

PINJARA COMMUNITY AND THEIR INVISIBLE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF GULBARGA

Abstract

In the present paper, an endeavour has been made to give a new historical perspective to the old pinjara (cotton carder) community occupation in the Gulbarga district. It deals with the subaltern school of history, such as the history of all those who are marginalized, voiceless, oppressed, and without an 'agency' due to their caste, race, occupation, class, age, color, gender, etc., are subalterns. Similarly, along with the adherence of the old occupational Pinjara community from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial Period in the present context, it is one of the most neglected and marginalized minorities community(groups) in the Gulbarga district. Here focus is on primary data analysis of the particular region Gulbarga, and after that, for their conducive progress and change. An attempt has also been made to bring into the limelight unexplored old occupation of the Pinjara community through new historical narratives from below in search for fresh evidence by interpreting historical data and personal observation by one-to-one interaction in Gulbarga district, thereby providing a unique insight into the present scenario of cotton-carding community.

Keywords: Cotton Carders (pinjara), Gulbarga, occupation, subaltern school, Industrialization, Sanskritization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, cotton has been an essential and primary occupation of the Pinjara community in the southern state of Karnataka at Gulbarga district. The history of cotton in the southern zone of the Indian subcontinent started when people started covering their bodies either with the hides of animals or with the bark of various trees. For example, we have a story of Adam and Eve who became naked when they consumed the forbidden fruit offered by Satan and tried to cover their body first by hand, then with leaves, and finally with barks¹. (Assam add more)

II. PINJARA'S OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY DURING THE ANCIENT PERIOD HISTORY

Ancient literary sources like Harihara, Bilhana, and Arthashastra (although they did not mention the exact name pinjara) gives evidence of a similar instrument called dhunaki, a wooden bow string, being used for batting, ginning, cleaning, and separating seeds, giving final texture to cotton². (Schlingloff, D., 1974). From the above facts, one could analyse and justify the existence of the Dhunia community; since then, they had a sense of occupational identity based on their skill. They were called by the upper aristocracy and even by the local raja and were employed and allotted for particular work; for example, The Nawab of Arcot in the 18th century used this pinjara from Andhra Pradesh.³ (Misra, S.C., 1964). Besides, they try to maintain keep alive their community and preserved their cultural heritage based on belief, dignity, and labour. They work very hard weaving, ginning, under the heat sun and also in thrilled winter. These people didn't belong to the elite section. Consequently, therefore, their history has been neglected by early historians and lately by nationalist and modern scholars; hence, there are very few written sources about this particular community. Nevertheless, with the class consciousness, they tried to survive out with great difficulties. This class consciousness among the cotton carders community helped them develop hierarchies by adopting new skills, education, and livelihood. They imitate higher caste life style through Sanskritization method⁴.

The word pinjara has derived its name from the term pinjala meaning cotton carder bows. William C. Crooks says that if the people of this community belong to Mohammadan and a pedant speaker are called 'Naddaf. The word Naddaf derived from an Arabic word meaning "separator" (also called cotton-dressers or carders)⁵). Similarly, in the Telugu regional language of Andhra Pradesh, the word Dudekula derives from Dude, meaning cotton, and kurta, meaning cleaning. Hence, the people associated with the cotton cleaning occupation are called by the regional name Dudekula in Andhra Pradesh, the word is cotton cleaners who made quilts and mattresses in the state. They are a Mohammedan caste of

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(D.Schlingloff, Journal of the Economic and social history of the Orient, vol.17, Mar 1974, brill publication Jstore, pg-06

³ (Misra, s.c.1964, the Muslim community in Gujrat: preliminary studies in history and their social organization, Delhi Asia publication, p.152 And see encyclopedia of world Muslim; tribe, caste, community by N.K Singh, Delhi global vision publishing vol.1, p.932)

⁴. (Abstract)

⁵ (Russel, R.S, And Hiralal.1916.The Tribes and castes of the central provinces of India. London: MacMillan and Company, reprint 1975.Delhi; Cosmo publication, vol.11 p.70)

cotton cleaners, rope, and tape makers, recorded by Thurston(1909)⁶. He also quoted that the people of Dudekula are said to be converted from Hinduism to Islam. Thus, the people of the Mansoori community are also known as Dudekula in Andhra Pradesh by the narration(conversation) that the members of Dudekula are the descendants of those Hindus who got converted to Islam by the Muslim Sufi Saint, Bava Faqrudin. He was the king of Seistan in Persia before becoming a Sufi saint, Tabri Alam Pasha, after entering the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Bava Faqrudin had some miracle power when he embraced the holy order of Sufism. He reached Penukonda's place and started the practices of Sufism near the important Hindu temple of Gangamma in Tamil Nadu. Where the idea of starting Sufism practice near the temple engaged the Hindus, it is no need to go into the history of this pattern. Still, the fact remains that after seeing the miracle power of Bava Faqrudin, the king of Tamil Nadu was impressed and provided the land to him for the mosque at the place of the temple. With this, it is the story that many Hindus embraced Islam. Some people are now to be the Dudekula (cotton-cleaner). Thurston stated, "The people Dudekula are considered the progeny of Muslim soldiers and the local women." Rahim supported this statement, who says that there were Muslim settlements in south India before the advent of Islamic rule in India. Because the Arab traders visited India for trading, but later on, they settled after marrying the local women. Thus, it is believed that the Dudekulas are Muslim and also said to be the progeny of this in the area.**

Besides that, the Mansoor pinjara also trace their ancestry to Sufi saint Khawaja Mansoor al-hajj from Bagadad in Afghanistan. He was an Arabic-speaking mystics theologian and the grandson of a Gabr as a descendant of Abu Ayyub, the companion of Prophet Mohammad. Crook says that along with Muslim invaders, Mansoor al-Hllaj came to India and lived with people of dhunia(cotton-carder) who belong to a Sunni sect of Islam. Though the community member follows Islamic principles, most customs, rituals, and practices are similar to Hindu traditions of lower social hierarchy. Later on, it was clear that some Hindus, under the influence of Khawaja-Al-Hajjaj, converted and adopted the same occupation of cotton-carding, primarily Muslims. Based on their field, they were spread in different regions by names such as dhunia, Bahia, pinjara, Gaddafi, Panchu Lotti, dudekula, etc. Besides this, the Muslims had adopted the customs of spinning the yarn, and the production of cotton has a long history; for example, the first evidence was found around 6000 B.C years ago, and further archaeology exploration revealed that it was also one of the cultivated verities; to be domesticated in the Indian subcontinent who adopted unique characteristic of cotton production. But how and wherefrom they adopted this skill is a question to be solved by researchers in eastern UP and the Bhojpuri region of Bihar, known as Dhunia or dhyana, with an etymological root in the Sanskrit word "Dhu", which means to agitate. In the Mithila region of Bihar, they are called Naddafs. The term Gaddafi is Arabic, which means someone who separators.** Similarly, in Rajasthan, Gujrat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, they are known by different names. But traditionally, they all are associated with the occupation of cotton-carders.

Furthermore, like any other region, Gulbarga is also one of the emerging developing cities with newly urbanized setting up new universities and hospitals; along with that pinjara community also started educating children with an emphasis on imitating modern lifestyle; therefore, we see teachers, doctors' engineers, lawyers, civil servant, and clerk after acquiring

⁶ (Thurston, E. 1909. The Castes and Tribes of Southern India . Madars: Govt Printing Press, reprint, 1975, cosmo Publication vol.111, p.195 And see Madaras, Census Report, 1901.

education. Gulbarga is also called the stone city because of its rich monuments remains and has preserved its local tradition of agriculture and non-agriculture remains. However, non-agriculture remains the most crucial textile clothing weaving industry at Gulbarga.

III. MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF HISTORIOGRAPHY ON COTTON CARDING COMMUNITY AND THEIR OCCUPATIONAL FACTS

The earlier literary references to the cotton carder's bow come from the Persian text Miftah-ul-Fuzal are as follows: -

1. The device for ginning, using roller and board. (The Mughal artisans never attempted it).
2. The bow-string for carding, along with mallet (one search it in vain in Mughal school, or for that matter, in other schools of art in the 16th -17th centuries)
3. But the most exciting sketch is that of a spinning wheel carrying the usual spindle. The handle fixed upright to the axis of the contraption must be a crank handle. At any rate, this is not the proper place to discuss this aspect: to date, the stand held so far is that while a half-crank-handle might have been present in the spinning wheel during the Muslim times, if not the Delhi sultanate, full crank-handle came to be employed in the 18th century. However, it must be stated that a historian has to go along with facts available to him at a particular point in time. This device has been drawn better in a copy of Baburnama in the national museum, New Delhi.

Irfan Habib writes that the instrument of cotton carders was introduced into India at the time of the Muslim invasion. In the Islamic world, the presence of the bow during the 11th century was firmly found in the verses of the Persian poet Asiruddin Akhsikati. It is also said that there was no evidence to trace the cotton-carder bow in India before the Muslim invasion. Thus, it may be assumed that the people of this community came to India with invaders as Mohammedan cotton carders. During the medieval Period, the Nizam government of Hyderabad issued a license to two industries of Bangalore in 1883 to establish cotton mills in Gulbarga under the name of Mehboob shahi kalburgi Mills Company Limited in Madras, and it started functioning in 1886 in Gulbarga. It has been revealed from the inscription that in the ancient and medieval periods, there existed many local industries and commercial establishments. It can be illustrated from the record that this establishment has developed significantly since the Period of Rastrakutas** at Gulbarga. Describing the people of Muslim Pinjara, Ethoven (1922) states that they were converted from Hindu Pinjaris by Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor of India. Ibbetson (1916) also says that injera is a cotton carder, often called by Pumba in Punjab. While making the ethnographic notes on injera/Punjabi in southern India, Thurston (1909) states that the people belonging to the Pinjara category are an exogamous sept of Devanga and are a synonym of Dudekula. It is also recorded as Laddaf and Nurbash.

After winning over the Mughal territories, the British turned their attention and planned to annex an autonomous regional princely state apart from Awadh, Arcot, Mysore, and Hyderabad. Mysore reserved special mention because Haider Ali belonged to the Pinjara community and was born to ordinary parents. Starting his career as a junior officer, he took advantage of disunity among the Wodeyar dynasty, brought all the military power under his power, and emerged as an independent ruler due to the constant threat from the English.

Battle with the English continued after him by his son Tipu Sultan, who died fighting and, finally, under Lord Wellesley. The governor-general of that corresponding region had issued a Subsidiary treaty with his puppet king of the Wodeyar dynasty**.

IV. ADVENT OF BRITISH AND HANDICRAFT DURING MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

With the advent of British rule, the situation changed drastically; indigenous industries like textiles mills, those who were associated with artesian, handicrafts and weavers were ruined in crises.⁷ Before the British period there was a large concentration of the Pinjara community, consisted the largest group among the minorities Muslims in the Karnataka district of Gulbarga, Dharwad, bidar, etc.⁸ These communities mainly were engaged manual laborers with hands and legs, sometimes whole families, including children also. What is unique to mention is that injera women were in large numbers and had influenced society at both social as well as economic levels, but there was a significant demise or jolt in their life when their sole domestic income shifted to capitalization, privatization, and mechanization; free trade and Deindustrialization had affected the employment of weaver and spinners, i.e., 1st threw them jobless and then shut down their local home market and then national market, people started buying cheaper machine-made goods instead of hand made costly goods. Hence the local artesian weaves had no alternative but to crowd into agriculture; it was in this Period that the British ruined India's age-old self-sufficient-economy and transferred it to a private economy, i.e., the producer of cash crop raw material cotton and also a market for its finished goods.¹

All this reduced India to a state of poverty; as reflected in the large-scale famines in Bijapur and its comprising region of Karnataka since 1876-78, its driest zone, and it was the victim of famines with an unprecedented level of the toll of life⁹. Meanwhile, the suicide of Pinjara women also took place, but the modern historian did not record such an event. Hence, we could analyse it with a subaltern perspective to establish an autonomous domain of subaltern historiography. It becomes a highly arduous task as it is difficult to locate sources about the subaltern in South Asian societies (especially lower-rank events like pajama stories) as the Western notion of record keeping never existed here. No record belonged to these people.

If there were some materials available, they were fragmentary and episodic. So, they attempt to find some sources and materials from popular, private, and local authorities. They took oral tradition as historical severe material. They also tried to analyse the dominant records and read them against the grain and between the lines. In this context, subaltern studies, the eleventh volume of *Community, Gender, and Violence*, addresses a new range of issues related to community, gender, and violence. The twelfth volume, *Muslims Dalits and the Fabrication of History* (2005), directly deals with the problems of the minority community in the subcontinent. It shows how the dominant historians of India have been constructed and how it deals with the Muslim and Dalit subjects. Before this, his first volume of subaltern studies had focused on peasant and mass uprisings and rebellions and tried to

⁷ Meena Menon and Uzamma, *A Frayed History The Journey of Cotton in India*, oxford university press, 2017, pg-25

⁸ Present census

⁹ Satyana B.N (ed). *Mysore state Ggette*

prove the existence of an autonomous domain of subaltern subjectivity. In support of minorities like Pinjara and other many essays in the volume like Shahid Amin's article "Representing the Musalman: Then and Now, Now and Then ", M.T Ansari's article "Refiguring the Fanatic: Malabar 1836-1922", Milind Wakankar's "The Anomaly of Kabir: Caste and Canonicity in Indian Modernity" etc. dealt with the Muslim and minority issue with proper material grounding and theoretical rigor.

Similarly, Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in support of the native community to rejuvenate their old occupation with a call for the survival of Khadi clothing, for example, the Non-cooperation and Quit India movement. The nationalist leaders also started supporting indigenous workers through various laws and upliftment policies in homemade items, such as by propagating Charkha and spinning, weaving, handloom, etc.

V. PRESENT SCENARIO AT GULBARGA DISTRICT

According to the census report 2009-2019 of Karnataka, the textile mill function in the district has enabled Gulbarga to find a unique place in the history of the industrial map of the state; there are a few household industries mainly engaged in handloom, weaving which provides job to thousands of workers at Gulbarga. Moreover, banking support began in 1917 when a central cooperative bank was established in Gulbarga. However, to record the present scenario of pinjara and its cotton production, it had sifted to Bt cotton production significantly from seed cotton yieldⁱⁱ, however, it becomes imperative to note that India preserves the second largest important grower of cotton producing at present world cotton scenario; after Maharashtra, Karnataka is 5th largest state in producing cotton where especial mentioned reserved the region Dharwad, Haver, Gadag, Gulbarga, etc. Injera can be found in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

In India, they live in the following district Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, etc.; in Karnataka, they speak Urdu, and in other places, they have a dozen different languages depending on their location. The Pinjara speak primarily Bhojpuri, Nepali, Maithili and Urdu. Although they are well over 90% Muslim, the injera can be found to keep Hindu festivals, even making vows to Hindu gods. The injera are not vegetarian though they do not eat pork. The Hindu Pinjara association has urged the state government to ensure that its community member was facing problems under the taluk as, in some cases, their caste name was mentioned as Muslim or Sunni. Therefore, the govt should issue in honor of caste certificates under category 1 of the other backward class list.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, to undertake the narrative of banjara history is a very scares and challenging task due to its pioneering nature; nevertheless, in total, with the above observations and critical analysis of facts, the subaltern school of history has helped well to depict such familiar people story, what is called as history from below, the injera is a backward low-level community.

Gulbarga mainly comprises Muslim pinjaras. But what's being necessary to highlight in this paper is that despite having such unique skills, which not only separate them from others but also helped them to earn their own identity in society since ancient times, i.e., cotton carding and weaving, Even American cotton carders imitated Indian bow instrument and produce alike same machine for separating cotton from its seeds. Therefore, it's imperative to bring to notice the current historian unexplored, such unwritten history, which had contributed a lot in shaping Indian history without being noticed invisibly; in the name of traditional heritage, social hierarchy, and the economy by fulfilling making cotton stuff, and then by trade and commerce. At the same time, through their conventional cotton skill carding and weaving, they had also contributed to empowering women in the domestic and professional business markets; hence injera, with the knowledge of their skill and handwork, placed worth mentioning.

ⁱ A.K. Bagchi, Deindustrialization of Gangetic Bihar 1809-1901; in Essays in Honour of Prof. Sushobhan Sarkar, (ed). Barun De, 1974, pp.499-520

ⁱⁱ Decades of Bt cotton experience in Karnataka: 2002 to 2012 Report by GM-free Karnataka Movement