CHAPTER -6

THE POSITION AND THE CONDITION OF ARTISAN CLASS DURING 18TH CENTURY NORTHERN INDIA
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The condition of artisan class after the downfall of the Mughal Empire drastically changed with passage of time (18th century northern India) the artisan class found change in its patronage social system. As with downfall of the Mughal authority there emerged a number of provincials smaller kingdom which provided some relief to these workers and artisans who were previously employed in different positions in Mughal services. Thus it would be a great interest in studying the changing fortune of the artisan class in context to northern India.

The study of this nature would reveal various aspects of their working conditions, wages and their social status. In this study attempt have been made to analyze the aspect of the artisan class taking cognizance from the European context with comparative study in this context. Because of drastic changes in the European technological aspects, as a result of the dawn of Industrial Revolution in England in so rapidly changing societies, Europe was experiencing. In comparison to that it would provide a lead to understanding the problem in European context also.

Position of artisan during Mughal Era:

In context to the late Mughal Era it was the excessive price of the raw material as well as the burden of miscellaneous cesses levied on the artisan on their production which drove them into the clutches of the middle men and financiers, thus the artisan would not overcome the periodical crisis of scarcity and famine, which left them altogether destitute, as is abundantly testified by the Surat and Madras factories with reference to the weaving communities. On the other hand since the
market of the principal handicrafts and artistic industries were chiefly confined to the limited class of the Mughal aristocracy there was a little scope of the expansion for the class of the crafts. Besides the Mughal nobility often preferred foreign products, however the shining example of Akbar directing certain ranks of novelty to wear particular kinds of indigenous fabric and Fatehpur-sikri and Lahore. Akbar’s patronage was directly responsible for the expansiveness of the silk carpet and shawl weaving industries in different parts of India and amelioration of the lot of work in the field. We read in the Ain-i-Akbari through the attention of emperor Akbar, a variety of new manufacturers are established in the country though the cloth fabricated in Persia, Europe and China are cheap and plenty. The skill of manufacturers has increased with their number. “Now shawls are worn by people of all degrees”, these were formerly high priced and used to come from Kashmir generally for the nobility. “In Lahore there are upward of a thousand manufacturers of this community”. From Akbarnama we also learn that Akbar sent intelligent artisans to Goa with a view to examine and bring to the Europeans knowledge of the various productions of arts and skill to be found at that time. The artisan who had gone to there to acquire knowledge exhibited their skill and received applause”, when they return to the court.

**Economic Position of Artisan during Mughals:**

The information on the economic position of the artisan is extremely scanty. Very few incidental details are available from the memoirs of Babur, Ain-i-Akbari and some observation of a few foreign travelers but no connected account in contemporary chronicles is available to us. Babur provides details in his memoirs to the unnumbered and endless workmen of various kinds, infinite number of artisan in different crafts and industries as one of the advantages of
Hindustan². Abul Fazl speaks skilled masters and craftsman having settled in the country. He also mentions the wages of skilled labors of different categories³ except such isolated bits of information. There is no 16th c account of the condition of industrial labour. But in the absence of any revolution the condition in the 17th century might be considered to be equally applicable to the 16th century as well. Broadly speaking the industrial worker or artisan may be divided in two categories. Corresponding to the forms of industrial organization the free artisan working on their own. Under the artisan system and the regimented worker working to order under the Karkhana system. Under the artisan system the artisan possessing little resources work at home on their own initiative from the raw materials to the working state. At times they work to order of foreign merchant or the brokers with advances of money but could not always deliver finished goods. Even in Delhi no private workshop of skilled independent artisan existed. Most artisans sought to improve their lot by joining the state Karkhanas.

Under the state Karkhana system the artisan seemed to exchange freedom for security. The work was under strict supervision as the laborer from morning to evening is described in account of Pelsaert and Bernier. The latter writes artisans report every morning to their respective karkhanas where they remain employed in the whole day and in the evening return to their homes⁴. The account of Hawkins and Pelsaert and Delaet to the effect that work done by a single European that there was “excessive specialization”. The absence of private factories by artisans in the 17th century was not due to want of genius among Indian as according to Bernier, there were ingenious man in every part of the Indies⁵ in fact there were serious disadvantage operating against the artisan, notwithstanding the combination of such a dismal array of adverse condition. The standard of excellence attend by
individual artisan was very high. Bernier approvingly writes numerous instances of handsome pieces of workshop made by person, devoid of tool and who can scarcely be set to have received instructions from a master. Sometimes they initiate so to perfectly articles of European manufacturing that the difference between the original and copy can hardly be discerned. Among other things Indian make excellent muskets and following pieces and such beautiful gold ornaments that it may be doubted if the exquisite workmanship of those articles can be exceeded by any European goldsmith. Bernier says “I have often admired the beauty, softness and delicacy of their paintings and miniatures and was particularly struck exploits of Akbar painted on a shield by a celebrated artist, who is said to have been seven years in completing the picture”. Bernier writes I thought it a wonderful performance. The Indian painters are chiefly deficient in just proportions and in the expression of the fact but these defect would soon be corrected if they possessed good masters and were instructed in the rules of art. It may reasonably be held that the standard would have been much higher under more encouraging circumstances or that the high standard would have been limited not to a few individuals but become general.

Infact these were some favorable conditions for the artisans. Of these the first was royal encouragement. We find from Ain that Akbar directed some ranks of nobles to wear some special kinds of local fabric. He also persuaded the carpet weavers of Persia to settle in Agra, Fatehpur-sikri and Lahore. Such patronage helped the development of silk carpet and shawl industries in the country and tended to improve the condition of worker in such crafts. Abu Fazl writes, “Through the attention of his majesty a variety of manufacturer established in the country and clothes fabricated in Persia. Europe and China have become
cheap and plenty. The skill of manufacturers has increased with their number."

It is also reported that Kashmiri shawls have (used by nobles) become cheaper and come to be work by people of all degree. Lahore alone had more than 1000 manufacturers of shawls. As we get in Ain emperor Akbar had intelligent artisans deputed to go to 'examine and bring to the emperor's knowledge these returned and were applauded for their skill'7.

The second favorable factor was the encouragement craft by some powerful or influential noble. But these were not such as to new trailing the bad effects of the adverse ones. Bernier remarks that the degradation of the artistic handicrafts was retarded by (i) the influence of imperial workshop and by (ii) the protection of new powerful patrons which resulted in (iii) the payment of higher wages tends also to preserve the arts. Bernier continues, 'I say rather high wages for it should not be inferred from the goodness of the manufacturers, that the workmen is held in esteem or arrive at a stage of independence. Nothing but sheer necessity or blows from a cudgel keep him employed, he never become rich and he feel it no trifle matter if he has the means of satisfying cravings of hunger and covering his body with the coarsest garments. If money be gained it does not in any measures go into his pocket but only serves to increase the wealth of the merchants, who in his turn is not a little perplexed how to guard against some act of outrage and extortion on the part of his superiors'.

The imperial workshops helped the diffuse talent and raise the cultural level of the country. All the skilled trained artisans or apprentices, finishing their technical education (e.g. painters and musicians) were not absorbed their. The surplus was employed by the nobles and the rajhas and the local potentates.

But by and large the condition of artisans, craftsman and industrial worker and portrayed contemporary sources was bad during the 16th & 17th century was substantially (at least as bad) as about 1923. He worked mainly for the benefit of merchant, purchaser and
middleman, depended on them for current expenses and had no serve left to face of a period of stress of famine. His economic position was unsatisfactory. The only prospect of improvement lying in the influence of a rich and powerful patron but only a few individual could suspect such enlightened patronage, the vast majority of workers’ life on the bare margin of subsistence. So it may be concluded according that the lot of the labour was not happy and hardly conducive to the true economic development of the country. The karkhana manufacturing maintained by the great Mughal at important places for supplying their needs or those of official aristocracy seem to have lingered till the middle of 18th century. What Abul Fazl and Bernier have said about these is faintly echoed by Foster. The native princes and chief description of various states the retainer of numerous dependents, afforded a constant employment to vast number of indigenous manufacturer, who supplied their master with gold and silver stuff, curiously flowered plain muslins and diversity and beautiful skill and other article of Asiatic luxury. Though certain technological innovation seems to have been incorporated, the loom of Indian weavers remained simple and could be manufactured locally.

Village self-sufficiency and artisans:

It should also be noted that in the 16th – 18th century not only village community artisan but also groups of artisans in town and country who did not belong to the village community, worked on customer’s order—a typically feudal practice. This form of economic organization of the handicrafts should not be confused with another when the artisan worked to fulfill the orders of merchants, work on consumer order was widespread in spinning, weaving and bleaching, printing and dying on cloth. In building iron making and other
industries, it is often difficult to judge from the source material whether the work was carried on solely on customer’s orders. For it was nearly always interlocked with craftsman’s activities of small scale commodity producer. Nevertheless source material of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century reveal some instance of artisan working to fulfill consumer’s demand.

The artisan constituted organic elements of Indian society had greater fluctuation in socio-economic condition and social status. Their position kept on changing with the passage of time from passing of Empire to other. Their fortune fluctuated with the passing of the Empire from Mughal to the British. The Indian society experienced the great transformation and with that both their material gain as well as their skill faced challenges with the Mughal loss of patronage. Loosing that artisan had to look from different local and regional power centers for the continuation. Despite such great changing number of urban centers thus maintained to better position for those artisans who worked previously under the patronage by Mughal. But with the emergence of industrialization of Europe particularly England and coming of textiles and other industries various urban centre of India greatly suffered. So much so that artisan had abandoned their skill and worked as it faced stiff competition and some time persecution from the British authority. The cotton and other industries had desertion and migration by the artisans either to take different jobs and returned to take part in agricultural work. Though the artisans of rural areas did not find themselves much affected as they were not very much part and partial of the village self sufficient economy more particularly the carpenter, the black smith, the potter and other quite remained intact with their old profession. Thus they also continued because villages in northern India continued with their old barter system and the wages of artisans
certainly depended upon the harvest, the good crop. The rural areas in the situation of crops failure the artisan has to suffer for quite a long but as the season passed, their position automatically becoming better. Though European innovations to metal tools entering India started affecting the carpenters as those objects which were made of wood being replaced by iron implements for example iron cane cursing press laid the carpenter to abandon the making wood cane cursing press. Though this phenomenon occurred only late 19th C and same example could cited for dying (rangrej) as the fortune also greatly suffered with the introduction of analyne dyers (synthetic) British in India in 1870 and so much so by 1890 Indian dyers disappointed at used and thus the fortune of rangrej also suffered. In relation to center cloth production we also find not only the old centre Murshidabad, Decca that had suffered artisan faced challenges but it was clothe production centre, Lucknow, Banaras, Mau, Mubarakpur(Azamgarh)and other centre find great fluctuation. To cite one example, the weaver of Lucknow had been winning impact English goods with finance. William report which he write Lucknow are one of the fast living cities and seeking livelihood in service and the same case he fined the Jamdani the figure Muslim weaving of Tanda other place Faizabad districts were also seriously thrashed.

The crafts guild system of India continued in changed scenario also and we find important guilds like brass smith, carpenter, weaver, cloth dyers and other and with passage of time powerful element social stability of the artisan.
FORMS AND TECHNIQUES OF PRODUCTION AND ARTISANS 18th CENTURY:

The process of separation of craft from agriculture and the town from country was intensified particularly through out the 17th and 18th century. This process led to the rapid growth of weavers’ settlement and also to the increase in the number of weaver among the urban population. There were weavers in practically all Indian towns commercial and industrial centers. They are the numerous artisan commodity producers.

In the second half of the 18th century the English East India Company punished weaver who failed their obligation for example weaver who did not live worker and could not return the advances, they had received from the company were prohibited from weaving clothes for bazar sales. The weaver organizations were sometimes headed by merchants. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of 19th century in Maharashtra the urban weavers were divided into special scheme for payment of taxes.

The artisans occupied an important place in the lower strata of society. They may be divided into two categories skilled and unskilled. The skilled are handsomely placed in the royal karkhanas of the nobles according to Bernier they had a miserable life and were quite often victims of operation of their master. It seems that the life of artisan in rural areas was not happy. The village community artisans were called watandars (Balutedar and Alutedar), hakdar of inamdars. The balutedar generally included the carpenter (sutar); blacksmith (lohar); potter (kumhar); tanner(chamar); watchman(mahir); ect. Among alutedar there was the goldsmith or silver smith potdar, sometimes he was one of the (walutedar) the water carrier(koli), musicians and others. The number of such functionaries was different in
different parts of the subcontinents and reach. In the caste hierarchy, the social position of all the balutedars was lower than the average farmer of village. In the Punjab, the village community artisan were called kamini (from the Persian—small or significant) for the village. Economic life of the carpenter (sutar in Maharashtra and Gujarat warahi in Hindustan; tarkan in Punjab) held the central place among the community of artisans. The goldsmith and the astrologer were among the rich village elide but receive less to balutedar the humble tanner and woodcutter.

The village artisans enjoy separate status on the basis of their professional skills. The element of unity was written through their occupational guilds which was great social significance. The potter supplied village community all kind of eastern priests. Instead of cash payments he received his share in harvest from his customer. These potter, barber and washerman held important position in the rural social life.

The village community was a group of person with different skills and enjoyed enough of freedom to pursue their vocation. They could freely mix among themselves except with tanner and sweepers.

A feudal structure of the society, in varying degrees of development, seems to have been prevailing in the various states of the Indian subcontinent in the 16th–18th centuries. Their economies were based mainly on feudal land ownership, which was characterized by a specific form of the exploitation of the peasant and artisan also of the merchants.

On the other hand this involved the progressive break up of the old village community structure, growing property in equality among the members of the village communities, the deprivation of the large part (sometime the majority) of them of their land lording right, the
increasing feudalization of the village community elite and the spread of commodity money relations to the countryside. The village community structure was increasingly subordinated to the invests of the feudal lords, while the exploitation of the peasants was intensified. Also, private feudal lord's ownership was gaining strength.

Various primary sources and the voluminous literature on India describe in detail the feudal form of the economic structure of the handicrafts in practically all the principal areas of the subcontinent in the 17th and 18th centuries. We have in mind the various kinds of handicrafts, where these had not yet separated from agriculture. At that time certain handicrafts, such as spinning, weaving oil pressing, sugar manufacturing, etc. were practiced. As a sideline in the peasant's households, which for the most part were still in the stage of natural Self sufficient economy and the proceeds obtained were used to provide solely for the peasant family. Moreover, hereditary professional artisan (blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, tanner, etc) were maintained collectively by the village community, which allocated to them certain share, rigidly fixed by tradition of the peasants' crops in kind and sometimes also a small plot of land in return the artisan supplied the member of their community with their products.

Although the investments of European trading companies and their activities did play a considerable part in the expansion of the market after handicraft goods, it was overwhelmingly dominated in 17th and the first half of the 18th century by Indian and other artisan merchants.

Indian merchants had amassed enormous wealth. The local production of the trade in handicraft tools and farm implements (looms and spare parts, plough share, etc.) forged head. The peasants increased the production of goods for the market. Merchant's capital strengthened
its grip on the handicrafts. The number of merchants and artisans grew in town and country.

By far the most important industry of the economy, viz., weaving was subjected to a variety of registration in the 17th and 18th centuries. A loom tax was general. There was also a road tax on cotton. Weavers were also sometimes compelled to by grain at fix rates considerably above market price. In some areas there was also a house tax or again a duty on stamping clothe before it could be exposed for sale. The weaver were altogether economically dependant upon merchant and moneylender who supplied them with raw materials and advance them subsistence money as long as this money was not repaid they were under the grips of intermediaries. The same economic dependence persists today but in the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th century. The dependence amounted to virtual slavery. For over a century the European merchant preferred to employ contractor called dadany merchants who made contract with weavers and gave them advances of money for obtaining the finished clothes. Such contractors could be distained by the English East India Company, if necessary. These Indian contractors were entirely under the thumb of the European merchant because without the intervention of the latter the wholesale market would close for them. Thus the Indian merchants had to reduce their profit while contracting in order to secure the custom of the European companies and this meant reduction of the prices of clothes and weavers earnings. Gradually the Indian merchant found it to their interest to become the salaried servants of the companies, gumastha, instead of independent traders participating in the risk of business with the weaving population. The gumastha, however, in the new industrial organization became more apprehensive then the merchant, and having distributed the fund of the company among the weavers often speculated.
on their own account, and sold of clothes to other traders by the middle of the 18th century the English East India Company give up the contract system and appointed a large number of gunastha who advance money to the weavers, obtaining from them signed chits and exercising a monopolistic control over them so that the weaver were not permitted to work for others. On the other hand, the weaver could not obtain a just price for their clothes.

THE MUGHAL GOVERNMENT AND Nawab:

Under the later Mughals and particularly under the subedari of Nawab of Bengal, the weaver manufactured their goods freely and without oppression. As it was reported by Bolts "then a common practice for reputable families of the tancy, or the weaver's craft to employ their own capitals in manufacturing goods", which they sold freely on their own account. But the effect of coercion on the weaving communities was even more for reaching". He describes the harmful effect of monopoly thus; "with every species of monopoly, every kind of operation manufacturers, of all denomination through out the whole country has daily increased in so much that weavers, for daring to sale their goods and 'dalal(middlemen)' and pykars(agents), for having contributed to or connived at such sales, have by the company’s agents been frequently seized and imprisoned, confined in irons, fined considerable sum of money, flogged and deprived, in the most ignominious manner of what they seem most valuable their crafts weather the detailed of the oppression were or not, the economic result was a wholesale abandonment of the occupations by the weavers, and the decline of weaving in Bengal and parts of northern India. Bolts though dismissed in Fort William obtained justice in a British court. His
account though contains elements of exaggeration, is backed by long practical experience and should not be dismissed as untrustworthy.

Until the middle of the 18th century, India could maintain her industrial supremacy due to the skill and hard work of her handicraftsmen and to a series of inventions in crafts and industries which got the best out of manual labour. As a matter of fact, India, up till the end of the 18th century, supplied the whole civilized world with her cotton goods and other items of handicraftsmen.

We should like to stress here that the artisans were apprised not only by the local feudal authorities. In the 17th and 18th century a steadily increasing role was played in the feudal apprised by representatives of European notably of English, merchants capital. One of the forms of the participation of European in the feudal exploitation of the urban and partly the rural population was the purchase by them from local feudal rural right to collect taxes.

The process of urbanization was seriously shaken by the 18th century chaos as was the general economy of the region. The trade came to a standstill, artisan had to flee from the affected towns, civilian service personnel sought service in vain and imperial urban administration gradually disappeared. Under the circumstances the urban citizen was left with three alternatives, migration to the towns lying east of the Ganges, enlistment in the armed forces of any of the chieftains enrolling levies or also to turn towards the villages. Perhaps the number of those migrations to villages was considerable as while, the urban output of manufactured goods in the western region had apparently declined. The period is marked with no scarcity of agricultural commodities. It is also likely that not all the urban artisans after reaching the village gave up their crafts, though now much less profitable. They might have preferred continuing it even after the
change of place. This feature would, to a certain extent, explain why since about the later part of the 18th century Indian crafts have generally been regarded more as a rural rather than urban phenomenon. With such migrations there was considerable transformation of the rural as well as urban settings. While most of the migrants returned to their ancestral land they became low paid artisans but continued to do their profession despite severe losses they incurred. The urban centers of high artistic and skilled handicraftsmen were deserted due to the atrocities of the British officials and their agents. The towns like Murshidabad, Dacca, Surat and several such places where once there was thriving indigenous industries, became fully deserted and so much so that area became forest like patch of land.

Thus to sum up, we find that the best efforts of the artisans during the 18th century were directed to adjust themselves to the changing condition and carry on the old tradition of working in the towns on the established pattern. In fact they have succeeded to the extent of maintaining some of the earlier manufacturers alive and even introducing others on the large scale is never placed. Nevertheless, there was a losing battle. Obviously the main trend during this period owing to the political shift from peace to anarchy was more towards the ruralisation of whatever industries remained rather their continuation in the urban centers.

In the meantime, village craftsmen or craftsmen from other towns setting in the town would produce commodities needed for general urban consumption. After the lapse of some time, if there still was a running supply of raw materials from the countryside and other facilities of work. The local output would grow discouraging their input, and as time passed, account for self sufficiency. Further on in point of time, provided other conditions remain the same, the urban artisan though
constant practice and continual incentive to work tended to acquire
greater skill in his craft either in the volume or variety of his products. In
either case, he would develop a market outside his home town.

The urban artisan's position in the town was a vital as that of the
cultivator in his village. As a village without cultivator can be only
temporary habitation, a town benefit of the artisan would be structure
without a pillar. The artisan served as the productive base of the urban
life, his products constituted one of the chief sources though the town
could eventually acquire independent status. That also decided the
standard of lifestyle and consumer habits of the urban class, more the
better product they buy or acquire from the artisans more that would
show their status in the society. So the prevalence of the type of artisans
and their products was the denominator of the class and status of the
society that they inhabited.
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