

SOCIO - ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF PATNAGARH UNDER THE CHAUHANS

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Abstract:

The Kingdom of Patnagarh was unique in nature because the Chauhan monarchs found their territories mostly inhabited by the aboriginal tribes. They tried to improve the social life of these people by introducing more of the Aryan elements encouraging the Brahmin and other higher caste immigrants. They also showed paternal care and patronage for the local aborigines to develop a healthy social life through their own customs and traditions. The status of women in the society was not very low. There was no purdah system and women were allowed to work with men in all spheres of social activities. There was no Sati system in this region. The festivals in the Chauhan territories were mostly connected with agriculture. The rulers paid much attention to improve irrigation facilities to the farmers. Many Small and Cottage Industries were established during Chauhans Rule for economic growth. They manufactured different kinds of Sarees which were called Bichitrapari, Saktapari, Kankanpari, Duiphulia, Panchphulia, Dasphulia, Chandankura and Baulmala etc. Due to availability of Diamond, this region is known as Hirakhand or Hiraprastha. Both internal and external trading was prevalent that time. Therefore, during Chauhans rule there was a unique development of socio- economic ambience in Patnagarh region.

Keywords: Patnagarh, Chauhans, Tribals, Social, Economic.

1. Introduction:

The Kingdom of Patnagarh was unique in nature because the Chauhan monarchs found their territories mostly inhabited by the aboriginal tribes. They tried to improve the social life of these people by introducing more of the Aryan elements encouraging the Brahmin and other higher caste immigrants. They also showed paternal care and patronage for the local aborigines to develop a healthy social life through their own customs and traditions. No doubt, a few Brahmin settlements were already there patronised by the Somavamsis, the Telugu - Chodas, the Gangas and other ruling dynasties in the past but vigorous attempts seem to have been made by the Chauhans and attracted people of higher social status from outside to come and settle permanently in their territories by offering land and other privileges. They also showed paternal care and patronage for the local aborigines to develop a healthy social life through their own customs and traditions.

2. Tribal ruling classes during Chauhans rule in Patnagarh:

The Gonds, Binjhals, Bhuyas, Kawars, Kandhas, Kisans, Kols, Kudas, Saharas, Kharias, Gonds and many other aboriginal tribes formed the bulk of the population of the Chauhan dominion. The Gonds, Binjhals and the Kandhas were once the ruling classes of this territory and they owned a number of Zamindaries under the Chauhan Rajas of Sambalpur, Patna and Sonapur. The states of Raigarh and Sarangarh were also owned by Gond Chiefs. There were two divisions of the Gonds: - the aristocratic class designated as the Raj Gonds and the plebians known as the Dhur (dust) Gonds. The Raj Gonds took sacred thread and they out did the Aryan Brahmins in their purifactory observances. Even they washed the wood before it was burnt to cook their food¹ (Malley-75). The Binjhals² (Russell and Hiralal) also were a strictly orthodox caste and they did not take food from the Brahmins³ (SDP-78). Traditions associate them with the Vindhya hills and it is believed that they came to Borasambar through Ratanpur of Chhatisgarh⁴ (SDP-76). The aristocratic Binjhals called themselves Barihas and they boasted of their Rajput origin.

3. Village Priests:

The Gonds and Binjhals served the villages as Jhankars, the village - priests and watchmen. Under the Chauhans, they became mostly Hinduised and the Hindu immigrants to this territory were also greatly influenced by their social customs. The Savaras or Saharas who were one of the earliest tribes of the district adopted many Hindu customs, although they did not accept the Brahmin priests in their religious performances. Their chief deity was Mahalakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth. They were considered the best sorcerers.

4. Social Groups others than Tribals :

The Gonds, Chamars, Ghasis, Haries, Mangans and Mehtars were the lowest and the most despised castes and even the touch of their shadows defiled a Brahmin. The Gandas were regularly employed as drummers and pipers at Hindu marriage. Many of them earned their living by weaving coarse cloth. In almost all the villages, there were Ganda Chaukidars to help the Jhankars, the principal watchmen. Among the immigrants to Western Orissa during the Chauhan rule mention may be made of the Kultas, Gaurs, Bhulias, Kustas etc. The Kultas, who came from Baud, were great cultivators and were wealthy people having large holdings, good stocks and ample savings. The Bhulias and Kustas, the two weaver castes, came from Chhatisgarh. The Gaurs took care of the cattle and served the nobles as the Narias. The Brahmins were less numerous but more advanced people and they were greatly respected in the society. They followed their traditional occupation of priesthood, officiating at various Hindu ceremonies. The Negi, village accountant, Kumbhar, the potter, Luhura, the blacksmith, Dhoba, the washerman and Bhandari (the barber), rendered important and useful service to the society as in other parts of India. So, during Chauhans rule, there was social hierarchy in the society and caste people were doing their own business separately.

5. Position of Women during Chauhans Rule and Marriage System:

The status of women in the society was not very low. There was no purdah system and women were allowed to work with men in all spheres of social activities. Marriage was considered a sacred tie by all classes of people including the aborigines. However, widow marriage, divorce and polygamy were allowed in the society. A widow was often induced to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband, if he had left no male issue to inherit the property⁵ (Ibid-79). But she was not compelled to accept the choice. The Brahmins, however, did not recognise the widow marriage in their fold. Polygamy was common in the aristocratic family. A Zamindar generally married a new wife on the day he got his power over the Zamindary to commemorate the occasion, although by that time, he might have half a dozen of wives⁶ (Ibid-78). At the time of the marriage in the Raj family, the bride used to bring with her a number of young maidens who served her husband as concubines. Prataprudra Singh Deo of Sonapur sprang a surprise on the conservative class when he refused to enter the harem, unless the concubines brought by his wife Amulyamani Devi, were banished from the Court. He was also remonstrating by his father for his refusal to marry a second wife⁷ (Majumdar: 44-45). Early marriage was uncommon in the society. The aborigines like the Gandas and Saharas and the immigrant castes like the Bhulias and Kultas performed the marriage before the girl attained puberty. Failing which, she was first married to a bow or arrow and only after that, the actual marriage was celebrated. But among the aboriginal tribes, the girl was married after puberty. She was allowed to choose her mate or her consent was sought for the marriage settled by her parents. Special facilities were given to her on festival days when she was allowed to mix with young men of her caste so as to have her selection from among them.

6. No Practice of Sati System:

Sati system was, however, not in vogue in this part of India and we find instances of large number of widows even in the Rajput ruling families of the Chauhans. The mother of Ramai Deva, the first Raja of Patnagarh, was a widow and so also was the mother of Balarama Deva, the first Raja of Sambalpur kingdom.

7. Unique Ornaments and Garments:

The women were very fond of ornaments, too much of which often marred their natural beauty. In addition to the glass and silver bracelets, they wore Bandrias and Katrias in their hands, Tada and Bahasuta on their arms, painris on the ankles and Khagla on the necks. All of these ornaments were made of silver. The two ears were covered with gold Jhalkas and Ganthias and the nose with two to three gold ornaments like the Dandi, Gunas and Natha. The hairstyle was of different types and the most common was called Khusa which was roundish in shape and was studded with a number of hair-pins, gold and silver flowers and a comb. They wore different kinds of Sarees called Bichitrapari, Saktapari, Kankanpari Duiphulia, Panchphulia, Dasphulia, Ghatidankura, Baulmala etc., each of which exhibited an artistic design of its own. At the time of daily bath, they rubbed themselves with powdered turmeric which gave the skin a light colour. The dress of a man was simple and scanty, it being consisted of only one piece of Dhوتي and sometimes a Chadar. On festival days, the wealthy people wore matha or silk garments.

8. Pastime Games and Dances:

The people, living in the Chauhan territories, had certain originality in their games and pastimes. Ganjpa among the males and Chhaka among the females were the most common indoor games. Ganjpa was played with one hundred forty four small circular cards of twelve different colours between two groups, the Rama and the Ravana each consisting of two partners. Chhaka was played by womenfolk on a specially prepared cloth where there were as many as twenty four small square blocks on each of its four sides. The most important outdoor games were the Dahi Makdi played on the branches of the trees, Gudu, Khokho, etc. Humo was played in the evening or in the bright moon by young girls, who formed two rows by joining arms and both the rows approached one another with sweet songs.

The important folk, dances of the aborigines were Karma, Dalkhai, Danda and Sua Nach. Karma was a dance festival celebrated throughout the territory on the 11th day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrava or on some auspicious day of September and October. The object of this festival is the joining, in matrimony of the two branches of the Karma tree (*Nauclea Parvifolia*) as king and queen with the belief that this union would make the session a year of plenty. Dalkhai and Sua Nach were performed by young girls, who danced and sang merrily when their male partners played at the drums. Danda Nach is an open air lyric theatre dominated by dance and usually dealt with the love of Radha and Krishna. The song ended the girls go down on their knees and bowing to the ground, respectfully salute the young men who gravely and formally return the compliment and they part⁸ (Ramsay-55).

9. Celebration of Festivals during Chauhans Rule:

The festivals in the Chauhan territories were mostly connected with agriculture. The Akshaya Tritiya ceremony on the eve of sowing, Kado Varishta before transplantation, the Nuakhai, when the new rice was available and the Puspuni soon after the harvest were celebrated with pomp by all the people of this area. Of the non-agrarian festivals, Sitala-Sasthi, the car-festival and the Dussehra festivals were very important. Sital-Sasthi was the marriage celebration in usual Hindu rites of Siva and Parvati and took place in the month of Jyestha (June). The town of Sambalpur and Barpali were the only places where it was observed every year. In almost all the villages of the Chauhan dominion, the car festival was celebrated in imitation to that of Puri in the month of Asarha. The entire second half of the month Aswina was devoted to ceremonial worship of the Devis. The worship of Samalai in Sambalpur and Sonapur and that of Patneswari in Patna were performed with pompous ceremony during this time by the Chauhan rulers.

The eighth day of the first half of the month of Aswina was a day for the mothers who observe fasting for the good of their sons. The ceremony was known as Puajuntia. A similar ceremony called Bhaijuntia was celebrated on the eighth day of the second half of the month when the young women and girls went on fasting, wishing prosperity and happiness for their brothers. Siva Ratri was another popular festival celebrated in the month of Phalguna (March) in all important Siva temples and big markets were arranged in these places on this occasion. A similar festival was held at Narsimhanath on the previous night of Baisakh Purnami every year and a large number of people visited the place from all over Orissa. Narasimhanath was regarded as a place of Pilgrimage (Papaharana Tirtha) and it was believed that a bath in the Gokund, near the temple would wash away the sin of cow slaughter.

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF PATNAGARH UNDER THE CHAUHANS:

10. Professions of Caste people:

The Chauhan rulers encouraged caste professions and trade of the merchant class. In each village, people of different castes and professions were living in compact areas distinct from one another. They were conducting business either in co-operative ways or under a market regulation, sanctioned by the authority. Arts and crafts had free scope of development and various cottage industries flourished in order to cater the need of the locality.

11. Agriculture was the Chief Occupation of the People:

Agriculture was the principal industry during the period under review. People of almost all castes had practically some connections with agriculture either as cultivator or as field-labourers. The Kultas, Aghrias and Malis had however, adopted it as their main occupation. The number of female labourers on the field was more than that of their male counter parts. Rice was their most important crop. The principal pulses grown in this country, were Biri (*Phaseolus radigtus*) Mung (*Phaseolus Mungo*), Kuluth (*Dolichus biflorus*), Masur (*Ervum Lens*) and peas. Sugarcane was widely cultivated for molasses which was an important article for trade. A kind of crude sugar known as Naba was manufactured by local people. The light sandy soil of this country was favourable for the growth of fruit trees of which mahua (*Bassia latifolia*) mango, Palm, date-palm etc were fairly common. The garden crops were melon, water-melon, maize, orange, lemon, guava etc. The favourite crops of the aboriginal races were Kado (*Paspalum Scrabiculatum*) and Gunji (*Panicum Psilopoglium*)⁹ (Sambalpur-115-1160). Turmeric was the monopoly cultivation of the Kandhas.

12. Means of Irrigation and Role of Chauhan Rulers:

Tanks were the most common means of irrigation and were found in large number in this country. They were of three kinds, viz, Kata, Munda and Bandh. Kata was an ordinary irrigation tank and was constructed by throwing a strong earthen embankment, slightly curved at either end, across a drainage line, so as to hold up an irregularly shaped sheet of water¹⁰ (Lbid-110). Munda was an embankment of smaller size across a drainage channel and 'Bandh' was a four-sided tank below a 'Kata', from which it derived its water by percolation. Large tanks known as Sagaras were excavated mostly by the rulers themselves to facilitate irrigation¹¹ (Mullick-106). Vajjala Sagara near Narasimhanatha, excavated by Vajjala Deva I (c.1410-1430 A.D.)¹² (Ibid-183). Rama Sagara and Jagannath Sagara at Sambalpur dug during the time of Ratan Singh (c.1690 AD) Chhatra Sagara at Sambalpur during the time of Chhatra Sai (c.1691-1725 A.D.) and Hira Sagara, Bhanu Sagara, BhoSagara, Rama sagar, Darpan Sagar etc at Patnagarh were very big tanks excavated by different rulers of Patna kingdom, for irrigation and bathing purposes. Apart from tanks, a large number of wells were sunk specially for gardens and sugarcane plants.

13. Development of Small and Cottage Industries during Chauhans Rule:

Among the industrial classes, the Kultas, Bhulias, Kulis and Gandas were noted as cloth-weavers. The Kulis and Gandas produced coarse cloth for the poor. But the Bhulias worked for the well-to-do and their products were of artistic design, durable texture and fast and variegated colours. They manufactured different kinds of Sarees which were called Bichitrapari, Saktapari, Kankanpari, Duiphulia, Panchphulia, Dasphulia, Chandankura, Baulmala' etc. These Sarees were generally named after the designs they contained and most of the designs were woven in a process which was known as Kama or Bandha i.e. "tie and die work". The Gandas carried on the rearing of the tusser silk worms, chiefly on the Sahaj trees (*Terminalia tomentosa*), but the weaving of the tusser cloth was monopolised by the Kultas who had earned a good deal of reputation for it¹³ (Dewar-1905). The tusser industry fast declined with the end of the Chauhan rule in Sambalpur not only for lack of royal patronage but also because of keen competition, it had to face with the silk fabrics from Ganjam. Yet as late as 1905, N.G. Mukerjee wrote that "the intrinsic merits of the Sambalpur tusser cloths are very great. In quality, the Sambalpur tusser excels Bengal tusser, and the skill of the Sambalpur spinners is greater than that of the tusser-spinners of any other district. In lustre, in

evenness of weaving, in neatness of design, the Barpali tusser of Sambalpur is superior to all others and it would be prized highly even in European markets."

The iron industry was a monopoly of the Lohars(Ironsmith) who supplied most of the iron goods, wanted by the villagers, even though; they followed indigenous and primitive method in producing them. Dr. Shortt, who visited this part in 1855 has given an interesting of the method, followed by these Lohars. He wrote; "In the process for obtaining iron from the stone, no flux is used, it is smelted by means of charcoal. The furnace stands about 4 feet in height and the width inside is foot. Three men are employed in each Furnace, two to work the bellows and one as feeder. The furnace is closed at the bottom, the fire being maintained by an artificial blast, introduced through a fire clay pipe, which is closed with clay after the introduction of the bellows whose tubes are made of common bamboos, which play into the fire-pipe. The materials consist of charcoal and ironstone; the latter is broken into pieces and put together with the charcoal, into the furnace, which is constantly being supplied from the top.

On another side, a hole is made in the ground, connected with an opening at the bottom of the furnace, through which the slag escapes and is from time to time removed, leaving the metal below"¹⁴ (Medical topography-1855). It is very likely that the same process was also followed by the Lohars in the early Chauhan period.

The brass and bell-metal industries were carried on by the Kansaris and Kharras and the chief centres of their trade were Tukura, Barpali and Reme nda in Sambalpur and Tarva in Sonepur. Gold and silver ornaments were made by Sonaris. Gold dusts as well as diamonds were collected in the rivers, Mahanadi and the Ib by the local caste of Jhoras¹⁵ (Ball-186-192). Sambalpur had long been noted for diamond mines and the Chauhan rulers did not fail to utilise this lucrative source to their benefit.

Among other industries, mention may be made of the stone carvings of the Sahansias, the bamboo works of the Betras, drums made by the Ghasias and leather saddles of the Chamars(who makes sleepers).

14. It is a home of Precious Metals like Diamond:

It is said that the first Chauhan Raja of Sambalpur, Balaram Deva (C: 1575-1600), employed the Jhoras for the collection of diamonds from the Mahanadi and assigned them the villages of Hirakud and Junani for their service¹⁶ (A. Barai - Pandulipi). Amongst the foreign travelers who visited Sambalpur and noted the findings of diamonds in the valley of the Mahanadi, mention may be made of Mustafa in 1758, T. Motte in 1766, Dr. Voysey in 1823, Surgeon P. Breton in 1825, M. Kittoe in 1838 and J.R. Ouseley in 1840¹⁷(Mustafa and Motte's account). Dr. Breton, while giving an account of the diamonds, found between 1804 and 1818, spoke of a big stone weighing 672 grains or 210.6 carats which was seized by the Marathas in 1809¹⁸ (SDG-10). In 1806, Captain Roughsedge found in Sambalpur, two pieces of diamonds of about two hundred and fifty rupees of worth¹⁹ (N.R.R-.83).

The Sahansias probably came to Sambalpur at the time of building of the Samalai temple there by Balarama Deva²⁰ (Das -28) and subsequently they erected a large number of temples and built sculptures of gods and goddesses in different parts of the kingdom. For carving small images, they used a black stone resembling marble or a green stone like Jade, but, for larger figures a fine red sand stone called 'Dalima' was preferred by them. Sasan was an important centre of bamboo works during the Chauhan rule and a large number of baskets were exported from this place. Toy-making was also a popular cottage industry in the Chauhan territories. Out of the soft Simuli wood, the carpenters used to carve a variety of animal figures like cat, horse, tiger and elephant. Four square in structure and heavier, the colourful Sambalpur toys are excellent specimens of the village carpenter's craftsmanship²¹ (Yojana- 1 964).

15. Trades – Both Internal and External:

Both internal and external trade was briskly carried on in the Chauhan dominions. Weekly market or Hat in every important village and the annual fairs at Huma and Narasimhanath were chief centres of internal trade. Merchandise was transported (from place to place by means of bullock-drawn carts. or on the beasts-of burden like the ass, bullock and horse. These goods carrying animals when passing "in groups were collectively known as Banjari.

In addition to diamond and gold, the exports of the Chauhan dominions to the neighbouring states included rice, oil seeds, hemp, hides, bones and forest products such as timber, lac and wax. The principal imports were salt, sugar, kerosene oil, wheat etc. As the goods of Chhattisgarh were exported to the province of Cuttack mainly through Sambalpur, the town developed as an important trade-centre. The best means of communication between Sambalpur and Cuttack, at that time was the river Mahanadi and an army of boatmen or Keunts were employed to transport goods on it. Different kinds of boats used by them were known as Dangas, Kuslis, Patwas and Chaps. The Dangas were merely dug outs and were generally used for passenger traffic. The patwas were long narrow boats 75 to 90 feet in length and could hold 150 to 200 maunds of grain. Kuslis were similar in build to Patwas but broader than them and smaller in length and could hold 60 to 80 maunds of grain. The Chaps were meant mainly for the conveyance of cattle and carts and were generally used in the flood time²² (SDG-162).

16. Land Routes:

The land route from Cuttack to Nagpur lay by way of the Chauhan territory and it passed through Banki, Baideswar., Padmavati, Contillo, Belpara, Barmul, Baud, Sonepur, Sarangarh, Mohra, Ratanpur, Maro, Lanji, Torora and Tharsa to Nagpur. It was bifurcated at Sarangapur, one leading to Sambalpur and the other to Sonepur²³ (Rannel:161-162). This road was followed by T. Motte in 1766 when he came to Sambalpur for trade in diamond. In 1790, Leckie followed the same route from Cuttack as far as Sonepur but from Sonepur he took up a shorter route and passed through Bank Berja Lachhinpur, Mursund, Salebhatta, Surangapur, Borasambar, Surmul, Kansebera, Khultary, Balasore, Raipur, and Ratanpur to Nagpur²⁴ (O.H.R.J. p. 3 & 4). On 10th April, 1743 when Raghuji Bhonsla heard of Aliwardi and the Peshwa advancing against him, he decamped from Katwah and then passing through Manbhum, took the road to Sambalpur which shows the existence of a road that connected Manbhum with Sambalpur and ran to Nagpur²⁵ (Sarkar-459). Another route passed through Sonepur to Bhojpur and leaving Sambalpur on the left, it ran to ChotNagpur and from that place to Amarakantak and on to Bundelkhand and Chhatarpur towards Nagpur.

This route was suggested by Mudoji Bhonsla to the Governor of Bengal when James Anderson and Captain Campbell were to go to Nagpur by way of Cuttack²⁶ (Calender-1901-33). All these roads undoubtedly served as trade routes and they promoted the trade of Chauhan kingdoms with their neighbouring states.

17. Barter System – A Common form of Transaction:

During the rule of the Chauhans, barter system was very common with the people because they were totally unknown to coins. Cowries were widely used for small business. For greater transactions, however, gold coins known as Asarpis, silver coins as Jarbees and coppers as paisas were used. An Asarpi was equivalent to 15 Jarbees or rupees and the value of a Jarbec was sixty four times that of a copper paisa. The Chauhan rupee was, however known as Cutcha rupee in other states and it was accepted only at half of its face value²⁷ (NT .12. R - 5 4).

The standard measure of seeds under the Chauhans was a ' Tambi' which was equivalent to four mans. Twenty Tambis made a Khandi and eight Khandis a Purug. The size of Tambi, however, differed from place to place and it made business complicated and speculative. The later Chauhan rulers of Sambalpur prescribed a standard Tambi, which they called Lakshmi Prasad Tambi after the goddess of wealth (Lakshmi). This Tambi could hold three and half pounds of grain²⁸ (Settlement- 16).

18. Lifestyle of People:

During the Chauhan rule, people were living with much simple comfort in patriarchal village communities. No man was rich except in grain, and no man was distressingly poor, because the food supply was cheap and abundant. Nethersole, writing as late as 1887 gives the following sketch of the economic condition of the people of this country."Under normal conditions far more rice is produced than is required for the food of the population and any one, who chooses to work hard has hitherto had little difficulty in maintaining himself and his family in relative comfort. The people of the district generally though capable of steady and sustained labour and of forming habits of frugality, are not naturally inclined thereto and I

believe this is to a great extent because the food supply has hitherto been, as a rule, so plentiful and easily procured that they have not been forced to exert themselves. It is obvious that, without previous exertion, there could be no accumulation of capital in the Garden of Eden itself²⁹ (Quoted-140). In Sambalpur, rice was sold 54 seers a rupee at the close of the Chauhan rule in 1849³⁰ (SDG-122) and the price of Til as late as 1887 was more than 20 seers³¹ (Ibid-140). This gives us an idea about the abundance of supply and the cheapness of necessaries of life in the time of the Chauhans. The British officers have admitted that this part of Orissa was a Garden of Eden and a Land of Promise when they occupied it³² (Nethersole: 1887).

19. References:

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31. Ibid. p.140.

32. Nethersole Report 1887.

