ABSTRACT

The Patna-Gaya region was one of the crucial places of the British rule during 19th century. This was the period of several changes. These changes had adverse impact over the existing economic and social structure of the region concerned.

Patna and Gaya comprised two contiguous districts located in the centre of the modern Bihar province. Patna is situated on the bank of river Ganges and Gaya is situated on the bank of river Naranjana (modern Phalgu). Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. Ever since the region was sucked into colonial system, impact was felt by various sectors of economy and different sections of the society. The introduction of Permanent Settlement introduced noticeable changes in the existing rural economy and social structure.

We have made an attempt to study some aspects of region in order to know about the situation obtaining during the crucial phase of the 19th century when the sway of capital and started impacting adversely the Patna-Gaya region.

The first chapter dealt with some aspects of the population of the region. Amiya Kumar Bagchi had attempted on exhaustive study. A.K.
Bagchi had tried to determine the proportions of industrial population to total population in the districts of Bihar surveyed by Buchanan Hmailton. Amiya Kumar Bagchi’s starting discovery was that the implicit total growth of the 50-year period 1822-72 was around 60 per cent on a base of 37.5 million. While the growth of 49 year period between 1872-1921 was about 40 per cent (in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa). This had coincided de-urbanisation and de-industrialization. Bagchi’s major finding is that ‘industrial’ segment of population had registered a decline form about 18.6 per cent of the total to about 8.5 per cent in the course of 90 years following 1809. Our discussion deals with the question of increasing occupation of rural space at the expense of urban space. Therefore contraction of urban space occupation strengthens the hypothesis of de-urbanisation and ruralization of the Patna-Gaya region.

In the second chapter we have discussed agriculture, its various aspects of production and distribution. We have discussed the level of relations and agrarian relations during our period.

Similarly peasants also had a hierarchy of relation. Moneylenders became an important feature of the village society by their role in peasant production and its distribution. In the peasant production, prices of commodities, market and rent were the deciding factors. Prices of the
commodities were quiet low in this region. This was mainly due to absence of market in the close vicinity for agricultural commodities. We find that there was an effort by the zamindars or rural bureaucracy to extract produce rent instead of money rent.

For small cultivators and agricultural labourers were at the lowest ebb of the society. By the end of the period, their condition had taken a turn for the worst. This section constituted forty per cent of the population facing acute shortage. Kamia or bonded labour was an important feature of the region. During agricultural season there was a great demand for labourers. Therefore, the peasants adopted an ingenious debt mechanism to ensure the supply of labour. They provided money in advance to the kamia and after accepting this money as debt, he was bound to serve under his 'maik'.

The third chapter deals with trade and commerce in the Patna-Gaya region. It was one of the famous centres of cotton textile industry and its trade. Saltpeter manufacture and its decline during the 19th century is also discussed. Surprisingly saltpeter attracted the required attention of our predecessor’s studies of the region.

Patna served as an important entrepot of the region. Its geographical location gave it an edge over others. Commodities from the hinterland
arrived at Patna and then got redistributed mainly through its waterways. But coming of railways changed the complexion of trade and commerce. Last chapter deals with gender and labour. This is an area ignored by previous scholars. Their contribution in economic life was not insignificant and hence justifies any attempt to understand various dimensions of the problem.