"HANDICRAFT TECHNIQUES AND ARTISANS DURING 18th CENTURY NORTHERN INDIA"

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

HISTORY

BY

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2010

ABSTRACT

One of the most debatable topics of modern studies in Indian history is that of the level which the technology, craft, economy and society of the subcontinent had achieved in their evolution by the end of pre-colonial and the beginning of colonial era. The importance of this question needs no special explanation. To find an answer means to get the keys of so many enigmas and to form a more clear understanding of India's past, present and future. This is, no doubt, a complex problem which implies the analysis of economic development, social structure, the state and its functions, ideology, ethnic identities, religions, culture, etc. All these aspects are significant: the neglect of some of them or the exaggerated attention to another may distort the whole picture. Whether a scholar agrees with the "basis-superstructure" model or not, the research into socio-economic field will be of topmost priority.

The majority of works on this subject discuss the agrarian sphere of pre-colonial Indian economy, the development of agricultural techniques, economic relations, social institutions and other sides of rural society as well as the state policies as concerned the peasants. Such an approach is fully justified by the fact that in all pre-modern societies, India being no exception, agriculture was the predominant field of economy and the occupation of the absolute majority of people. A number of Indian scholars, along with their colleagues from other countries, have made valuable contribution to the agrarian history of India.[1]

However, given the predominance of the agrarian sphere of economy, the industrial one was likewise of vital necessity. Non-agricultural production was widely spread in the countryside also, but its gradual concentration in the cities, the growth of urban sector in scope and significance was one of the major premises for socio-economic progress. The work hereby presented to the readers is supposed to discuss the evolution of urban industries in pre-modern India: the productive forces, the forms of economic organization and social institutions pertaining to the life and work of medieval craftsmen, their relations with the state and the nobility as well as their socio-psychological profile. The author has no special purpose to undertake a detailed study of rural crafts, but where necessary some features of the latter and their development vis-a-vis their urban counterparts are to be discussed. It has become common knowledge that urban industries of the Middle Ages were almost everywhere characterized by some kind of guild or corporate organization and labor division not as much within a given technological process, but more between the guilds/corporations. Productive forces developed through the centuries and centuries on the base of manual labor which

survived for quite a long period even in the modern times. Nevertheless it was the quantitative and qualitative changes in manual technologies along with the organizational and social development that facilitated the early modern leap to machine-based production. We may here bring to the readers' mind a well-known statement by Marx that "it is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs."At the same time it has to be noted that the improvement of tools and techniques is not necessarily congruent with the development of production relations, nor does (he former automatically influence the latter. Some instruments have come from remote antiquity to modernity with no major changes in shape and functions. Hence it would be wrong to study the history of production with no reference to man and to society. The history of manufactures is thus not only the record of technological changes, but the history of people involved in these activities in the concrete civilisational surroundings, as well as of social relations and institutions pertaining to the sphere of production.

As far as urban industries of medieval India are concerned, the majority of works on this matter analyze mainly economic organization, social structure, relations with commercial capital and such like aspects. Some of these publications are to be cited and commented upon in the present book. However the study and estimation of technological development and productive forces as a whole are anything but easy due to the scarcity of adequate source material. This fact has been acknowledged by nearly all scholars engaged in the research into the non-agricultural sphere of medieval economy. Nevertheless the deficiency of reliable data has not prevented some historians from categorical statements on the techniques of medieval Indian crafts as archaic, stagnant and primitive. According to some scholars, to name first Professor Irian Habib, these features are even more visible in comparison with the technological development of medieval Europe and China, viewed as the never-ending flow of improvements and progress.

This problem is of acute significance for the study of pre-colonial Indian society. It is also related to a wider question of what medieval period has given to Indian civilization. Was it a dark age of technological primitivism, feudal oppression and obscurantism or an epoch of harmony, great achievements in technological aspects and giving status to artisans?

The present study is therefore finally based on the following:

- By observation
- Use of internal records related to crafts
- Use of external records like publications of government, semi-government and other organizations like universities, NGo's and public bodies.
- Use of Historical documents ,books and gazetteers, Manuscripts etc
- Occasional Field surveys

The core of this method is something contrary to the manner in which comparisons are generally being made. People compare things and as a result arrive at the conclusion that one is different from .the other, one is more useful, advanced, beautiful, etc; than the other. But in the above-described case the result is known long before the comparison is undertaken: "after all, who conquered whom?" The West represents progressive model of development, innovations, changes, evolution and revolution, while India is (for the Middle Ages, at least) backward, stagnant and archaic, non-adaptive to technological, economic and social novelties. In some studies, as if to make the comparison more unequal, for Europe a result is taken (like the mature forms of manufactory, putting-out system, etc., that developed throughout, the centuries and passed through many transitional forms) and juxtaposed with a certain process (or some randomly selected stage of it) in India. The result of such a method is not difficult to foretell: "stagnant" or "stagnation" are the key words for everything Indian of the pre-modern (pre-colonial) times, and to spare the readers of any doubts, these definitions are included even in the title of the books.

Such an approach makes the very comparison senseless: why should we waste time on it when a result is already known? A historian may be hereby equated with a lazy but crafty schoolchild who, being unable to solve an arithmetical problem, peeps at the end of his book where he finds the right answer and then adjusts the solution to it. The knowledge of the result does not, in our opinion, necessarily imply the correct understanding of the process leading to it.

Apart from the variety of developmental models, Western societies were distinguished by different tempos and paradigms of historical evolution, A fourteenth or fifteenth century European would have been very much surprised by hearing from a modern scholar, in case such a conversation were possible, that Britain was destined to lead the world industrial development and not Italy, the great workshop and stock exchange of the Middle Ages, the place where technological innovation reached the greatest heights and first manufactories were established; he would have been likewise astounded to know the sad plight of Italy in the seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries. Similarly our present knowledge of the breakthrough made by some (only some) European countries on the eve of modernity should be no obstacle for an objective, equality-based and unprejudiced comparative study.

ESSENTIAL STEPS IN DESIGNING A RESEARCH

Social research is becoming increasingly an important activity and more importantly the interdisciplinary approach has become latest trend in reaching out to some conclusion... It is extremely important for the agency which wants to undertake any research to understand the basic research procedures. The knowledge about the basic rudiments of careful and systematic inquiry is very

essential for undertaking any research.

There are a number of steps or closely related activities involved in research. All these steps follow a prescribed sequence. However, all the steps need not follow a rigid sequence but may overlap as well. The steps in research are also very much interdependent. One step determines the nature of another. Every step of the research process is so wide that separate chapters can be written on them. However, in the present write up a very brief account of the steps is given.

Formulation of the problem

Formulation of the problem is one of the very important steps in research. We have to put a great deal of thought into the formulation of our questions if we hope to get anything out of an effort to answer them. In order to solve the problem, it has first to be carefully formulated. The more carefully the problem is formulated the more satisfactory is the solution we obtain. Before formulating a problem we have to first determine what a 'problem' is. Before considering the questions of research design the problem must be defined. The problem should be as clearly defined as it should give guidance in the construction of research design. By allowing design considerations to influence problem definition, the researcher tends to limit his choice to those problems about which objective data can be readily obtained. Hence, we find that formulation of the problem is a very essential step of research.

(i) Specifying Objectives of the Theme

The objectives of the survey must be clearly spelt out. This very important and helps in achieving and measuring the results. Both general as well as specific objectives of the survey must be clearly defined. The objectives make it clear as to why we are conducting the research and what we are trying to get out of it. Where do we look for the objectives and how do we go about formulating them? In general there are three sources to take into account before formulating objectives; these are (1) the research consumer, (2) the researcher, and (3) those that will be affected by use of the research results. All pertinent objectives are not compatible. Some conflict of interests is always to be expected. It is therefore necessary to know which objectives are the most important in order to know how to evaluate any potential solution to the problem. The objectives however should be simple and clear. They should be framed in a simple language.

(ii) Selecting an Area for exploration and study

The particular area where the survey is to be undertaken must be carefully chosen. Great care should be taken before choosing an area. Many important factors such as importance, feasibility, its use to community, organisation etc., must be taken into consideration.

(iii) Deciding the Nature and Scope of Work

Yet another essential step of research is the decision as to what is going to be the nature and scope of the survey. The decision about the type of survey will also depend upon its purpose. There are different types of studies. Broadly the surveys can be classified by (i) purpose and (ii) approach used. Surveys of foreign technology may be divided into several types according to purpose and scope and according to where and when interviews take place.

The surveys may not however, be classified according to some precise or rigid system. What is important is that they should be well designed and carefully done, whatever type they may be. It is also important that specific nature of the survey should be determined early particularly when time and resources available are limited.

(iv) Selecting Methods and Techniques

Great care is to be taken in the selection of methods and techniques of data collection. The findings of the survey will greatly depend on how scientifically methods have been selected. The methods by which data is to be collected or obtained must be devised after the problem has been formulated. Techniques are to be devised for collection of information. There are various methods of data collection namely interviewing, observation, questionnaires, projective techniques, examination of records, etc. All these methods have advantages and limitations. Selection of a particular type of method will also depend upon the type of survey for which data is to be collected.

(v) Data Collection

Data are all the relevant materials, past and present, serving as basis for study and analysis. The data must be carefully collected. Care should be taken to see that it is collected honestly and consistently. The data should be free from errors. It should be seen that the interviews are honest and the data collected is unbiased. As data is being collected it should be checked for completeness, comprehensibility and reliability. Such checking will prevent difficulty at later stages when data is being arranged. Also care should be taken to see that the timing of data collection suit the convenience of the respondent.

(vi) Analysis of Data

The collection of data however is only one step, an important step in research. The data collected is to be analyzed for meaningful interpretation. The amount of data collected may be huge and extremely varied. This has to be systematically arranged. The process of analysis includes: editing, classification and coding (placing each item in the appropriate category) and tabulating

(counting the number of items in each category) and statistical computations. In order to save time at the later stages, it is necessary that the analysis be planned in detail before actual work on it is started. A simple basic outline of analysis should be prepared in advance.

(vii) Interpretation of Data

The data analyzed is to be meaningfully interpreted. The interpretation of findings is inter-related with the analysis. Both are involved in the writing of survey report. Interpretation takes the results of analysis, makes inferences pertinent to the research questions studied, and draws conclusions about these questions. Interpretation of data should be done very carefully. Results of the survey greatly depend on this. Care should be taken to see that most of the data which is analyzed should be interpreted. It is advisable that a plan should be prepared beforehand as to the manner in which the data is to be interpreted.

(viii) Writing of the Report and reaching to conclusion

Writing of the report is the final step of research. The process of research becomes incomplete until report has been written and distributed. The report should be written in simple and meaningful language so that different consumers may not have difficulty in grasping its findings. The final report can be utilized in different ways. It can be useful for the guidance of the agency sponsoring the research in dealing with some practical problem. It may be for wider audience of people with similar problem. Lastly, it may be for the use of administrators in formulating policy. The report should be brief and precise. At the end a summary containing the essential points should be given.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The work on such theme of craft technology and the condition of artisan class during 18^{th} century northern India, have never been easy, as it required a critical analysis of enormous amount of source materials needed for the purpose.

The craft and its related technology could not keep pace with the passage of the time and so it becomes difficult for any scholar to keep track and get all information related to technology and craft. It is also difficult to keep the track of incorporation of those 'ideas and techniques', which have been changing with the passage of time. The work also become very difficult when a comparative study is done between the indigenous technology and the technology coming from abroad and judging which technology came from outside. The analysis is required in order to differentiate between the purely indigenous and purely foreign technology and techniques. The study taken in