



ORDINARY LIFE OF PEOPLE'S REFLECTED IN EUROPEAN TRAVELERS ACCOUNTS DURING THE 17TH CENTURY

Abdul Munim,
Post-Doctoral Fellow,
Department of History,
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

The European travelers' accounts are important source of history as they reflect evidence on varying facts of the society. The European traveler's, who visited India during 17th century, have left impressive account dealing with social and cultural life in India. The present paper aims at presenting the details on the ordinary life of the Indian people as reflected in the European traveler's account of the 17th century, mainly Sir Thomas Roe(1615-1690), Francisco Pelsaert (1620-1626), Pietra Della Valla (1623-1625), Peter Mundy (1628-1634), J.B.Tavernier (1631-1668), Niccola Mannucci (1653-1708), Francois Bernier (1656-1634), Jean De Thevenot (1657), and G.F. Geneti Careri (1695).

A study of social life of the common people under the great Mughals was long felt in our historical studies.

The European sources form an inseparament of historical material supporting the edifice of Indian society during medieval period. The European travelers': merchants, priests, missionaries etc. who visited India during the 17th century, recorded the contemporary events. Study of social life of common peoples in medieval India without European traveler's sources would have shady and obscure.

The impression of the European travelers, regarding the social conditions providing in India is not a happy one. The life of an ordinary man, in general happened to be hard and difficult and they lived and labored under grinding poverty.

The dress of the common people different almost radically from that of the aristocracy. The common man or a cultivator or an unskilled labor lived half naked and had only a piece of cloth to cover their private parts¹, called *langota orlungi*. The people of high strata used breeches² (tight

¹.Tavernier, J.B.: Travel in India, trn. By V.Ball, London 1942, P 197.



trousers) of cotton cloth, an ordinary shirt. The *qaba* or coat made of a variety of stuffs was usually long and they reached to the ankles³. Indian dress, through the age, has been determined chiefly by the climatic conditions. In the winter season, they wore over their shirt an Area luck or just an corps quilted with cotton and pinked,⁴ *shawls*, too, were wrapped around the shoulder during cold season⁵. the turban was commonly used in India⁶. It was called *Pagri*. Foster writes that the Indian people are rude (uncivilized), and their most part of the body go naked⁷. Stocking (shoes) were not used by any section of the people. Bernier writes, "Heat is so great in Hindustan that no one, not even the king, wears stockings"⁸.

Women's dresses were less varied than those of men. Thevenot writes that the "Mughal women, who would distinguished themselves from other, the clothed almost like the men, however, the sleeves of their smocks, as those of the other Indian women, reach not below the elbow, ordinary smocks of Indian women reach down to the middle, waste coat of satin or cloth, which they wear over in". again writes that "From waist downwards they wrap themselves up, in a piece of cloth⁹ or stuff that covers them up to the feet like a petticoat; and that cloth cut in such a manner, they make one end of it reach up to their head behind their back"¹⁰.

Another dress was '*lahnga*' or Ghaghara *choli* or *angiya*, and an *orhni* or *duppatta*. The Ghaghara was popular among the Muslim. The Muslim ladies in fact were distinguished mainly by their *shalwar* (breeches) and shirt of half-length sleeves¹¹.

The masses of peasant women in village did not observe purdah. Della Vella also tells us about the absence of purdah among Hindu women¹². They simply drew the lapel of *sari* over their

².Thevenot and Careri:Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, ed by S.N. Sen,New Delhi, 1949 , p 163

³.Ibid pp 50-51

⁴. Ibid,p53.

⁵. Ibid,p.53.

⁶.ibid,p.53

⁷.Foster,W: (ed.)Early Travels in India (1583-1619), London,1921. p 153.

⁸. Della Vella ,P.;The Travels of Pietra Della Vella in India , trn. By G. Havers and Ed. By Edward Grey, vol 2, haklyut society. London 1921. p44.

⁹Thevenot and Careri; op. cit. p 53

¹⁰Ibid p 53

¹¹Ibid p 53.

¹²Della Vella ,vol.I P46.



face whenever they met a stranger. This was the *ghoonghat*. We find that Muslim women observed the purdah.

Thevenot, further observes that in some part of India women moved naked: Their breast remained uncovered. That had only a piece of liner to cover to their bodies up to thighs only¹³. It was thin muslin¹⁴.

It is evident from the account of foreign travelers that ornaments were the very joy of women's hearts¹⁵. Ordinary women put on rings on their toes, and moved barefoot¹⁶ and adorned themselves with a variety of ornaments of cheap metals: bronzes, copper and brass etc. *kundal* was often worn in ears. Women had used different forms of ears rings¹⁷, wore a ring on nose, too, was in practice¹⁸. The women used among our ornaments the cups, rings and *churis*, or bracelets, small circle.

Manucci say that the Indian women, in general, had a habit of scenting their hands and feet with a certain earth, which they called *Mehndi*, which colours the hands and feet red¹⁹.

The dwelling (houses) of the common people were generally built of mud with thatched roof with very little of furniture inside²⁰. However, in Cambay, the houses were roofed with covering of tiles²¹ and in Nedar, Houses were thatched, had only one story²². In Kashmir, the houses were built of wood²³.

¹³J.B., Tavernier, op.cit. p.223. Petra Della Vella, op.cit. p.45

¹⁴Ibid 53

¹⁵Storia do Mogor voll.III p 40.

¹⁶Thevenot and Careri 53

¹⁷Tavernier, J.B., op cit. p 223.

¹⁸Ibid, Peter Mundy : Travel of Peter Mundy in Indian ,Europe and Asia (1608-1667), ed.By R.C.Temple, vol.II, Hak. Society. London 1914. P 171-172.

¹⁹Peter Munday: pp 171-172

²⁰Pietra Della Vella : The Travels of Pietra Della Vella in India , trn. By G. Havers and Ed. By Edward Grey, vol 2, Hakluyt society. London 1921.p 67. , Bernier Francois: Travels in Mughal Empire (1656-1668 AD.), trn. By Archibald Costable, revised by V.A. Smith, Westminster, 1891, P61.

²¹Petra Della Vella op. cit. , p 67.

²²Tavernier, op cit., PP. 50-51.

²³Thevenot and Careri, op. cit., P. 82.



Thevenot and Carari have made a similar observation on Ahmadabad and Brahampura; Ahmadabad, houses were low and made of mud and bamboo, and street narrow, crooked, and full of dirt²⁴. Thevenot described that houses were built with mud mixed with cow dung²⁵. The houses, writes Pelsaert, were built of mud with thatched roofs. There used to be little furniture or belongings in them, except some earthenware pots to hold water and for cooking and two beds, one for the man and the other for his wife²⁶.

Tavernier writes that the *Banjaras*, dwell in tents²⁷ because they travelled palace through the country.

Furniture's of their houses were very little or none, except some earthen wares, pots to hold water and cooking etc.²⁸

European travelers described about the *sarai*'s, were mainly built on highway, Sort of *sarais* were founded all palaces.²⁹

There festival and ceremonies etc. observed these days, included Holi, Dewali, Nouroz³⁰. Writes in following words about the celebration of Holi "At that time temples are filled with people, who came to pray and make hopes etc.³¹".

Life of the women was miserable since widow could not remarry, and were burned on the Pyre (*sata*) of there. The Sati system is known to be is very ancient, and several travelers have noticed this practices viz. Tavernier, Peter Munday, Pelseart Francisco, Petra Della Vallaetc.. Hewrites that the women burned herself alive with the body of her dead husband³².

²⁴Ibid p 164.

²⁵Ibid p 163.

²⁶Pelseart ,F. ,op.cit.,P.62

²⁷Tavernier, J.B., op. cit. P.34.

²⁸Bernier, F., op. cit. P.61,; Tavernier op.cit, P.60.

²⁹Peter Munday ,op.cit.P 159 ;Mannucci, Niccola : Storia Do Mogor (1653-1708) , 4 vol. Trn. By William Irvin, London, 1907.P 115.

³⁰. Ibid, P.159

³¹.Thevenot and Careri, op. cit. P. 217.

³²Petera DellaVella,op.cit.,P83



Thevenot, too, observed that, a woman was not allowed to marry again, and was burnt alive on pyre of her dead husband. All it so happened in the presence of her relatives, friends and priests etc.³³. That, too, amends beatings of drums, singing and dancing etc.

Women's were professional, too, and dancing as a profession. Peter Mundy has observed "*Lahriharikanees (harkani) kenchanees (kanchani) and doomini (domni) who played singing in feast, and used different manners of musick*"³⁴. Peter mundy also noticed women called bhatyaran "*Meternies or Beteannea are certain women all sares, that looked the little rooms there and dress the servant's meats accommodating them with cloth [khat, bed] etc*".³⁵. Child marriage was common. Thevenot and Tavernier recorded that the marriage of boys and girls at very young age i.e. 7 or 8 years was prevalent³⁶.

The main mode of conveyance for the lower class was bullock carts³⁷ or ponies and in some parts of the country camel carts were available. Terry said the inferior sort of people ride on oxen, horses, mules, camels or dromedaries, the women like the men else in slight coaches with two wheels³⁸. Various types of wheeled conveyance were use besides those in which male carrier and runners carried their masters and clients, horse, elephants, palanquins³⁹. The people of town or several villages assemble and travel together in company. The poor, who came from a far by foot.⁴⁰

The purpose of the paper to critically analyses the information provided by the European sources to highlight the various aspect of Indian society during the 17th century.

Some of travelers left on short journal and some have given a full description and informative work. They supply ample and corroborative evidence of political, social people, based on their personal experience. Their knowledge of the country was superficial and they were not fully aware of the geography of India. Sometimes depend upon local gossips and talks without testing the accuracy

³³Thevenot and Careri, op.cit.,P.211

³⁴Perter Mundy; op.cit.,P. 216

³⁵Ibid, P. 159

³⁶ThevenotandCareri: P.117; Tavernier, op.cit. Vol.II, P.196.

³⁷Peter Munday, op.cit. ,P. 89.

³⁸E. Terry, P. 46.

³⁹Thevenot and Carari, op.cit, P.246.

⁴⁰Tavernier,J.B. ,op.cit. , P. 190.



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of the events. Moreover, they sometime became prejudiced with the foreign land. It often happened that one information passed from one traveler to other and so on and theses gained accuracy.