

“Impact of Muslim Rule on the Society and Culture of Medieval Orissa,” A brief study. (1568-1751 A.D)

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Abstract of the research paper titled impact of Muslim Rule on the society and culture of Medieval Orissa, (1568-1751): A brief study.

The Mughals, despite a short period of rule for a century only, had left permanent legacy in the socio-economic and cultural life of Orissa although their contribution in the field of polity was not lasting as they failed to give a system of polity to the state that could replace the earlier ones or resist later developments. The socio-religious and cultural process which integrated Hindus and Muslims then and thereafter, had, however, a profound and harmonious effect.

Key words-*Purdah, Varnasramadharma, Abwabs, Nazar, Nawab, Diwan, Salam, Qilla, Bartan, Attar, Atlash, Shikari, Atak, Kagaz, Zari, Rumal, Kaman, Halua, Jalebi, Chapati, Palau, Biriani, Kismis, Pesta, Badam, Angur, Anar, Qamis, Takia, Qaba, Lungi, Jama, Paijama, Rumal, Shawal, Peshkash, Patta, Sarkars, Parganas, Taluks, Mauzas*

Muslim rule over Orissa was initiated by the Afghans who under Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal occupied it in the year 1568. This event brought an end to the long Hindu rule over the state, and thereby introduced a period of political instability. Their rule lasted for a period of 24 years when in the year 1592 the Mughals occupied it during Akbar and merged it with Bengal. The Mughals ruled it, of course, for a long time till the death of

Aurangzeb in 1707. The period of Mughal rule left its imprint on almost all aspects of the life and culture of the state.

Mughal rule in Orissa lasted for about a century. During this period, Orissa experienced an administrative uniformity and a systematic government. Moreover, they gave comparatively political stability in an unstable state and introduced significant changes in the administrative system of Orissa particularly in the field of revenue administration. The earlier revenue administrative system of the Gajapati kings was thoroughly overhauled by the Mughals and their system of revenue administration was uniformly applied to the newly conquered territories. It was under the Mughals that laws were uniformly applied throughout the state which was significantly different from those of the Gajapatis and had a distinctively Islamic character. It was because of such historical developments that impact of Mughal rule in Orissa is still seen particularly in its land and revenue administration. It is interesting that the peasants of rural Orissa are still governed by land relations developed under the Mughals.

Mughal rule in Orissa opened a new chapter in aspects of social and economic life in Orissa. First, it led to a new demographic trend by allowing the Muslims to add to the existing population complex which was based on Hindu- *Varnasramadharm*. As a result, a composite Hindu-Muslim society slowly grew, and by the close of the century, Muslim faction became a distinct element in Oriya society. In the field of social life the Mughals left certain impacts. For example, the *Purdah* system of them entered Orissa.¹ The practice entered the upper segments of the Hindu society because of their fear from ruling class, or due to their desire to imitate the Muslim aristocracy. This

however, did not influence the toiling women who could not labour with veil. It is pointed out that opening of commercial centers and creation of port-towns during the Mughals encouraged prostitution as a profession which was a known practice in ancient Orissa. The rise of European settlements during this period on the coastal towns of Orissa gave more impetus to the growth of prostitution.² Thus, in a sense, position of women declined.

Spread of Islam led to the rise of a good number of Mosques, that contributed to the growth of a type of architecture in Orissa that is Islamic in feature. The *Zuma Masjid* at Balu Bazar, for example, is unique in its beauty and grandeur and is considered as the *magnum opus* of Muslim monuments in Orissa.³ Others though not so exquisite in structure and beauty, are also famous for their architectural designs. Ample state patronage was received by these Islamic monuments as a matter of policy. Besides, the Mughal painting on paper also influenced the pictorial art of medieval Orissa.⁴ It was during this period that the cult of *Satyapir* became popular in Orissa.⁵ As a result the *Qadam-i-Rasool* became a popular shrine for both the Hindus and the Muslims. It thus became a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity.⁶ Similar is the case with the *Bokhari Sahib* of Kaipadar and other Muslim shrines of the state. Moreover *Dussehra*, *Diwali*, *Rakhi*, *Muharram*, *Id* and *Satyapir* were some of the festive occasions where both the Hindus and Muslims participated freely.⁷ The popular musical show known as *Mughal Tamasha* was participated and enjoyed by all sections of the common people of both the communities.⁸ The spirit of toleration and amity between the two communities was the conspicuous feature of the social and religious life of Orissa under the Mughals. Thus, the Mughal rule left some permanent imprint on the social and cultural life of Orissa.

During the Mughal rule Orissa was broadly divided into two parts *Mughalbandi* and *Garhjats*. The area which remained under the direct administration of the Mughals was called *Mughalbandi*. The area under the native princes on the other hand, who tendered submission and paid a fixed annual *Peshkash*, was known as *Garhjats*. For the purpose of revenue administration, the Mughals divided Orissa into a number of *Sarkars*. Each *Sarkar* was divided into a number of *Parganas*. A *Pargana* consisted of a number of *Taluks*. Each *Taluk* comprised of some *Mauzas* or villages. However the Mughals undertook two major land settlements in Orissa. The first settlement was undertaken under the supervision of Raja Todar Mal. By his settlement (called *Tankha Raqmi*) on the crown lands, Todar Mal increased assessment of revenue.⁹ Towards the end of the sixteenth century Akbar's revenue minister Todar Mal surveyed the entire province and introduced the system of measurement by a standard rod of twelve spans known as the *barodastipadika*.¹⁰ The second settlement called *Jamma Kamal*, was undertaken by Murshid Quli Khan, is of Afghan origin.¹¹ Moreover, the Mughals gave the ryots or cultivators the *Patta* by which they could know the amount of rent to be collected. This system gave the peasantry occupancy right on the land. In order to increase land revenue the Mughals encouraged the extension of agriculture by selling the uncultivated lands to such persons who wanted to bring them under cultivation. The elements of Mughal revenue system has been still to be seen in the state.

The growth of trade led to the influx of bullion and its impact on the economic life of the people was deep. This brought about gradual change from barter system to monetization of economy. This change helped

flourish money lending and money – changing business and also led to the growth of merchant capital in urban economy. Besides, cash payment of revenue to the Mughal authorities was possible on the part of the people. On the other hand, flow of money subjected the peasants to great disadvantage. The peasants were bound to sell their agricultural produce at a cheap rate to get money but that meagre money did hardly fetch for him any comfort. Hindu rulers circulated various kinds of gold and silver coins in Orissa. These were, however, not inscribed coins but pieces of certain weight. Moreover, the Mughals circulated coins of different varieties and denominations, and of different metals like gold, silver and copper from the mint established at Cuttack.¹² These were standard money whose intrinsic value were equal to the face value. The lowest unit of currency was cowrie which was used for small transactions. Besides, the Mughals also introduced standard weights and measures, although slight variation could be observed between such measures introduced by one monarch or another. A *maund* associated with the name of one emperor did not go out of circulation after the death of that emperor. The *Man-i-Jahangiri* continued to be in use till the death of Aurangzeb. Similarly the *Man-i-Shah Jahan* continued to be in use till 1708.¹³ Thus, the Mughals brought a great change to the agrarian economy of Orissa by introduction of a regular currency system.

In medieval Orissa Balasore and Harishpurgarh were important places for building of ships and boats and their repair.¹⁴ The Mughals made vigorous attempts to strengthen the naval fleet for suppressing the piracy of the *Maghs* and *Feringees* on the coast of Bengal. Under their patronage the

shipping and boat building industries developed in Orissa. And it is since then that this industry has a strong role to play in the socio-economic life in Orissa.

The people of Orissa were subjected to various kinds of taxes and duties during the Mughal rule. The total annual contribution from the land revenue normally amounted to between Rs. 34,00,000 to Rs. 56,00,000,¹⁵ which constituted a major source of income of the imperial exchequer from Orissa. Further, as our records reveal, about Rs 9,00,000 per annum was collected as pilgrims tax from the people who visited Lord Jagannath of Puri. Besides the levy of land revenue and custom duties, the imperial government used to collect various *abwabs* or illegal cesses on one pretext or on another. Their illegal exactions caused enormous hardship to the *Zamindars*, chiefs, the merchants and the cultivators. Offering *nazar* was a common practice of the time. The kings received *nazar* from the *Subahdars*, and the *Subahdars* from the *Zamindars* and the *Zamindars* from the people. Succession fees to the maximum amount of Rs 10,000 were found to have been collected from the feudatory chiefs. This ultimately worsened the economic condition of the people because, the chief in his turn exacted the amount from his subjects. The traders and merchants were subjected to customs, octroi, and transit duties. They also had to offer presents, bribes, etc. to the ruling authorities in order to get certain trade privileges. They in turn raised the prices of the commodities, for which common people suffered. Thus, the imposition of fees, duties and presents ultimately fell heavily upon the peasantry of Orissa.¹⁶

During the Mughal rule vernacular Oriya literature developed. For example, Oriya poet like Kabichandra Biswanath Samantaray was honoured by Akbar for his poetic talents. Besides, many Urdu and Persian

literary works have been translated into Oriya by Muslim writers. The *Pandnama* of the Persian poet Shaikh Shadi was translated by an Oriya Muslim writer Abdul Mazid of Balasore district, under the title *Probadh Kavya* which was published in 1869. Similarly another Muslim writer Shaikh Saheb of Puri district transcribed the work *Ichhabati Haran* written by Padmanava Shrichandan of Banki. Salbeg as a Muslim, composed devotional poems in Oriya and they have become popular through generations.¹⁷ With the establishment of Mughal rule, the infiltration of Perso-Arabic words into Oriya became more prolific. In the *Madala Panji*, the temple chronicle of Lord Jagannath, we find many words of Perso-Arabic origin like *Nawab, Diwan, Salam, Faraj, Naskar, Suba, Emam, Qilla, Bartan*, etc. In the poems of the famous Oriya poet Upendra Bhanja, we find the use of words like *attar, atlash, shikari, atak, kagaz, zari, rumal, Kaman*, etc. which are unmistakably of Perso-Arabic origin.¹⁸ In the vocabulary of Oriya language *more than two thousands* Persian, Arabic, Turki and Urdu words have found their permanent place. Muslim impact is also found on the grammar and style of Oriya language. In gender, voice, proverb, adjective, exclamatory words, preposition and on the pronunciation of the Oriya language the impact of Muslim is unmistakable. The impact is also found in the codification of style of Oriya language. The *karani* style of writing in Oriya is also due to the same impact.¹⁹ Thus, in this way, Oriya vernacular language was enriched through Mughal contact.

Mughals left significant contribution towards dress and food habits of Orissa. They brought new ideas in fashion, ornaments, foods, dresses and thus practically metamorphosed the society. Food items like *halua, jalebi, chapati, palau, biriani*, which became popular in the medieval period, were

introduced by the Muslims in Orissa.²⁰ In respect of fruits, the Muslims had their contributions. Fruits like *kismis*, *pesta*, *badam*, *angur*, *anar*, etc. were brought by the Muslims to Orissa which became popular food items since then.²¹ The dresses of Muslim society, namely *qamis* or shirt, *trousers*, *coat*, *takia*, *qaba*, *lungi*, *jama*, *paijama*, *rumal*, *shawls*, etc. influenced the Hindu society.²² The dresses used by the *Palakaras* were of Mughal type.²³ Even the impact of Muslim costumes on *Rajas* and *Zamindars* of medieval Orissa seems to be significant. Ornaments for nose, *bajubandh*, *paunji*, etc. became popular as a result of contact with the Muslims.²⁴

But the interesting point is that being minority by strength, they were influencing the existing society, became themselves influenced. As a result, they soon became divided into high and low as per Hindu caste system.²⁵ The Muslims of foreign origin known as *Ashraf* claimed superior status over the Muslims of Indian origin because of their link with the foreign lands such as Arabia, Persia, Turkistan, etc. Under the Mughal emperors they became the most privileged class in the society. Besides, the Muslims in due course of time, spoke Oriya and have also adopted many Hindu customs, traditions, manners and beliefs. For example, Hindu astrology, efficacy of exercism, doctoring, healing by distribution of *Tawidh* (amulets), etc. have influenced the Muslim community.²⁶

Thus it is seen that the Mughals, despite a short period of rule for a century only, had left permanent legacy in the socio-economic and cultural life of Orissa although their contribution in the field of polity was not lasting as they failed to give a system of polity to the state that could replace

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