বলছে তাদের কাছে যে ৯০% পাহাড়ি জমি রয়েছে সেটি আসলে অনুর্বর পাহাড়ে এলাকা। সেখানে ফসল ফলে না তাই বাধ্য হয়ে তাদেরকে আফিংয়ের চাষ করতে হয়। কিন্তু মেয়েতিদের কাছে যে অধিকাংশ জমি রয়েছে তা অত্যন্ত উর্বর। তাই আদতে ১০% হলেও সে উর্বর জমি জন্য মেয়েতিরা আর্থিকভাবে ভীষণভাবে শক্তিশালী। কুকিরা এই আর্থিক অসাম্য মানতে চাইছে না। উপরন্তু কুকি এবং নাগাদের দাবি যেহেতু জনসংখ্যার বিচারে মেয়েতিরা সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ তাই আজ পর্যন্ত অধিকাংশ

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী মেয়েতি সম্প্রদায় থেকেই এসেছে। রাজনৈতিকভাবে মেয়েতি সম্প্রদায় মণিপুরের সমস্ত ক্ষমতা ভোগ করে এসেছে।

মণিপুরের সমস্যার আশু সমাধান বিশেষজ্ঞদের কাছে এখনো অধরা। ভৌগোলিক, আর্থিক, সাংস্কৃতিক নানা দিক এই সমস্যাকে আরো জটিল করে তুলেছে। তবে আশা করা যায় অদূর ভবিষ্যতে মণিপুর সমস্যার সুষ্ঠু সমাধান হবে এবং ভারতের এই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ রাজ্যটিতে আবার শান্তি ফিরে আসবে।

তথ্যসূত্র

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আন্তর্জাতিক সংকট -রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধ

ইন্দ্রানী দাস

২১,ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২২ রাশিয়ার প্রেসিডেন্ট পুতিন ঘোষণা করেছিলেন যে রাশিয়া, ইউক্রেনের রাশিয়া নিয়ন্ত্রিত অঞ্চলগুলিকে স্বাধীন রাষ্ট্র হিসেবে স্বীকৃতি দিয়েছে। ২৪,ফেব্রুয়ারি সময় ভোর পাঁচটার সময় পুতিন আবার ঘোষণা করেন যে রাশিয়া একটি বিশেষ সামরিক অভিযান শুরু করছে যাকে, বিজনেস ইনসাইডার ইউক্রেনের বিরুদ্ধে কার্যকর ভাবে যুদ্ধ ঘোষণা করা বলে বর্ণনা করে। পুতিন বলেন যে তার ইউক্রেন দখল করবার কোন পরিকল্পনা নেই এবং তিনি ইউক্রেনের জনগণের স্বনিয়ন্ত্রণের অধিকার কে সমর্থন করছেন। পুতিনের ঘোষণার কয়েক মিনিটের মধ্যেই রাশিয়ান স্ফেপনাত্স ইউক্রেন জুড়ে লক্ষ্যবস্তুতে আঘাত হানতে শুরু করে এবং এর ফলে রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের যুদ্ধ শুরু হয়।

২৪ শে ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২২ রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনকে আক্রমণ করার পরেই বিশ্ব জুড়ে হইচই শুরু হয়ে যায়। তবে রাশিয়া ও ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধের এই পটভূমি রচিত হয়েছিল সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের ভাঙ্গার সময় থেকে, ১৯৯১ সালে ঠান্ডা লড়াইয়ের সমাপ্তি কালে। রাশিয়া ও ইউক্রেন সহ মোট ১৫ টি রিপাবলিক সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের অন্তর্ভুক্ত ছিল। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের অন্যতম শক্তিশালী দুটি অংশের সংঘর্ষ বিশ্বব্যাপী সংকটের সৃষ্টি করেছে। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সবথেকে অগ্রসরমান রাজ্য হিসেবে ইউক্রেন পরিচিত ছিল। কৃষি, শিল্প পরমাণু ও প্রযুক্তি সহ বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে তারা ছিল সবথেকে অগ্রগণ্য।

পরবর্তীকালে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ভাঙ্গনের ফলে ইউক্রেন সহ ১৫ টি রাষ্ট্র স্বাধীনভাবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করে। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ভাঙ্গনের সময় পশ্চিম দেশগুলির সাথে রাশিয়ার একটি চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর হয় যার অন্যতম শর্ত ছিল কখনোই সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ভেঙে গঠিত হওয়া রাষ্ট্রগুলিকে পশ্চিমা দেশগুলো জোটের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করবে না। কিন্তু রাশিয়ার সবথেকে কাছের রাষ্ট্র ইউক্রেন যখন ন্যাটোতে যোগদান করবার ইচ্ছা প্রকাশ করে তখন রাশিয়া এর বিরোধিতা করে। রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধের অন্যতম প্রধান কারণ হলো ইউক্রেনের ন্যাটোতে যোগদানের ইচ্ছা।

ইউক্রেনের পূর্ব দিকে দুটি জায়গা, ডোনাঙ্ক ও লুনাঙ্ক যাকে একত্রে ডনবাস বলা হয়, এই দুটি জায়গা কে নিয়েও ইউক্রেনের সাথে রাশিয়ার মতপার্থক্য রয়েছে। ইউক্রেন পূর্বে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নেরই অন্তর্ভুক্ত ছিল এবং এই দুটি জায়গা ইউক্রেনের একেবারে পূর্ব সীমান্তে হওয়ায় রাশিয়ার সাথে এদের সাংস্কৃতিক দিক থেকে অসম্ভব মিল দেখা যায়। এখানকার অধিবাসীরা রাশিয়ার সাথে সংযুক্ত হতে চায় যেহেতু সাংস্কৃতিক এবং ভৌগোলিক দিক থেকে রাশিয়ার সাথেই তাদের খুব বেশি মিল রয়েছে।

অপরদিকে ইউক্রেন মনে করে ডনবাস অঞ্চল তার নিজস্ব এবং এই অঞ্চলটিকে রাশিয়া দখল করার জন্য অন্যায় ভাবে এই জায়গাটিতে হস্তক্ষেপ করছে।

২০১৪ সালের শুরু থেকে ইউক্রেন ও রাশিয়ার সংঘাত শুরু হয় যখন রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের দক্ষিণ দিকে অবস্থিত ক্রিমিয়া দখল করে নেয়। আমেরিকা সহ ইউরোপ রাশিয়ার এই কাজকে তীব্র ভাষায় আক্রমণ করে কিন্তু রাশিয়া তাতে কোনরকম কর্ণপাত করেনি। ক্রিমিয়াকে দখল করায় রাশিয়াকে শাস্তি দেবার জন্য তাকে G-৪ থেকে বহিস্কার করা হয়। কিন্তু রাশিয়া তাতে কোনভাবেই বিচলিত হয় না। ক্রিমিয়া দখল করার পর রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের পূর্ব দিকে ডনবাস অঞ্চলের দিকে নজর দেয় এবং এই অঞ্চলটিকে দখল করার জন্য চেষ্টা করে। রাশিয়ার বক্তব্য হল ডনবাস অঞ্চলের লোকেদেরকে আত্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের অধিকার দিতে হবে। এই অঞ্চলের লোকেরা যেহেতু রাশিয়ার সাথে সংযুক্তিতে সম্মতি প্রকাশ করেছে সেই কারণে ডনবাস অঞ্চলকে রাশিয়ারই অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা হবে। ইউক্রেন কিন্তু রাশিয়ার এই দাবি মানতে মোটেই রাজি নয়। ইউক্রেনের বক্তব্য হল ডনবাসের লোকেরা বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী আন্দোলন করছে এবং তাদেরকে মদত দিচ্ছে রাশিয়া। ইউক্রেনের বক্তব্য ডনবাস অঞ্চল ইউক্রেনের অবিচ্ছেদ্য অঙ্গ। এই অঞ্চল রাশিয়াকে ছেড়ে দেবার কোন পরিকল্পনা ইউক্রেনের নেই। ফলশ্রুতিতে রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন সীমান্তে গোলাগুলি ও খন্দ যুদ্ধ চালাচ্ছিল। কিন্তু বছরের পর বছর ধরে চলতে থাকা এই সংঘাত পরবর্তীকালে উদ্বেগে কারণ হয়ে দাঁড়ায়। ২৪শে, ফেব্রুয়ারি রাশিয়া সরাসরি ইউক্রেনে সামরিক আক্রমণ শুরু করে এবং রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের মধ্যে সরাসরি যুদ্ধ আরম্ভ হয়। এই আক্রমণের ফলে অনেক বেসামরিক লোক প্রাণ হারান, পরিকাঠামো ধ্বংসপ্রাপ্ত হয় এবং প্রচুর সংখ্যক ইউক্রেনবাসী পার্শ্ববর্তী দেশ গুলিতে আশ্রয় নেয়। রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের উপর নিজের প্রাধান্য প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্যই এই আক্রমণ হানে।

এছাড়া আরও একটি কারণ হলো রাশিয়া পৃথিবীর শীর্ষ গ্যাসের যোগানকারী দেশ হিসাবে পরিচিত ছিল। ইউক্রেনে প্রচুর প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাসের ভান্ডার আছে। ইউক্রেন যেহেতু পূর্বে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের অন্তর্ভুক্ত ছিল সেই কারণে ইউক্রেনের অফুরন্ত প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাসের ভান্ডার রাশিয়া ব্যবহার করে সারা পৃথিবীতে প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাস সরবরাহ করতো। প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাস সরবরাহের যে সমস্ত লাইনগুলো রয়েছে সেগুলো কিন্তু সবই ইউক্রেনের মধ্যে দিয়েই অন্যান্য দেশে গেছে। প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাসের প্রধান কেন্দ্র হল ইউক্রেন। সোভিয়েত রাশিয়া ভাঙ্গনের আগে ইউক্রেনের উপর রাশিয়ার আধিপত্য ছিল। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ভাঙ্গনের পরে ইউক্রেন একটি স্বাধীন রাষ্ট্র হিসেবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করেছে কিন্তু রাশিয়া কোন ক্রমেই ইউক্রেনের উপর নিজের দাবি ছাড়তে রাজি নয়। রাশিয়া মনে করে ইউক্রেন রাশিয়ারই অন্তর্ভুক্ত ছিল এবং ভবিষ্যতেও থাকবে। ১৯৯১ সালে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ভেঙে যাওয়ার পর ইউক্রেন স্বাধীন হয়ে যায়। ইউক্রেনের কিছু অংশের উপর ইউরোপের আধিপত্য প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়। ভৌগোলিক নিরাপত্তার কারণে রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের উপর পশ্চিমা দেশগুলির এই আধিপত্য কিছুতেই মানতে চায় না।

এবং তার পররাষ্ট্রনীতির অন্যতম বৈশিষ্ট্যই হল ইউক্রেনের উপর নিজের আধিপত্য যে কোন মূল্যে ধরে রাখা। এই অবস্থায় রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের যুদ্ধ শুরু হয়।

রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের যুদ্ধ হঠাৎ করে শুরু হয়নি। রাশিয়ার প্রেসিডেন্ট পুতিন অনেক আগে থেকেই যুদ্ধের পরিকল্পনা করেছিলেন। তার পরিকল্পনার বাস্তবায়ন শুরু হয় ২০১৪ সাল থেকে। ২০১৪ সালের মার্চ মাসে রাশিয়ার সেনারা ইউক্রেনের ক্রিমিয়ার অঞ্চল দখল করে নেয়। যা পরবর্তীকালে ক্রিমিয়ানদের গণভোটের মাধ্যমে আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে রাশিয়ার অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়। এর পরে ডনবাস অঞ্চলের রাশিয়াপন্থী বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদীরা গণভোটের মাধ্যমে স্বাধীনতা ঘোষণা করলে, ইউক্রেন এর পিছনে রাশিয়ার সক্রিয় মদত দেখতে পায়। রাশিয়ার বক্তব্য হল গণভোটের মাধ্যমে ডনবাসের লোকেরা যেহেতু স্বাধীনতা ঘোষণা করেছে এবং রাশিয়ার সাথে সংযুক্তির প্রস্তাব সমর্থন করেছে তাই জনগণের আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে মূল্য দেওয়া উচিত। এর ফলে ইউক্রেনের সাথে রাশিয়ার মতপার্থক্য শুরু হয় এবং রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের পূর্ব সীমান্তে সৈন্য সমাবেশ করে, ডনবাস অঞ্চলের লোকেদের ইউক্রেন থেকে বিচ্ছিন্ন হবার ইচ্ছাকে মদত দিতে থাকে।

ইউক্রেন রাশিয়ার এই যুদ্ধে পশ্চিম ইউরোপ এবং আমেরিকা ইউক্রেনকে সবরকম সাহায্য দিতে এগিয়ে আসে। তাদের বক্তব্য ইউক্রেন ১৯৯১ এর পর থেকে একটি স্বাধীন রাষ্ট্র এবং সে যে কোন জোটের মধ্যে যেতে পারে বা যাবার সম্পূর্ণ অধিকার তার আছে। রাশিয়া অন্যায় ভাবে ইউক্রেনের উপর নিজের ক্ষমতা প্রতিষ্ঠিত করবার চেষ্টা করেছে। সুতরাং ইউক্রেন ও রাশিয়ার এই দ্বন্দ্ব শুধুমাত্র দুটি দেশের মধ্যে আবদ্ধ না থেকে তা পরিণত হয় এক ব্যাপক যুদ্ধে, যখন পশ্চিম ইউরোপ এবং আমেরিকা ইউক্রেন ও রাশিয়ার এই যুদ্ধে সক্রিয়ভাবে অংশ নিয়ে ইউক্রেনকে রাশিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে সব রকম সাহায্য দিতে এগিয়ে আসে।।

২০২১ সালের অক্টোবরে রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন সীমান্তে সৈন্য ও সামরিক সরঞ্জামাদি জমা করতে শুরু করে। ডিসেম্বরের মাঝামাঝি রাশিয়ার পররাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী আমেরিকা ও ন্যাটোকে ইউক্রেনে যে কোন ধরনের সামরিক কর্মকাণ্ড বন্ধ করার দাবি জানায় কিন্তু আমেরিকা ও ন্যাটো তা প্রত্যাখ্যান করে। ২০২২ সালের ফেব্রুয়ারিতে আমেরিকার প্রেসিডেন্ট রাশিয়ার আগ্রাসন মোকাবিলায় প্রায় তিন হাজার আমেরিকার সেনা ইউক্রেনের সীমান্তবর্তী দেশ পোল্যান্ড ও রোমানিয়ায় মোতায়েনের আদেশ দেয়। ২৪শে ফেব্রুয়ারি রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের বিরুদ্ধে পূর্ণমাত্রায় সামরিক অভিযানের কথা ঘোষণা করেন।

২০২২ সালের জুনের মধ্যে প্রায় চার মিলিয়ন ইউক্রেনীয় অভ্যন্তরীণভাবে বাস্তুচ্যুত হয়েছিল। ২০২৩ সালের মে মাসে ৪.২ মিলিয়নেরও বেশি লোক দেশ ছেড়ে চলে যেতে বাধ্য হয়। রাশিয়ার সেনারা এপ্রিল ২০২২ এর মধ্যে উত্তর ফ্রন্ট থেকে সরে যায়, দক্ষিণ ও দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব ফ্রন্টে রাশিয়া একটি ধ্বংসাত্মক অবরোধের পর মার্চ মাসে খেরসান এবং মে মাসে মারিওপুল দখল করে। এপ্রিলে ডনবাসে একটি নতুন যুদ্ধ শুরু হয়। রাশিয়ার বাহিনী ২০২২ সালে শেষের দিকে ইউক্রেন দক্ষিণ এবং পূর্বে

পাল্টা আক্রমণ শুরু করে। এরপরই আংশিক অধিকৃত অঞ্চলকে অবৈধভাবে সংযুক্ত করার কথা ঘোষণা করে। ২০২৩ সালের ফেব্রুয়ারিতে রাশিয়ার ডনবাসে একটি নতুন আক্রমণের জন্য প্রায় দু লাখ সৈন্য সংগ্রহ করেছিল। এরপরে ইউক্রেন দক্ষিণপূর্বে আরও একটি পাল্টা আক্রমণ শুরু করে।

রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধের এই এক বছরে দুনিয়া অনেকটা বদলে গেছে, এমন কিছু পরিবর্তন ঘটেছে যা খুব কম মানুষই তখন ধারণা করতে পেরেছিলেন। প্রতিবেশী দুই দেশের যুদ্ধে ইউক্রেনের যেমন ক্ষতি হয়েছে তেমনি ইউক্রেন থেকে বহু দূরের দেশের মানুষেরও জীবনের অভিঘাত লেগেছে, দেশের অর্থনীতিতে দেখা দিয়েছে অস্থিরতা, অনিশ্চয়তা। এই যুদ্ধের কারণে সারা বিশ্বে যে ভোগান্তি হয়েছে তাতে তিনটি ক্ষেত্রে প্রভাব পড়েছে সব থেকে বেশি। এগুলি হল খাদ্যদ্রব্য, জ্বালানি এবং মূল্যস্ফীতি। যুদ্ধের আঁচ প্রায় সব দেশের গায়ে লেগেছে, তবে সবথেকে বেশি ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হয়েছে উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলো। খাদ্যদ্রব্যের কথাই যদি বলা হয় তাহলে ইউক্রেন রাশিয়ার যুদ্ধ বিশ্ব জুড়ে খাদ্যদ্রব্যের দাম এমন একটা পর্যায়ে নিয়ে গেছে যা সর্বোচ্চ মাত্রা। এর কারণ রাশিয়া ও ইউক্রেন বিশ্বে গম সহ বিভিন্ন দ্রব্য রপ্তানির ক্ষেত্রে শীর্ষস্থানীয় দুটি দেশ। জাতিপুঞ্জ সতর্ক করে দিয়েছিল যে রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধের ফলে কোটি কোটি মানুষ বিশেষ করে আফ্রিকা ও মধ্যপ্রাচ্যের বিভিন্ন অংশের মানুষ দুর্ভিক্ষের ঝুঁকিতে পড়বে।

রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের এই যুদ্ধের ফলে ইউক্রেনের কোটি কোটি টন খাদ্যশস্য রপ্তানি করা যাচ্ছিল না কারণ রাশিয়া নৌপথে অবরোধ করে রেখেছিল। তবে গত বছরের অক্টোবরে হঠাৎ করে রাশিয়া এই অবরোধ থেকে সরে আসে। তার ফলে ইউক্রেন থেকে বর্তমানে খাদ্যশস্য রপ্তানি করা হচ্ছে কিন্তু তা সত্ত্বেও বিশ্বজুড়ে খাদ্যশস্যের দাম উর্ধ্বমুখী।

রাশিয়া ইউক্রেনের যুদ্ধের কারণে ভয়াবহ জ্বালানি সংকট পড়েছে বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন দেশ। নিষেধাজ্ঞার কারণে অনেক দেশ রাশিয়া থেকে জ্বালানি কেনা বন্ধ বা কমিয়ে দিয়েছে, এতে বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন দেশে জ্বালানির দাম এক লাফে অনেক বেড়ে গেছে। যুদ্ধের প্রথম ছয় মাসের মধ্যেই ইউরোপের বাসিন্দাদের গ্যাসের বিল দ্বিগুণ এবং বিদ্যুতের খরচ ৭০% বেড়ে যায়। ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের কূটনীতিকেরা গত ডিসেম্বরে রাশিয়ার জ্বালানি তেলের দাম ব্যরাল প্রতি ৬০ মার্কিন ডলার বেঁধে দেয়। যার অর্থ EU জোটের বাইরের দেশের উপর রাশিয়ার আধিপত্য থেকে যায়। রাশিয়া গত এক বছরে চীন ও ভারতের কাছে বেশি তেল ও গ্যাস বিক্রি করেছে।

ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধ যখন শুরু হয় তখন বিশ্ব অর্থনীতি সবে করোনা মহামারী আতঙ্ক কাটিয়ে উঠছিল। যুদ্ধ শুরুর পর জ্বালানির সংকট ও মূল্যবৃদ্ধি কমে যাওয়ার কারণে মূল্যস্ফীতি বাড়তে শুরু করে। নিত্য পণ্যের মূল্য বৃদ্ধির কারণে কমে যায় মুদ্রার মান। মানুষের সঞ্চয়ের অর্থ ভেঙে উদ্ভূত পরিস্থিতি সামাল দেওয়ার চেষ্টা শুরু করে। এতে মানুষের ক্রয়ক্ষমতা কমে যেতে শুরু করে। মূল্যস্ফীতি যুক্তরাষ্ট্র, ফ্রান্স, যুক্তরাজ্য সহ বিভিন্ন দেশের সরকারের মাথাব্যথার কারণ হয়ে ওঠে। এই পরিস্থিতি সামাল দিতে

সরকার সব থেকে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত পরিবার ও ব্যবসায় প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলিকে নগদ প্রণোদনা দিতে শুরু করে। একই সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন ভর্তুকি, পণ্যের মূল্য বেঁধে দেওয়া, এমন কি কর কমানোর পদক্ষেপও নেওয়া হয়।

যুদ্ধ শুরুর পর ইউক্রেনের প্রায় ৩০ লাখেরও বেশি নাগরিক ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন দেশে আশ্রয় নিয়েছে। বিশেষ করে যুদ্ধ শুরুর দিকে ইউক্রেনের নাগরিকরা বেশি দেশ ছেড়েছেন এবং প্রতিবেশী দেশে আশ্রয় নিয়েছেন। সবথেকে বেশি পনেরো লাখ ইউক্রেনীয় আশ্রয় নিয়েছেন প্রতিবেশী দেশ পোল্যান্ডে। এই হিসাবে দিয়েছে জাতিপুঞ্জের শরণার্থী বিষয়ক সংস্থা UNHR। এছাড়া ইউক্রেনের ভিতরে বাস্তুহীন অর্থাৎ গৃহহীন হয়েছেন আরো প্রায় ৫০ লক্ষ মানুষ। যেহেতু পোল্যান্ড ইউক্রেনের এই যুদ্ধের দ্বারা সব থেকে বেশি প্রভাবিত হয়েছে সেই কারণে পোল্যান্ড আমেরিকা এবং ইউরোপের অন্যান্য দেশের উপরে চাপ দিচ্ছে যাতে তারা ইউক্রেনকে সব রকমের সহায়তা দেয় এবং এই যুদ্ধকে একটা নিশ্চিত পরিণতির দিকে খুব তাড়াতাড়ি নিয়ে যেতে পারে। তবে যুদ্ধ শুরু হওয়ার পর ফ্রান্স ও জার্মানির মতো দেশের নেতারা সামরিক সহায়তা দেওয়ার বিষয়টি নিয়ে দ্বিধাশ্রিত ছিলেন। কারণ এই সব দেশ দীর্ঘদিন ধরেই ইউরোপের ‘নিরাপত্তা কাঠামো’ মানার নীতি মেনে আসছিল। এই নীতি অনুযায়ী রাশিয়া সাথে বৈরিতা নয় সহযোগিতা সম্পর্ক রাখতে হবে। এছাড়া পারমাণবিক বিশ্বে একটি তৃতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ আরম্ভ হওয়ার সম্ভাবনাও কিন্তু বাতিল করা যায় না। যুদ্ধরত দেশগুলির বেশির ভাগই পরমাণু অস্ত্রধর।

ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধ শুরুর পর থেকে এ বিষয়ে দ্বিমুখী নীতি গ্রহণ করতে দেখা যায় চীনকে, একদিকে সে শান্তির কথা বলছে, আবার অন্যদিকে রাশিয়া সমালোচনা করা থেকেও বিরত থাকছে। চীনের শীর্ষ কূটনীতিক ওয়ংই সম্প্রতি ইউরোপ সফর করেন। ইউরোপ সফরের সময় তিনি ইউক্রেনের পররাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী কে বলেছেন এই যুদ্ধ দীর্ঘ হোক বা সংঘাত আরো ছড়িয়ে পড়ুক তা তিনি চান না। কিন্তু ঠিকই তখনই রাশিয়া ও দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকার সাথে যৌথ সামরিক মহড়া চালাচ্ছিল চীন। চীনের অবস্থান নিয়ে গভীরভাবে উদ্ভিগ্ন পশ্চিম দেশগুলি। চীন রাশিয়াকে সামরিক সহায়ত দেয় কিনা তা নিয়ে ওয়াশিংটনের উদ্বেগ রয়েছে। মার্কিন পররাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী রাশিয়াকে সম্ভাব্য সামরিক সহায়তা দেওয়ার কথা নিয়ে চীনকে সতর্ক করেছেন। তবে বেইজিং যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের এই অভিযোগের শক্ত জবাব দিয়েছে এবং বলেছে আমেরিকা ও পশ্চিম ইউরোপের দেশগুলি যদি ইউক্রেনকে ক্রমাগত অস্ত্র সরবরাহ করে তবে শান্তি ফেরানো সম্ভব নয়।

রাশিয়া ইউক্রেন যুদ্ধ বিশ্ব রাজনীতি - অর্থনীতির এক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিষয়। এক বছরে পশ্চিম দুনিয়া ও ন্যাটো এক হয়েও রাশিয়াকে টলাতে পারেনি। রাশিয়া বড় ও সম্পদশালী দেশ হিসেবে হয়তো এই ক্ষতির ধাক্কা সামলাতে পারবে। শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান, যোগাযোগ, আবাসন ও মানব সম্পদের যে ক্ষতি প্রতিষ্ঠানের হয়েছে তাতে দেশটির অর্থনীতি ভয়ংকর ভাবে বিপর্যস্ত হয়ে পড়েছে। অপরদিকে ইউক্রেন একটি দুর্নীতিগ্রস্ত দেশ। সরকারের শীর্ষ পর্যায়ের বেশ কয়েকজনকে সম্প্রতি দুর্নীতি ও লুণ্ঠপাঠের

দায়ে বহিষ্কার করা হয়েছে। জেলেন্সকির স্ত্রীর নামও পানামা পেপার আছে। যুদ্ধকালীন পশ্চিম সাহায্যের একটি বড় অংশও দুর্নীতিগ্রস্ত। দুর্নীতির অভিযোগ রুশ সরকারের পুতিনের বিরুদ্ধেও আছে।

রাশিয়ার তুলনায় ইউক্রেন দুর্বল দেশ। রাশিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধ করার মতো পর্যাপ্ত শক্তি সামর্থ্য না থাকলেও আমেরিকা ও পশ্চিম ইউরোপের প্ররোচনা এবং সাহায্যে সে এখনও পর্যন্ত যুদ্ধ চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। রাশিয়া এখনো বিশ্বের প্রধান সামরিক ও পারমাণবিক ক্ষমতামণ্ডল দেশ। এই যুদ্ধের আঞ্চলিক, রাজনৈতিক, অর্থনৈতিক স্বার্থ সমীকরণের বোঝাপড়াই বলে দেয় এর ভবিষ্যৎ। এই যুদ্ধে ইউক্রেন রাশিয়ার কবল থেকে সহজে মুক্তি পাবে না।

তথ্যসূত্র

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