

Perceptions of Poverty in Mughal India

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Master of Philosophy

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation
entitled "Perceptions of Poverty In Mughal India" submitted
by ANUMITA KAPUR, in partial fulfilment of the Degree of
Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) in Jawaharlal Nehru
University, has not been previously submitted for any other
degree of this or any other University. To the best of our
knowledge this is an original work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed
before the examiners for evaluation.

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Anumita Kapur
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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a phenomenon as much measurable in absolute terms, as variously perceived according to ones' social and cultural perspective. While realities of poverty in its absolute state are clear, undisputed for-example in the starvations, migrations, impoverishment etc. in the eventuality of natural calamities like famines, wars, plagues etc. Beyond that poverty has different shades and becomes relative. Yet even in the absolute state, perceptions come into play as the attitude towards them reflect an attitude towards poverty as well foexample whether the ruling class, the affluent react sensitively or insensitively to it. Moreover concrete measures or policies towards the alleviation of poverty arise from the nature of ones' perception of it.

Though works like those of historians like Moreland,¹ Irfan Habib² exist which have dealt with the question of poverty as a fact of life in those times, none has dealt with its perceptions which is relative. There are European studies like 'The Poor In The Middle Ages'³ which bring out important aspects, but to the best of my knowledge there is a lack of a comprehensive study of

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1. W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India : A Historical Essay with Appendices, Delhi, Second Edition, June, 1968.
 2. Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707), New Delhi, 1963.
 3. Michel Mollat, The Poor In The Middle Ages, Arther Gold Mammer, tr., New Haven and London, 1878.

Poverty in Medieval India alongwith perceptions of it.

We face the problem of sources when comparing to those available in Europe forexample. As such we don't have Hospital Archives , Church records etc. which could prove very useful. Nonetheless we have the Mughal Chronicles, Mughal Court Paintings, Bhakti literature of our period of study, Foreign Travellers' Accounts (of ones who visited Mughal India) which are the primary sources used for this study. Folklore has been used not as an empirical fact, but, as a reflector of the value system and wherein see continuum in the value system Bhakti Literature to folklore; therein find it useful. These have been supplemented by a look at some secondary sources though not necessarily on poverty but containing useful information. Works like 'Natural Calamities And The Great Mughals' by C.M. Agrawal have been looked at and found informative but difference lies in the fact that they are not studies specifically on perceptions of poverty in the period.

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1. C.M. Agrawal, Natural Calamities And The Great Mughal, Patna, First Edition : 1983 which looks at Mughal emperors as being sympathetic to the famine-struck, aiding them and also points to the inadequacy of aid due to various factors, attimes corruption prevalent in such times. Significant is the fact that it is a study of natural calamities in Mughal times, its impact and measure-s adopted to fight them which though useful is not specifically a study of perceptions of poverty in Mughal India.

The perceptions that have been looked at in this connection are that of the Ruling class, of the Foreign Travellers, of the Bhakti Saints. One could argue that each set of perceptions would have their biases, rights and Wrongs. But since my attempt is not to arrive at the truth of how rich or how poor people in Mughal times really were, therefore this fact is an asset to us. This is because the fact that various people look at poverty in various ways is a significant perception of poverty too.

The significance of a study on 'Perceptions of Poverty In Mughal India' also lies in the fact that this way we are looking at the thought-process of those times, reflecting also the idioms then. Significantly no study of poverty or any other can be complete only by looking at statistics and facts, but, also the thought behind the actions, perceptions of various things.

My attempt in this study is to look at what constitutes poverty and what are the various ways of looking at it. The perceptions reflect their attitudes towards aspects like Charity, Stratification in society, natural calamities, categories of poor etc.

The Ruling class reflect a patronizing attitude towards the poor via their preoccupation with Charity; aiding the ones impoverished by natural calamities etc. At the same time they reflect stratification in society (which leads to the divisions into affluent and the poor) as something very natural (stratification in society of those

times has been recognised by the other perceptions discussed as well). They also reflect it to be unquestionable with a submissiveness expected from the lower rungs. Depictions in Mughal Court Paintings also reflect a patronizing note that is extended to foreexample craftsmen, servants. Silences generally of the ruling class towards the poor's life, silences on the ruling classes' attitude towards life beyond the court generally is a significant perception too. They refer to poor generally to the extent of being at the receiving ends, not as independent entities independent of Ruling Classes' omissions and commissions (attitudes) towards them.

Travellers' Accounts have however given a graphic description of the miseries and poverty and the hopelessness of the poor. Their information is often quite a contrast from that of the Ruling Class which is generally so patronizing (towards the poor).

The Bhakti Saints, often from among the poor themselves live generally on an idealistic plane and provide , spiritual compensation for poverty, talking in terms of resignation to fate (also reflected in folklore), recognise stratification in society and simultaneously glorify and resent poverty.

Acetics' or fakirs are unquestioned poor as far as the Ruling Class, Travellers' Accounts, Bhakti Saints are concerned. They all reflect them to be objects of reverence and describe their self physical torture, austerities, life of self-denials and extreme poverty.

Attitudes towards charity are significant too as charity legitimises poverty. Charity is something which all three perceive positively, but, the motives behind them as reflected exhibit the difference in perceptions too.

As far as treatment of categories of poor is concerned, while Travellers' Accounts quite clearly earmark peasants, artisans, slaves, halalkhors/mentals, servants as poor alongwith additional information that they give on social, psychological categories of poverty which not necessarily was related to the economic station of ones' life.

The Bhakti Saints ideologically treat those as lowly who are not involved in true peity, nevertheless they reflect what is low, poor according to society (along with society's attitude towards them) which was in terms of treating castes of shudras, weavers, cobblers, dyers etc. as low too. In any case the Bhakti saints also recognise stratification and gradation in society. Their remedy is spiritual compensation that they provide to the poor, not challenging the existing setup concretely therefore.

The Ruling Class does not earmark categories beyond fakirs, beggars, indirectly slaves also (who were disinherited and socially cut off according to them) as poor. Though we have stray references like those of Khafi Khan who refer to for example devastated *raiyat*. The Ruling class reflect poor as a general category, as ones'

who received charity from them, aid from them.

A very significant aspect is that even the absence of a comment on poor, poverty underlies a perception, attitude towards it and is related to the social ideology. As such even casual remarks regarding poverty are no less significant.

As an M.Phil dissertation, this is purely an exploratory and tentative exercise, further limited by the scarcity of resources of time and data. I do hope, however, that as a preliminary step towards a later in-depth, and multifaceted analysis of the problem of poverty in medieval India, it will prove a worth-while endeavour.

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CHAPTER - II

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY IN MUGHAL INDIA : RULING CLASS

I

Mughal state was a powerful one with enormous resources at the disposal of the ruling class. As such their perceptions of poverty in Mughal India is significant as their effect on poverty arose from their perception of it.

A major source for analyzing our subject of study (of the ruling class) are the long series of Mughal Chronicles which were written by court historians. Since the number of such chronicles is extremely large, I have used only the following as a kind of sample survey : The Ain I-Akbari (Vol I-III) ¹ , Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh (Vol I & II) ² , Tuzuk -I-Jahangiri ³ , The Shah Jahan Nama⁴ , Aurangzeb In Muntakhab- Al Lubab.⁵

1. Abu'L Fazl Allami, The Ain I Akbari, vol-I, H; Blochmam tr., Calcutta, 1977.
Abul Fazl Allami, The Ain I Akbari, Vol. II, Col.H.S. Jarrett, tr. corrected and further annotated by Sir J.N. Sarkar, Third Edition, Calcutta, 1978.
Abu'L Fazl Allami, The Ain I Akbari, Vol III, Col. H.S. Jarrett, tr., Revised IInd Edition corrected and further annotated by Sir J.N. Sarkar, Calcutta, 1978.
2. Abdu-L- Qadir Badauni, Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh, Vol.I, George S.A. Ranking, tr. & ed., Reprinted, Patna, 1973.
Abdu-L- Qadir Badauni, Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh, Vol.II, W.H. Lowe, tr. & ed., Patna, 1973.
3. Jahangir, Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri, Alexander Rogers, tr., Henry Beveridge, ed., Delhi, Reprinted 1989.
4. Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama, Begley (WE) & Desai (ZA), tr., New Delhi, 1990.
5. Anees Jahan Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-Al Lubab, Bombay, 1977.

Stratification and gradation in society which led to the division between rich and poor too is brought out not only in the chronicles, but, also in the court paintings. Desire of the ruling class for maintenance of status-quo is made clear when forexample in the Ain-I-Akbari (as discussed below), the carrying on of the work, duties of the station, class one belonged to is recommended.

Significantly, poverty is not concretely condemned, nor is it really landed except in the case of exceptions and fakirs who were looked upto in their existence of poverty, for the adoption of a poverty-ridden life was a matter of deliberate choice made by them; thus they lent dignity to poverty.

A pervading consciousness to help the needy is seen in the chronicles. There were numerous occasions wherein the emperor, especially¹ resorted to charity and established welfare schemes for the poor like free eating houses. Charity is looked² upto and is glorified and it is undertaken also by the nobility (besides the emperor).

Silences are also a very significant perception since they underlie the attitude of the ruling class. Silences except for stray references on the way of the life of the poor are significant. The general lack of the ruling classes' perception on this aspect (beyond the charity that the poor received from the ruling class.) seems to be not a totally unconscious attempt. Beggars, fakirs, attirnes devastated raiyyats, slaves are mentioned, but, what is generally not given to us is the perception on the way of conducting the day to day life of the poor. This,

however is accounted for, in depth especially by the Travellers' Accounts and also by Bhakti-literature. One reason seems to lie in the fact that society was being looked at top downwards and so these histories in the shape of chronicles are not histories of, or concerned with the poor, but, are rather of the ruling class. They refer to the poor generally only to the extent that the poor are the ones at the receiving end of the ruling classes' charity, of their oppressions (forexample as mentioned by Khafi Khan) etc. which has been discussed below.

II

The stratification and gradation in society that is stressed by the ruling class who seem all out to maintain it is a significant perception when we look at the ruling classes' perceptions of poverty in Mughal India.

Abu'L Fazl in, Ain I-Akbari, divides people of the world into four classes⁶, as well as men into

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6. Abul Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, Vol.I, p.4, "The people of the world may be divided into four classes :-
- (1) Warriors, who in the political body have the nature of fire.....
 - (2) Artificers and merchants, who hold the place of air.
 - (3) The learned forexample the philosopher, the physician, the arithmetician, the astronomer etc. who resemble water.....
 - (4) Husbands-men and labourers, who may be compared to earth."

four ranks ⁷ and in both, the last category i.e. in the former being of husband^s-men and labourers and in the latter being of servants, occupy the position of earth where as the others^{6&7} resemble fire, wind, water respectively. The supposedly depressed, poor as such have been given a telling attribute which shows a clearly perception of the ruling class.

Clearly reflected is the desire for the maintenance of the divisions as they existed in society by glorifying the work of husband^s-men and labourers i.e., "By their exertions, the staple of life is brought to perfection and strength and happiness flow from their work"⁸ stressed is the obligation of the king to put each of these in its proper place.⁹

Also significant is the reference to some beliefs ("which is a system of knowledge of an amazing and extraordinary character, in which the learned of Hindustan concur without dissential opinion."¹⁰) wherein it is

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7. Ibid, p.4, "And as the grand political body maintains its equilibrium by the above four ranks of men, so does royalty receive its final tint from a similar four fold division.
 (1) The nobles of state (resembling fire).....
 (2) The assistants of victory (...resemblig wind)....
 (3) The companions of the king (resemble water)
 (4) The servants who at court perform the duties about the king.....
8. Ibid, p.4.
9. Same as 8.
10. Abul Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, Vol III, p.235.



قوله اسماؤف بزکا دیوا به برابانی نوز در روز ولادت پسر پادشاه حضرت سید الشهدا علیه السلام و این جشن

PLATE 1. - BIRTH OF PRINCE SALIM. (FESTIVITIES THEREIN)

78 (د. ۱۸۹۶) ۱۱۲
 ۱۱۲
 ۱۱۲

سجده کیستو گمان خیال مردها دوست

ایام از طاعتا در اول روز و احوال

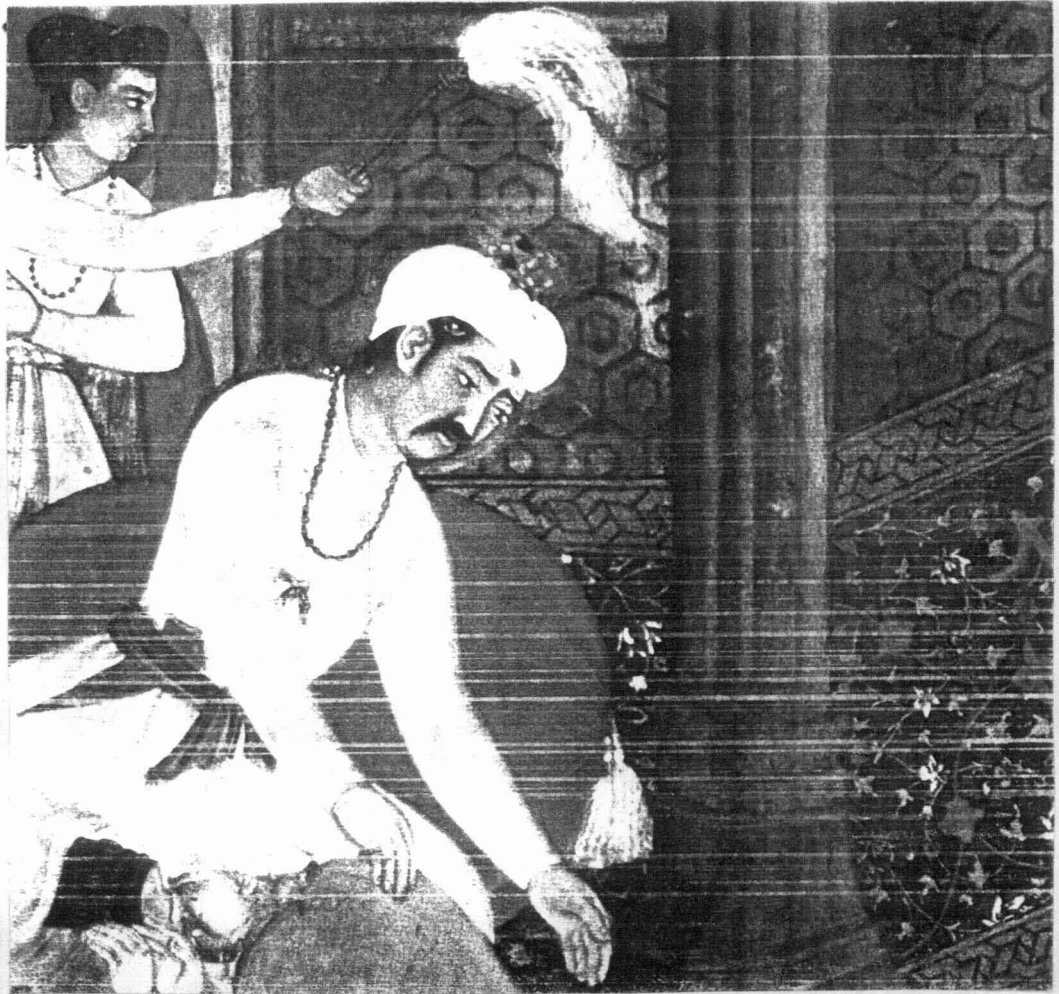


PLATE 2.- COURT SCENE FROM AKBAR NAMA: DETAIL

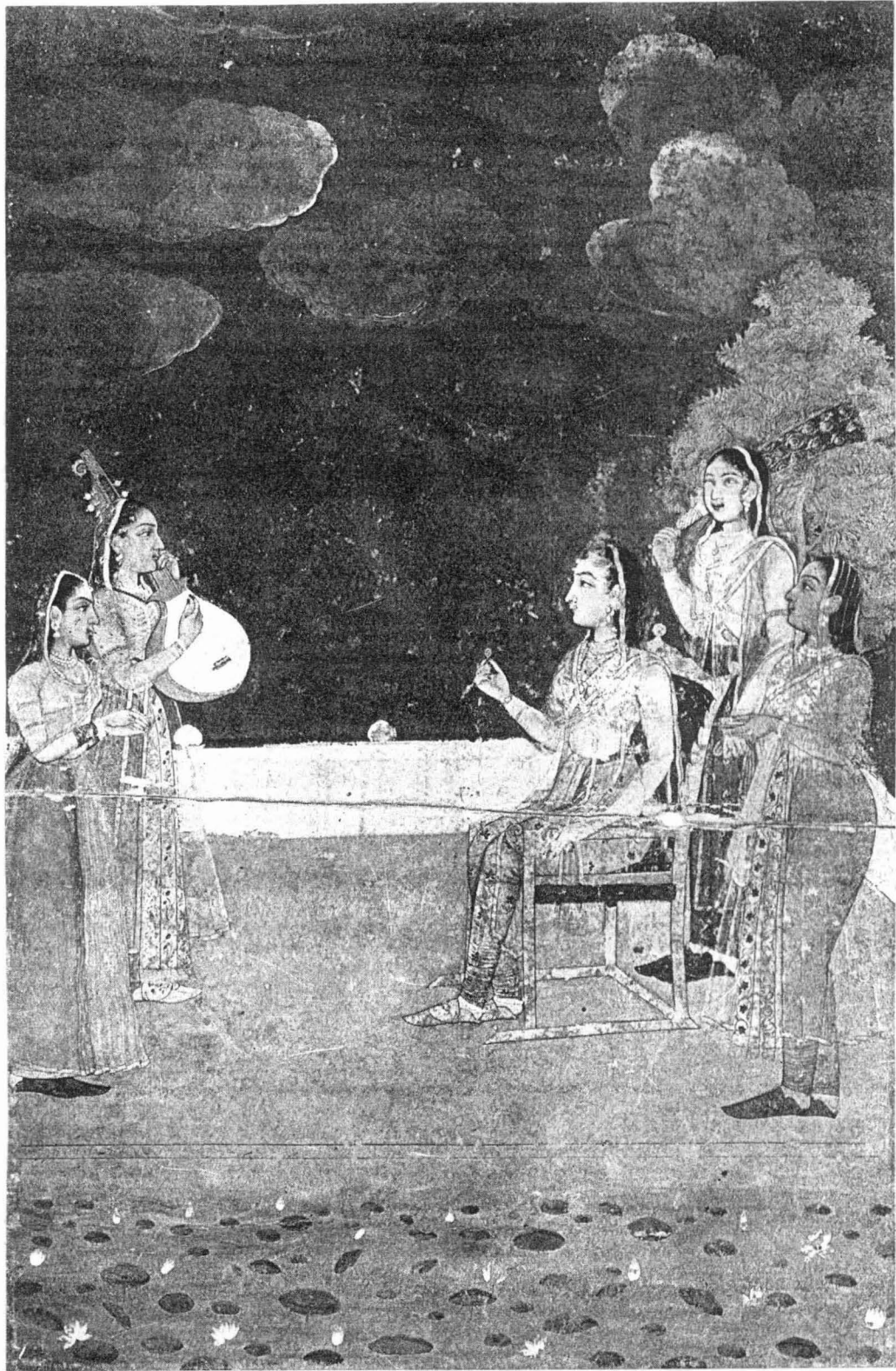


PLATE 3.- PRINCESS WITH ATTENDANTS.



PLATE 4. — CONSTRUCTION OF FATEHPUR-SIKRI. (AKBAR NAMA, Ca. 1590).

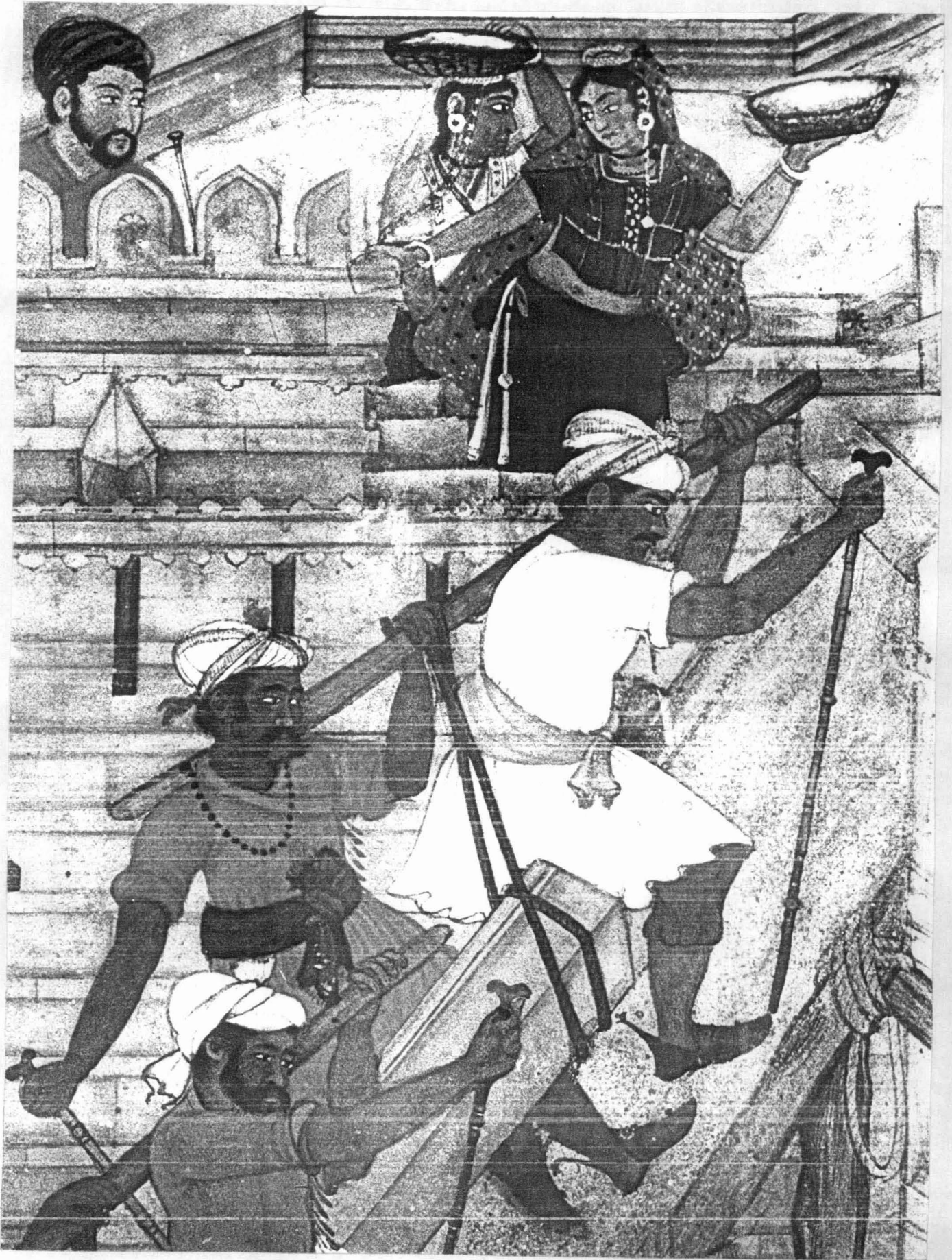


PLATE 5. - CRAFTSMEN AT WORK FROM AKBAR NAMA.

III

In a painting from the Akbarnama, the stone-workers are shown rather healthy, decently attired (which if they were miserably poor wouldn't have been possible as reflected of artisans in general by Travellers' Accounts as discussed in a subsequent chapter), they are even shown wearing shoes which the climate of India (it seems not to be winters even in the painting) wouldn't have made necessary to wear.¹⁴ The Rajasthani lady worker shown is decoratively attired (ornaments, her colourful clothes) and is rather healthy.¹⁵

IV

Charity is one important recurrent theme in the chronicles which is positively recommended and which majority of the Mughal emperors in one way or the other resorted to.

Charity is spoken of in laudatory terms and it is reflected upon as a virtue in the chronicles. The following reflection is in this light, "Every man of sense and understanding knows that the best way of ~~Worshiping~~ God, consists in allying the distress of the times, and

14. Ibid, Plate 33.

15. Ibid, Plate 33.

in improving the condition of man"¹⁶.

Charity appears to be on a regular basis in Mughal India. This being a significant perception of poverty in Mughal India: as regularity of charity reflects the recognition of vast number of poor people considered in need of charity and the desire of the ruling class to alleviate their poverty via the giving out of all this charity.

Chronicles emphasise the emperors' benevolence at various occasions when he gave alms and these include the lunar weighing of the emperor¹⁷ (we have instances of this

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16. Abu'L-Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, Vol I, p.12 + Jamshid H. Bilimoria, Ruka'at-I-Alamgiri or Letters of Aurangzebe, Delhi, 1972, pp.31-32, Letter XXVI, "Exalted son, one day Sa'ad Allah Khan came late in His Majesty (Shah Jehan's presence. H.M. asked the cause". He replied that he was reading some passages from a book and copying them down in order to show them to Shah Jahan. (They are here as follows)
A kingdom and property increase through bravery and charity..... If you desire that you should never be in need, fulfil the desires of the needy...Conquest and victory depend upon the blessing of the mendicants..... His Majesty was much pleased and kissed the forehead of the deceased Khan.....I thought that I should not enjoy the benefit of these maxims alone, consequently I wrote these things for my dear son. May the grace of God be with your actions in order to enable you to follow these instructions." (This being a letter of Aurangzeb to this son)
17. Abu'L-Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, vol-I, p.276, "From reasons of auspiciousness and as an opportunity of bestowing presents upon the poor, His Majesty is weighed twice a year. Various articles are put into the scales" + also see Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama, p.28", on the occasion.....needy."

being done in the time forexample of Mughal emperors--Akbar¹⁸, Jahangir¹⁹, Shah Jahan²⁰, Aurangzeb²¹), wherein the equivalent of the emperors' weight in gold and silver generally was given out in charity to the poor and needy.²² Charity was also given out at the marriage feast of a prince forexample²³, at the death anniversary of a queen²⁴ etc.

Besides these kinds of regular disbursements²⁵ of charity like lunar weighing, there are other such regular disbursements . Abu'L Fazl speaks of presents being made

18. Same as 17.
19. Jahangir, Tuzuk I-Jahangiri, p.287, "on the 8th urdibisht the assembly for my lunar weighing was hold and I wighed myself against silver and other things, distributing them amongst the deserving and needy.
20. Same as 17.
21. Anees Jahan Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab Al-Lubab, p.163, "About this time the celebration of weighing the emperor according to the lunar calender happened to fall near the yearly coronation. Aurangzeb..... He sat in the balance with thousands of graces, imparted new glamour to gold and jewels and distributed them among the needy."
22. Same as 17.
23. Jahangir, Tuzuk I-Jahangiri, p.81, "on sunday.....was held the marriage feast of prince Parwiz and the daughter of prince Murad.....9000 rupees were handed over to Sharif Amuli and other nobles, to be given in alms to fakirs and other poor people."
24. Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama, p.84.
25. Abul Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, vol.I, p.276, "His Majesty bestows upon the needy money and necessaries..... Many enjoy daily, monthly, or early allwances, which they receive without being kept waiting".

daily to beggars,²⁶ or the eating-house which had been established for the poor.²⁷

Charity legitimes poverty, seems to be an effort to make the stratification in society, an important cause of poverty unquestionable. Seemingly charity was a means of display of the ostentation of the emperor too.

Charity when given out had motives too attimes. There is the instance of the emperor Akbar giving something (contained in the section on donations), " With a view of increasing the zeal and desire for improvement among the servants²⁸. There is a reference wherein Shaikhul Islam did not take " a dam or dirham" out of the share of inheritance that came to him, rather he distributed most of the gold among the poor and the needy in the hope of lessening the punishment of his father (in the next world).²⁹

26. Abul Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, vol.I, p. 276.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid, p.150.

29. A.J. Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-al-Lubab, p.270 + also see Badayuni, Muntakhabu I-Tawarikh, vol. 2, p.342, "And since Mirza Khan before the victory had vowed that if the bride of victory showed her face.... he would give all the goods & chattels that might be among the baggage as a thanks giving for that event, to the poor and needy, with a view to paying this now he ordered some of his servants to fix a price on all stuffs and elephants and furniture that he might expend that money in disbursements. These untrustworthy, deceitful, irreligious valuers set such a price on them, that not a fourth or a fifth or even a tenth of the market value came to the needy And some things they gave away in order to bring joy to their hearts, & to comfort their own hearts, and so it did !.....!"

The nobility, a part of the ruling class also gave out charity.³⁰

Jahangir in reference to his benevolent ways in Ahmedabad writes in Tuzuk I-Jahangiri that "Although I have not been delighted with my visit to Ahmedabad, yet I have this satisfaction- that my coming has been the cause of benefit to a large number of poor people"³¹. Charity to alleviate poverty, he shows to have acquired so much importance for him as to weigh the satisfaction of his visit on this basis. He tries to show his excessive concern with aiding the poor, alleviating poverty and mentions his continuous efforts to help the needy, the dervishes by even directing his nobles to get the needy and dervishes to him so that he could aid them³². He even mentions appointing some women for this job³³.

V

The reflection on the causes of poverty given in the section on a system of knowledge in which the learned of Hindustan are said to concur without dissential opinion,³⁴ makes an interesting way of perceiving poverty in those

30. A.J. Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-al Lubab, p.167, "It will take too long to describe the presents and charities (for the poor) which the Amirs placed before the emperor" + Dr. C.R. Naik, Abdu'r Rahim Khan-I-Khanan And His Literary Circle, Ahmedabad, 1966 p.p. 196,201.

31. Jahangir, Tuzuk I-Jahangiri, p. 440.

32. Ibid

33. Ibid

34. A. Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, vol.III, p. 235.

times since Akbar adopted ways, thoughts of other faiths too, other philosophies too; and moreover these being mentioned in the Ain I-Akbari without any criticism probably implies his and Abul Fazl's (both being representative of the ruling class) faith in it too. It is referred to in the following manner in this section. Man gets three opportunities to become rich³⁵, "but, whoever has been deprived of these three opportunities, will be empty-handed and poor in his present life."³⁶ The solution/cure suggested for poverty has already been discussed.

VI

A remarkable piece of perception that one gets in Muntakhab-Al Lubab is the way (interpretation of how to undertake) categorisation into rich, middle section and poor is done in Aurangzebs' Jazia-ordinance.³⁷ Also given is how in these terms, following this interpretation of

35. Ibid, p.243, "The fourth kind treats of riches and poverty, and the like whoever distributes alms at auspicious times, as during the eclipses of the moon and sun, will become rich and bountiful (in his next existence) who so at these times, visits any place of pilgrimage, especially Ilahabas (Allahabad), and there dies, will possess great wealth, but will be avaricious and of a surly disposition. Who so when hungry and with food before him, hears the supplication of a poor man and bestows it all upon him, will be rich and liberal."

36. Ibid.

37. Anees Jahan Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-Al-Lubab, p.p. XXX, XXXI.

division to treat each category.³⁸ Herein an economic criterion is taken into account, " A rich man is he who owns property worth ten thousand dirhams or more; a middle class man is who has property worth two hundred dirhams or more. A man who possesses less than two hundred dirhams is to be considered a poor man. The Jizia-tax should be taken from them accordingly".³⁹ The fact that it is also mentioned that the poor man be allowed to pay the annual tax in two and four instalments respectively⁴⁰ indicated a realisation of the financial incapability of the poor man to pay up at once.

38. Ibid, p p. XXX, XXXI.
p.XXX, "Twelve dirhams from the poor (faqir), twenty-four dirhams from the middle class, and forty eight dirhams from the rich man should be realised annually as Jizia-tax. Since at present dirhams are not current1/20 of a' masha is to be realised from the poor, double of it from the middle class man, and the rich man is to pay the double of what the middle class man pays". + also see, p. XXX itself, "If a poor man has no property, but his earnings are more than the needs of himself and his family, the jizia tax should be levied on him. If his earnings do not suffice his needs and the needs of his family he should be exempted from the jizia tax" + also see, p. XXXI, "If a man is rich at one time and poor at another time, then if he has been poor for the larger part of the year, he should pay the poor mans' jazia. If he has been rich for half the year and poor for the onother half, he should be charged the jizia of a middle class man."

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid, p: ~~XXXI~~, ~~XXXI~~



PLATE 6.— WANDERING ASCETIC. (ca 1585)

VII

Another significant way the ruling class perceives poverty is life of fakirs and dervishes in the lap of poverty.

Badaoni mentions the esteem that Akbar had foreexample for Shaikh-ul-hadyah Khairabadi who had "traversed the desert of poverty.....and had not accepted any land from the emperor." Akbar exhibited his esteem for him by receiving him "standing with great respect".⁴¹ When he came to court in accordance with a message from the emperor.⁴²

Jahangir himself mentions how desirous he was of making an acquaintance with "an austere sanyasi of the name of Jadrup"⁴³ yet he chose not to send for him to avoid the trouble he could so give him and he went himself to see him, walking "one eight Kos on foot".⁴⁴ His austere life has been narrated by Jahangir who says that he lived in a hole on the side of a hill, swallows food without chewing so that he may not enjoy the flavour.⁴⁵

41. Al-Badaoni, Muntakhabu-I-Tawarikh, Vol II, p. 286.

42. Ibid.

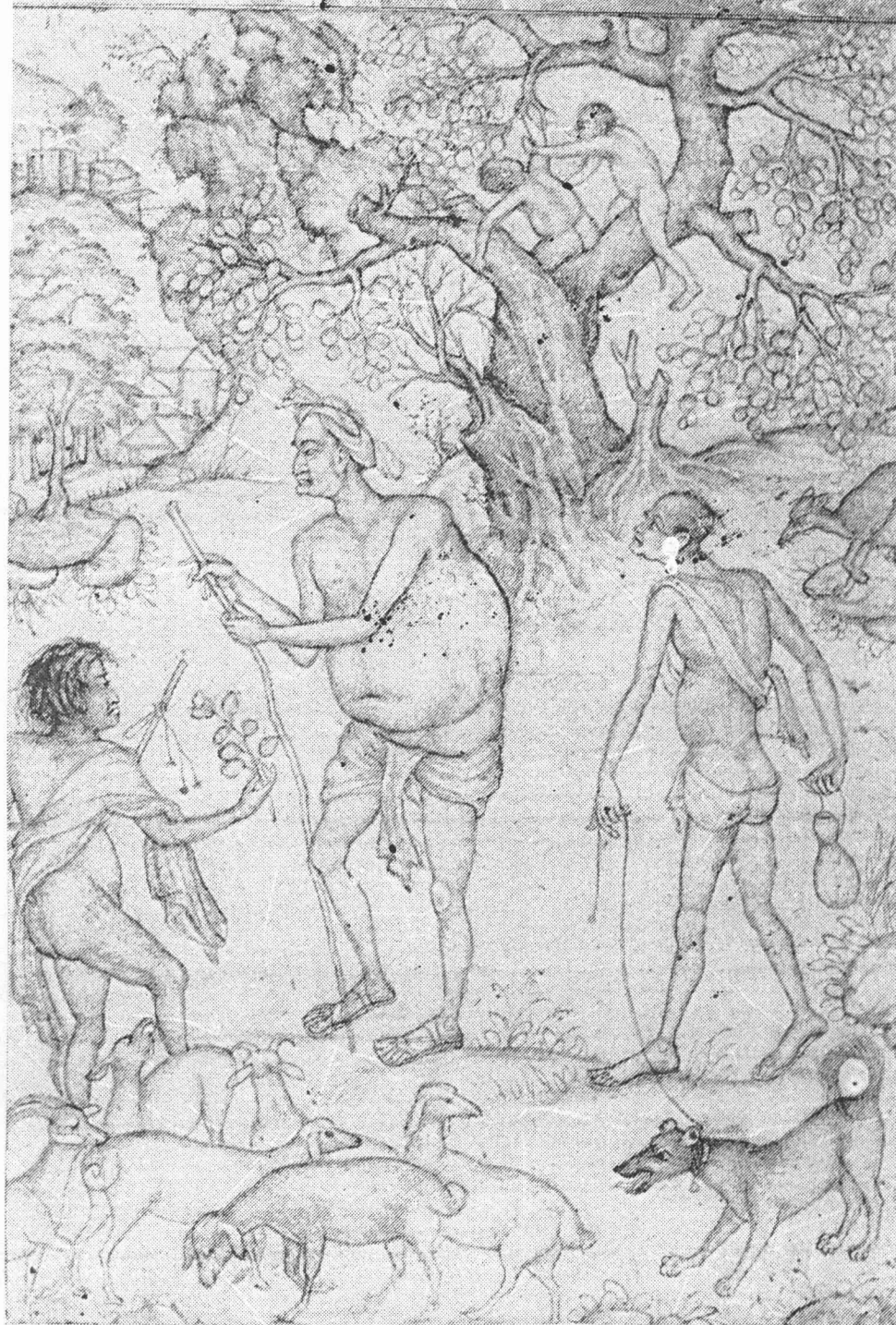
43. Jahangir, Tuzuk I-Jahangiri, p.p. 355-356. + see Al-Badaoni, Muntakhabu-I-Tawarikh, p. 215 wherein Shaikh Badr-ud-din who had "become a recluse, and occupied himself with fasting, zeal, repeating Gods name, excercising poverty, and reading the Quran" was invited to the Ibadat Khanah by Akbar (given respect to therefore) and it is also mentioned that "he attained the honour of reaching the heavenly Ka'bah, and enjoyed union with the Lord of Glory".

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

تعمان دانش از و پستش برود شد

ولش در و ام بخویشی ز بون شد



نشسته به عقد و کاپر که پستش

نشسته با درون خابیه

PLATE 8.— TWO ASCETICS OFFERED A FLOWER BY AN ASCETIC.

Though the fakirs and dervishes were held in esteem, yet we have an instance wherein Jahangir refers to Sharif Amuli who in the time of Akbar "relinquished the garments of poverty and asceticism, and attained to amirship and chiefship"⁴⁶ Jahangir doesn't seem to be holding this change-over in contempt and rather appreciates his qualities of eloquent and pure⁴⁷ conversation," exceedingly powerful utterance."⁴⁸ This change-over makes one wonder whether the esteem that the emperors had for these shaikhs pursuing poverty, life of self-denials (so as to attain God) was not a matter of convenience, being rather flexible (especially since these fakirs were revered in society, so was it probably that the emperors' esteem towards them too was only to keep with general opinion of society which they switched over as and when they felt like as in this case to esteeming even a worldly man changed over from a ascetics' life no longer pursuing poverty etc.)

Besides turning over a fakir (a life of poverty) in search of God, there are even instances like that of Sayyid Sultan who after "giving up his property (in charity), became a faqir, and then with a heart full of sorrow and eyes full of tears, he came out of the city, rubbing his hands in utter despair"⁴⁹. He did so after he

46. Jahangir, Tuzuk I-Jahangiri, p. 47.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Anees Jahan Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-Al Lubab, p.p. 327-328.



PLATE 7.- Group of Sadhus.

could not get married to the girl at the last moment.⁵⁰ Apparently this turning over a fakir due to grief implied the escapism that men resorted to, embracing thus the life of poverty and as an ascetic as is normally expected from a fakir.

Fakirs and dervishes have been repeatedly mentioned as recipients of charity⁵¹, on a number of occasions from the emperor forexample (which has been discussed above too).

Jahangir mentions a kind of sweetmeat which was obtained from the wild plantain which the dervishes and other poor people made their food, also mentioning that it was an "exceedingly hard and tasteless thing."⁵²

The paucity of such information on the food and like habits of the poor in the chronicles, leaving the information generally at preceiving the poor only as that of being at the receiving end amounts to a significant perception in the form of these silences.



50. Ibid.

51. Jahangir, Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri, p. 81, Badaoni, Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh, vol. 2, p. 261.

52. Jahangir, Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri, p. 386.



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VIII

Badaoni mentions a Shaikh (a leader of religion) who embraced the path of search after God, of poverty and self renunciation. "He devoted himself to the care of the poor of his own neighbourhood.....bestowed all his worldly possessions even to his books upon the poor"⁵³ He thus embraced the life of a fakir in the lap of poverty.⁵⁴ Husain Khan is also referred to by Badaoni who is one example of a member of the upper strata who believed in and advocated that property was transcient. It is mentioned by Badaoni of him that "he would never amass wealth"⁵⁵ and that he was never at ease till he had given it away. Significant is the way he reacts to reacts to Shaikh-ul-hidyah of Khairabad ("one of the leading Shaikhs on the high way of direction and guidance of posterity) who endeared to urge him to change his habits as he was exercised at "Khans' voluntary poverty and expenditure, and squandering of property....., and extreme extravagance in the distribution of pensions and grants."⁵⁶ Husain Khan got angry and said "It is simply a question between obeying your order in the matter, and following the tradit-ion of the prophet; what choice can there be ? On the other hand

53. Badaoni, Muntakhab-T-Tawarikh, vol I, p. 509.

54. Ibid.

55. Badaoni, Muntakhab-T-Tawarikh, Vol. II, p.p. 228-229 + also see Ibid, p.32;

:"There is no permanence in any prosperity,
However much you may have tried it
For lo! prosperity, read backwards is transcient,
Read it and see for yourself."

56. Ibid.

we expect from such as you religions guides, that, if there be any root of avarice or desire for the things of this world in us, you should show us the way by which we may eradicate and cut off such a matter; and not that you should be the ones to lend a false glitter to the accessories of transient trifles, and should make us avaricious so as to sink among the lowest of the low in the unworthy pursuit of greed and avarice."⁵⁷

Husain Khans' such an attitude to wealth and preferring the life of poverty which he felt was in tradition with religion (prophet) and therefore the virtue that he attaches to it.

IX

Famine, natural calamities, wars are a situation which engulf all rich and poor, affecting all categories, reducing the rich to poverty attimes too. For the already poor, it means a situation of absolute dispossession limited as their resources are. As such the way this situation of absolute dispossession is treated, perceived by the ruling class which is also shown by their remedial measures undestaken amounts to a significant perception of poverty of the ruling class.

57. Ibid.

Abul Fazl in reference to "Ten Ser Tax"⁵⁸, mentions the store-houses constructed in every district which were used to supply only "necessities", be it to enable people to buy cheap grain at the time of famines (or for providing grain to poor cultivators for sowing etc.)

In reference to a dreadful famine in the fourth regnal year in Deccan and Gujrat and the spread of a malignant pestilence in those regions for two consecutive seasons, it is mentioned that due to draught in these regions- the inhabitants suffered severely from the dearthness of grain and want of common necessities of life.⁵⁹ The emperor is mentioned to have ordered distribution of daily charity among the poor and indigent of Burhanpur, Gujrat and Surat at his private expense; seventy lakhs worth taxes were remitted for the purpose of restoring the country to its former flourishing condition.⁶⁰ The emperors' over-riding concern for the famine-struck is also referred to in the case of occurrence of famine in Kashmir wherein it is

58. Abu-L Fazl, The Ain I-Akbari, Vol.I, p.285, Ten Ser tax is mentioned as the one "His Majesty takes from each bigha of tilled land ten sers of grain as a royalty. Store-houses have been constructed in every district". It is also mentioned that these store-houses "are also used for benevolent purposes; for his Majesty has established in his empire many houses for the poor where indigent people may get something to eat." Mention is also made of appointment everywhere of experienced people to look after these store-houses.

59. Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama, p. 61.

60. Ibid.

reflected that "a vast number of the poor and indigent of that region were forced to emigrate and came with their wives and families to the capital of Lahore, where they proceeded to supplicate under the royal balcony." Herein the emperor is shown disbursing a lot of money, free food for the poor.⁶¹ The emperor is shown to be closely pursuing the relief operations wherein he changes the Governor, Tarbiyat Khan who was found incapable of managing the affairs " of the famished population".⁶²

The desperation of the poor also in the situation of war (herein the second Mughal plunder of Haidarabad) exhibits the untold miseries inflicted on the poor whose conditions must have already been precarious. As such it is mentioned that "merchants and poor people all competed with each other in taking their families and belongings to the fort in the course of the night"⁶³ to protect themselves from plunder of the "hooligans and rascals"⁶⁴ of the city. Also mentioned is the loss of "property and honour" by many poor people too.⁶⁵ What amounts to a significant perception

61. Ibid, p p. 291-292.

62. Ibid,

63. Anees Jahan Syed, Aurangzeb In Muntakhab-Al Lubab, p.325 + also see Ibid, p.204, "Owing to the scarcity of grain, the soldiers and specially the poorer soldiers, were brought to the verge of destruction", "no cows or horses remained; they had either been starved to death or had been slaughtered for food by the poor and the weak."

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

herein is the fact that Shah Amuli tried to stop the plunder, "there was no effective result".⁶⁶ Thereafter the Kotwal of the army was appointed "to collect what remained of the Karkhanas".⁶⁷ This implies that Shah Alam (in this case) was insensitive enough to go on with collection though the city, the poor were already devastated.

The imperial intervention in the case of desolation of the country.⁶⁸ from the movements and battle of armies, and finally due to lack of rainfall which raised the prices of grains which caused great distress to the poor of many parganas which were desolated is significant for our study.

It is mentioned that there were vast number of beggars and destitutes in every lane and bazaar. Aurangzeb reacted sympathetically and ordered more free kitchens to be established under the charge of God-fearing and honest darogahs; all high amirs (with mansab one thousand or more) were asked to establish free kitchens according to their means. It is also mentioned that taxes were remitted to enable collection of grain. Further it is mentioned that "an improvement appeared in the condition of the people"⁶⁹ which included the poor too as they must have been the worst hit and in which section the improvement would show the maximum.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid, p.173.

69. Ibid.

There are also references to Amirs like Khan-i Khanan who bothered about the security; property of the raiyyat and poor in the eventuality of a Mughal campaign (city of Kuch Bihar herein).⁷⁰ "Khan-i Khanan ordered Saiyyid Mohammad Sadiq, the Sadr of Bengal, to see personally to the arrangements and regulation every-where, so that no one may stretch his hands to the property and family of the ra'iyat..... The afore-mentioned Saiyyid made complete prohibitory regulations, so that no one could injure the inhabitants of the place, and the punishment prescribed for disobedience of orders was cutting off of the hands, ears and noses of the plunderers.⁷¹ Thus the Khan-i-Khanan strove to pacify the minds of the people and to secure the property of the rai-yyat and poor.⁷² The result of this kind of mercy being shown on "a proved infidel land"⁷³ was to bring back groups of every community and tribe and rehabilitation of desolated houses.⁷⁴ Similar is his attitude towards Aghar of refraining from paying attention to him or giving him any promotion, not showing him that attention which commanders when fighting show to their officers. This was so because some Mughals from among the followers of Aghar Khan plundered the properties of the people after the conquest of the country and would not refrain from their acts inspite of the orders of Aghar Khan.⁷⁵

70. Ibid, p p. 182-183.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid, p. 198.

A noble, commander making this kind of exception in the interest of the poor, the raiyyat is a significant perception of poverty.

The ruling classes' reactions to natural calamities (inflicting devastations on the poor) in a remedial fashion, sympathetic note is a significant perception of poverty in those times (as otherwise it would probably mean perishing of the poor (considering the maximum resources being concentrated in the hands of the ruling class)).

X

The reference to Amanat Khan as one of the very rare diwans who serve honestly and in collection of the kings' revenue, who serve the people with minimum of molestation and prefer the prosperity of the raiyyat to their own honour and promotion⁷⁶ is a valuable perception. Its significance lies in the fact that it is a revealing comment speaking of oppressions and extractions being the general rule which naturally must have adversely affected the poor raiyyat.

Such being the state, when an emperor tries to prevent impoverishment of the raiyyat, it amounts to an important attitude. Shah Jahan is said to have taken so much care that whenever a newly arrived Turk from Iran or Turan presented himself to Shah Jahan, he was appointed to a Mansab, he

76. Ibid, p. 281.

ordered that they (these appointed Turks) were to be given cash salaries in place of Jagirs till the "Turks were acclamatished and become acquainted with the policy of the emperor and the condition of the raiyyat and had realised the necessity of protecting the raiyyat and increasing the prosperity of the country."⁷⁷

An interesting attitude is seen also when an emperor (Aurangzeb here) justified his taking over of kingship not for selfish end, but, only "for the safety of the state and the prosperity of the raiyyat".⁷⁸ This kind of moralistic, idealistic overtones to an action (of kingly nature) is a significant reflection for our study too as this exhibits the concern of the emperor to give this much weightage (even though on an idealistic place here) to preventing impoverishment of the raiyyat. As such it is a reflection on perception of poverty of the ruling class as well in those times as this seems to be one of the ideals of kingship.

77. Ibid, p. 223.

78. Ibid, p. 155+ herein Augangzeb in his third letter to Shah Jahan mentions that his desire was to undertake the "great and responsible task (of government)" as a deputy of Shah Jahan; but that he was taking over the duty of kingship "for a few days" as since arranging the affairs of the empire and the Faith and pacifying the hearts of the raiyyat, wouldn't have been possible by merely acting as a deputy of Shah Jahan, his father. He even writes that the idea of Kingshi had never before crossed his mind.

Aurangzebs' order of remitting nearly eighty taxes having in view the prosperity of people "taking mercy on the desolate conditions of the raiyyat⁷⁹ (disturbed

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79. Ibid, p.p. 141-143; on p.142 it is mentioned, "The raiyyat protecting Aurangzeb orders the above mentioned taxes to be remitted, and insistent orders were sent about the matter; nevertheless, apart from the pandari tax, most of which was realised either in the territory of the capital or at the centres of the famous provincial governments the orders about the other taxes were never obeyed. For the following two reasons, the faujdars and jagirdars of distant regions, did not refrain from levying the other taxes inspite of the prohibitions of the emperor. First, no fear or dread of punishment whatsoever was left in the hearts of jagirdars, faujdars and zamindars during the reign of Aurangzeb throughout the protected empire of Hindustan." "Secondly, either owing to negligence and lack of attention, or in order to be on the safer side, the diwani officers did not remove these taxes from the diwani records as they ought to have done. Consequently, at the time of assigning salaries to the officers who demanded them) these taxes were not removed and deleted from the jagir orders. (Parwana-i-jagir), which were given as salaries. So, claiming that the money from these taxes was included in their salary-orders, and incited further by their greed and desire to oppress the people, the powerful jagirdars continued to realise the rah-dari and most of the above mentioned taxes in accordance with the old custom, and owing to their cruelty and oppression exacted even more than before. If this was brought to Aurangzebs' notice through the reports of the intelligence officers of some parganas, he reduced the Mansabs of the officers and appointed mace-bearers to keep them in awe. The mace-bearers prohibited the levying of the taxes for a few days, took money (from the officers concerned) and then returned. After only a few days had passed, the degraded officers through some patron or the machinations of his wakil (at court) got back his old mansab. Consequently, the order for the remission of most of the taxes could not be put into effect. This was especially the case with the money exacted for rah-dari..... The whole of this tax continued to be realised in most territories of the protected empire of Hindustan. The faujdars took more (for rah-dari) than before from traders, poor travellers and needy wayfarers- and they do so even now Further, the zamindars observing the negligence about inquiries into these matters began to take more (from the roads in) their taluqas than was taken from the roads in the taluqas of government officers."

condition of the country especially in North and East affected by two years warfare, march of large armies, and in addition failure of rainfall at various places and rise in prices of grain)⁸⁰. Apart from the pandari tax, it (remission) couldn't become effective in the case of the rest of taxes. This was partly due to fear of "no punishment or dread being in the hearts of Jagirdars, faujdars and zamindars during Aurangzebs' reign throughout the protected empire of Hindustan; negligence of diwani officers not removing these taxes from the diwani records etc.⁸¹ The worst was the case of rah-dari ("which in the eyes of well-informed and God fearing persons, is the worst of all vicious taxes and a source of distress and trouble to travellers")⁸² of which the faujdars took more (for rah-dari) than before from⁸³ traders, poor travellers and needy wayfarers.

This is a very significant piece of information for our study since these kinds of oppressions by the ruling class (of not implementing remitted taxes for example herein) despite the emperor at times being desirous of preventing impoverishment through such remissions for example signifies an important attitude towards poverty of the ruling class (since the officers preventing the implementations also formed a part of the ruling class

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

besides the emperor, princes forming the ruling class) as poor instead of being sympathised with, helped-were being sucked.

Khafi Khans' comment on the oppression of the Mughal Mansabdars is of worth wherein he says that such oppressors "Join the ranks of the forgotten people of this earth".⁸⁴ "And all this is due to the prayers of the helpless, who have been oppressed, for in the court of the Real Avenger, the appeals of the early risers (Sahr Khizan) are accepted and the arrows of sighs from hearts full of blood hit the mark."⁸⁵ The significance of this lies in the fact that Khafi Khan, who had also links with the ruling class thought so, felt so for the poor and helpless.

XI

An important perception of poverty is that of way of looking at slaves in Mughal India (our period of study). When there is a reference made in Muntakhab-Al-Lubab (in reference to Shivajis' geneology) that "The Rajputs, infact all Hindus, agree that it is blameworthy and wicked to have a child from the womb of a woman not belonging to their own caste (zat) or to breed families from slave girls."⁸⁶

84. Ibid, p.61.

85. Ibid, p.61 + also see Badaoni, Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh, vol.II, p.380, "Shah Fath-Ullah presented in a bag an offering of 1,000 rupees, which by oppression and ^{secret} false occurations he had tyrannously exacted from the wretched widows and orphans of the aimah-holders of Basawar, saying that his collectors had saved it from the charity-lands. The emperor made him a present of it. Not three months elapsed after this event, when Shah Fath-Ullah died."

86. Anâs Jahan Syed, Muntakhab-Al Lubab, p.p. 164-165.

If,.....a man has a child from a ghair-kuf woman (i.e. a woman not equal in status), the child is considered to be a servant or a slave, and such children are not entitled to the inheritance of their deceased parents"^{8.7}. There are important perceptions on the status of slaves in society which was depressed socially as well as financially not secure due to lack of inheritance. Moreover, we are not being too presumptious when we assume the slaves to be in a poor category as naturally they were not independent financially or otherwise and are generally supposed to be in the lap of poverty, at mercies of the master except some who were exceedingly lucky to get royal favours, as otherwise would not their status, category be of free men. Also, the ruling class (Shivaji belonged to the ruling class too) when speaking of inheritance being denied to such children are reflecting poor state of slaves. These slaves as such were therefore social outcasts to the extent it is mentioned further in Muntakhab-Al Lubab in reference to one of the ancestors of Shivaji that "Inspite of his false declaration in a far off land that the woman belonged to his own community, none of the true-born Rajputs would ally themselves in marriage with his family"^{8.8}.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

Also significant is the difference in the treatment of captives on the basis of the fact whether they were slaves or free. It is in this light that Shivajis' attitude to captive women (as mentioned in Muntakhab-Al-Lubab) appears, "if a Hindu or a Muslim woman fell into the hands of his men no one had the courage to look at her with an evil eye.....Shiva strove to protect her till her heirs came and rescued her by paying a ransom according their means. But if it was proved to him that a woman was a slave girl, he took possession of her as if she had been purchased by him".⁸⁹

One must add that the significance of the perceptions of poverty in Mughal India by the ruling class is also in relation to that of the other perceptions discussed in the subsequent chapters.

89. Ibid.

CHAPTER - III

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY IN MUGHAL INDIA : FOREIGN TRAVELLERS

I

An important perception of poverty in Medieval India is that of the Foreign Travellers who visited Mughal India.

They often provide the other side of the coin forexample to that of the ruling classes' perception. They have given a vivid description of the poverty and categories of the poor, their miseries, the picture that is quite often not highlighted by the ruling class (in the Mughal Chronicles, paintings forexample). They perceive the reason for their conditions of poverty among others to be lying in the social immobility, superstitions among the people, resignation to fate, high handedness of those in authority etc. which has also been discussed in this chapter.

The Travellers' Accounts diversify our categorisation of the poor by including social and psychological poverty too besides the economic poverty. They have, besides discussing the peasants, artisans, workmen, servants, slaves as poor, have gone on to encompass the miserable fate of the widows¹ forced to become sati¹, state of an abandoned child,² superstitious people willing to undergo self physical torture³ as a result³ as poor too (which has been discussed below).

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1. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668, Archibald Constable, tr., Vincent A. Smith, revised, Delhi, 1989, p.314.
 2. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, V. Ball, tr., New Delhi, 1977, p.167.
 3. Ibid, p. 198.

II

The category of the 'poor' according to them includes the peasants, artisans-workmen, servants who are shown to be miserable. They being a subject of the high-handedness of the ruling class⁴, be it in their remuneration⁵, justice available to them.⁶ Pelsaert forexample in reference to Sultan Parwiz, writes, "Sultan Parwiz (....) pays no attention to the administration of the country, his troops are left unpaid, their numbers diminished, and their pay reduced⁴, while the farms of the revenue of the villages and neighbouring country are increased. It is this which impoverishes the country and enriches the courtiers".⁷ Justice moreover is one which the poor people cannot afford. Justice it is mentioned, is meted out only among the equally poor.⁸ The punishment meted out to the poor are stricter too.⁹

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4. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, p.p.225, 228-230, 235, 237.
 5. Ibid, p.228. r i e
 6. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, W.H. Moreland and P.Geyl, trs., Delhi, 1972, p.6 - in reference to Agra writes, "whereas each governor ought to protect the people under him, they have in fact by subtle means drained the people dry because they know very well that poor supplicants cannot get a hearing at court; and consequently the country is impoverished.
 7. Ibid, p. 38.
 8. Ibid, p. 237.
 9. Niccolao Manucci, Memoirs Of The Mogul Court, Michael Edwardes, ed; London, p.18.

As such there seems to be no breathing space for these 'poor' people and they are with no hopes of advancement which is further aggravated by the fact that social mobility is lacking in these times. The 'poor' also seem to be reconciled to their fate.¹⁰ This lack of social mobility is a step towards maintenance of status-quo in society. These kinds of observations, perceptions of the Foreign Travellers give their perceptions on the causes of poverty.

Remarkable is also the minimal requirement of the survival that the 'poor' have and are seen forexample to be physically healthy in Kashmir wherein men and women get so little food.¹¹

The Travellers' Accounts draw out a miserable picture of the peasants. They were subjected to full amount of revenue even when their produce fell short and their children and wives sold on the pretext of rebellion.¹² What the peasants are forced to do is to either migrate¹³ or to find employment elsewhere.¹⁴ Pelsaert mentions that "so much

10. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.60.

11. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.34.

12. Ibid, p.47.

13. Ibid, p. 37.

14. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668, p. 226.

is wrung from the peasant, that even dry bread is scarcely left to fill their stomachs."¹⁵ They thus had no respite from the oppression of the ruling class because of the influence that their oppressors yielded even in influencing the meting out of justice.¹⁶

The artisans-workmen are described as rather poor too and Bernier says that a workman "feels it no trifling matter if he has the means of satisfying the cravings of hunger."¹⁷ The remuneration given to the workman is as per the discretion of the governing class which amounts to nothing at times, or is very often scanty.¹⁸ Justice against higher authorities was also not really available to them.¹⁹ Their working conditions are another limiting factor for -example Pelsaert mentions that what in Holland would be done by one person passes through four mens' hands in India before it is finished and that any of these by working from morning to evening can earn only "five or six tackas".²⁰ The food mentioned as being eaten by them is Khichri.²¹ Bernier goes on to say that a workman can never become rich because if money he gained, it only serves to increase the wealth of the merchant.²² Pelsaert has gone on to describe their

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15. Pelsaert, Jahangir's India, p.54.
 16. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1658-68, p.235.
 17. Ibid, p. 228.
 18. Ibid, p.256+also see Pelsaert, Jahangir's India, p.60.
 19. Same as 6.
 20. Pelsaert, p.60
 21. Ibid, p.61 (It is mentioned here that Khichri is made of green pulse mixed with rice)
 22. Francois Bernier, p.228.

houses which he says were built of mud with thatched roofs, furniture being little or none, bed clothes being scanty and houses unhygienic with no fire-place or chimneys and cowdungs' fire burning from outside the door to keep them warm, the smoke from these fires thus spread all over the city.²³ Pelsaert mentions that there are three classes of people who are indeed nominally free but whose status differs very little from voluntary slavery-workman, peons or servants and shopkeepers".²⁴

The payment for domestic servants in Mughal times was very meagre²⁵ and so, as Thevenot remarks, "that the court of the Great Moghul is very numerous because the Great men of the Empire are almost all there who have vast retinues because their servants cost them but little in Diet and cloths....."²⁶ Peitra Della Valle and Pelsaert both remark that the salary of an Indian servant was as scanty as Rupees three a month or so.²⁷ Servants became an item of display of the Vanity of the ruling class as remarked by Pelsaert.²⁸ Pelsaert goes on to say that for this "slack and lazy service" the wages are paid by the Moguls after large

23. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p. 61.

24. Ibid, p. 60.

25. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, Surendranath Sen, ed., New Delhi, 1949, p.60.

26. Ibid.

27. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals (1580-1627), I.A.D. Oriental Series No.27, First published, 1975, p.108 in section on Pietra Della Valle.

28. Pelsaert, p.61, "Outside the house they serve for display running continually before their masters' horse, inside they do the work of the house, each knowing his own duties.

deductions.....while wages are often left several months in arrears and then paid in worn-out clothes or other things". He also mentions the fact that very few of them serve their masters honestly, otherwise it would be impossible for the servants to feed themselves and their families on such low wages. Ironically it seems to be a vicious circle wherein, if the masters held office or power, their servants are arrogant and oppressed the innocent themselves. He thereby expresses his perception of how these miserable creatures coped with poverty though in the process inflicting miseries on others.

Slaves' condition is also described as rather poor ; they being available rather cheap and moreover Careri highlights the fact that they being idolaters were easily induced to embrace the "Catholick Faith" (i.e. without any need for persuasions). He gives forth his perceptions of the reasons for slavery among which the sheer want of parents was one reason and others in despair according to him sold themselves. Father Monserrate mentions Ghakkars

29. Ibid, p.62.

30. Ibid, p.63.

31. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p. 62.

32. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p. 188.

33. Ibid, p. 189.

34. Ibid, p. 188.

as a notorious tribe who lay in ambush for a free traveller whom if they succeeded in capturing, they shaved their head and sold him as a slave, sharing the booty with another member of the tribe if he arrived at the time of shaving.³⁵ Careri mentions the slaves' job being to carry the Portuguese umbrella besides other "mean employments".³⁶ The criterion of them being considered of a "noble and genteel disposition" according to Careri was by quoting an instance wherein the two instructed slaves³⁷ of the son of a neighbouring king came to the court of the governor of Angola. Their nobility according to Careri lay in the fact that on seeing no chairs brought to the son of the king (their master), on the instructions (prior briefing of the son of the king), the slaves squated down and the son of the king sat upon them.³⁸ This clearly demonstrated that nobility lay (as perceived) in keeping up the dignity of the master. Seemingly dignity of the slave as exemplified here was not in an individual capacity, but, an extension of the subjection to the master.

35. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals (1580-1627), p.11.

36. Thevenot and Careri, p. 188.

37. Ibid, p. 189.

38. Ibid.

Another category of poor worth analysing is that of the dervishes or fakirs or professional beggars; a definition rather clearly given to us by Bernier³⁹. Clearly Sir Thomas Roe also takes up the category of a sadhu whom he calls a "poor silly oldman"⁴⁰, a miserable wretch who was clad in rags covered with ashes⁴¹, a "beggar"⁴² whom the king showed much familiarity and kindness-charity, respect (calling him father) which to Sir Thomas Roe appeared very virtuous.⁴³ These people lived in a state of poverty, practised ansterities and were involved in peity which was the reason why people respected them so much. It is for this reason it seems that Aurangzeb when nominated Viceroy of the Deccan caused it to be believed that his feelings would be better gratified if permitted to turn fakir i.e. a beggar or one who renounced the world.⁴⁴ According to Tavernier "Under this false mantle of piety" (as a dervesh or fakir i.e. a professional beggar) he cleverly made his way to the empire.⁴⁵

39. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-68, p.10.

40. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, (1580-1627), p.64.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Same as 39.

45. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p.139. [In reference to Aurangzeb]

Tavernier has taken up three categories of "fakirs" or "Mussalman beggars" in the East Indies. He calls them "Vagabonds and idlers", who blind the eyes of the people by a false zeal and lead them to believe that all that falls from their own mouths is oracular.⁴⁶ Interestingly Tavernier traces the origin of number of fakirs in India from Ravana who according to him passed remained of his days as a poor faqir (his country being ruined altogether by troops of Rama) and that they led lives of such austerities that their penances amount to prodigies.⁴⁷ Thevenot talks in terms of rogues as well as good men among fakirs.⁴⁸ The latter being ones who "do no hurt and show signs of piety, were extremely honoured by the Gentiles".⁴⁹

46. Ibid, p.139-The three categories mentioned by Tavernier are as follows: : The first is that of ones almost naked (like fakirs of the idolaters) having no regular dwelling and abandoning themselves to all kinds of impurities, persuading that they are privileged to do all kinds of evil without sin. The second ones wear garments of many pieces, travel in companies having a supervisor over them distinguished by his garments which is poorer and made of more pieces than of others. They are brought food to be eaten by people. The disciples proclaim the great virtues of their masters and confer on him power to aid afflicted and favours he receives from God who reveals to him the most important secrets. People approach him with great devotion. The third class consists of ones born of poor parents and wanting to know the law thoroughly, in order to become mullas or doctors, taking up their abode in mosques where they live on charity bestowed upon them.

47. Ibid, p. 152.

48. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p. 93.

49. Ibid.

Then there are the ones described as utterly miserable by the Travellers' Accounts as another category of social outcasts, Halalkhors or menials who are described in details by Tavernièr. They were the only ones who removed the refuse from the houses, ate whatever remains they got from people of whichever caste, each house paid them something monthly, that only they used asses and only they fed on pigs.⁵⁰ The contemptuous attitude extended to them is clear from the fact that Tavernier mentions that "one of the greatest insults that one can do to a man in India is to call them Halalkhor".⁵¹ The Halalkhors are mentioned as a special caste who were the only ones who used brooms which even servants whether of Mussalmans or "idolaters" wouldn't use for they would consider themselves contaminated by it.⁵² They being social outcasts, under these conditions, scope for their advancement in life seems almost non existent.

III

Charity signifies an important perception of poverty as it means legitimation of poverty.

50. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 145.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

Alms in Mughal times seems to be on an organised basis by the ruling class, by religious authority, by individuals. (as reflected by the Travellers' Accounts)

Bernier speaks of alms being founded in perpetuity by Shah Jahan in the gallery in Taj Mahal wherein the poor were admitted three times a week during the rainy season to receive alms.⁵³ Similarly the weighing ceremony of the emperor was another occasion when alms were given out regularly.⁵⁴ Edward Terry writes that Jahangir continually relieved many poor people.⁵⁵ Shaistah-Khan organised alms to the extent of institutionalising it by employing officials in each of the principal cities of the empire who looked after the daily gifts of food and clothes to the poor and succoured the widows and the orphans.⁵⁶

The fact that, faqirs were much respected for their painful penances has already been discussed above. We have the example of a fakir who lay himself on ground upon his belly and ordered that the length of his body might be marked there; rose up and then again lay down asking to be marked (as the distance covered increased), intending to so

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53. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1650-68, p. 295.
54. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 301 + M.A. Ansari, European Traveller Under The Mughals, p.261
55. M.A. Ansari, p.77.
56. Nicolao Manucci, Memories Of The Mogul Court, p.177.

cover the distance till kabul by lying down, getting up and so on. In this manner the faq-ir covered a cosge and a half a day. Herein all respect was showed to him and the places he passed through were loaded with charity which thus he was obliged to distribute among the poor.⁵⁷

Similarly charity was given out on a regular basis by individuals forexample. Most part of the Gentiles, Heads of Families of Viziapour, divide their victuals into three parts, first being for the poor (second for ~~the~~ cow of the house and the third portion for the family)⁵⁸ Even if this was a normative prescription rather than an empirical fact, it signifies the importance of charity in the social ethos.

The fact that charity was on an organised basis suggests that society was alive to the need to alleviate poverty and as such charity was given out regularly. Charity, however, itself amounts to a recognition of poverty and this is what the Travellers' highlight in their description of the pitiable, poor state of people. They also attribute it (poverty) to the lack of social mobility. The social make-up, restricted forexample the particular tradesmens' children to follow no other occupation than

57. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p. 95 (Section on Thevenot).

58. Ibid, p.130. (Section on Thevenot)

that of their father, nor can they inter-marry with any other caste - thus providing hardly any scope for advancement.⁵⁹

Charity was often motivated by selfish ends. Aurangzeb went on penitential retirement for forty days, during ^{the} period he besides sleeping on the ground, fasting, gave alms to secure from God, continuance of victory, and the accomplishment of designs.⁶⁰ Similarly there is an example given to us by Tavernier of a particular Raja who in order to procure the idol for the pagoda of his house from the great pagoda gave in more than 500,000 rupees.⁶¹ Charity then because of the kind of virtuous deed that it was considered in society, seemed to be providing the sanction for covering up for the unsanctioned deeds at times too.

Charity was often at the whims and fancies of the influential, seeming to be flexible as per needs. Manucci brings it out when he refers to the feeding of mendicants which supposedly would free them from sins committed.⁶² Aurang-

59. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.60.

60. Niccolao Manucci, Memoirs of The Mogul Court, p.34.

61. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 184.

62. Nocolao Manucci, p.16.

zeb gave orders to his new governors that they might take false oaths and by this swearing gain over men and raise rebellions in the neighbouring kingdoms and that it would suffice them to feed ten mendicants to free themselves from sins committed.⁶³ But then Manucci also mentions Aurangzeb ordering the stopping of alms at Jahangirs' mausoleum just because he hated his grandfather whom he considered an infidel.⁶⁴ There is also the example of Begam Sahib being disallowed to give charity on the pretext that prisoners could not give away anything.⁶⁵ Interesting is the mention by Tavernier of the brahmins pressurising people principally among whom said they were poor (for whom it was impossible to provide it) to provide things (a specific amount) so that he could give it out in charity.⁶⁶ He (the brahmin) threatened not to eat or drink till it was given and when given, keeping only nominal - he distributed the rest among the poor.⁶⁷ As such the brahmin, ruling class" appear to be trying to mould charity as per their personal whims and requirements in Mughal India.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid, p. 127.

65. Ibid, p. 84.

66. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 173.

67. Ibid.

Dargah of a pir appears to be a place wherein the poor got alms.⁶⁸ Dervesh, Sadhu or fakirs who are referred to as "professional beggars" (by Travellers' Accounts) as discussed above were one of the categories of recipients of alms, often getting huge amounts in charity.⁶⁹ Nicholas Worthington has referred to a particular way of charity by the emperor wherein he invited poor and old people at the dead of the night in the ghusl-khanah, chatted with them and at parting time⁷⁰ gave them money. Poor were aided in pilgrimage by way of charity wherein the rich expended great sums in such alms.⁷¹ Pagodas also gave out regular charity. The offerings of Jagannath Pagoda for example were used besides feeding the pilgrims, to feed the poor.⁷²

Thevenot writes that in Kabul, the chief charity consisted in digging a great many wells and in raising resting-houses for travellers.⁷³

As such charity was well established in Mughal India. It was undertaken by various strata of people and was at times selfishly motivated too. Yet there also are instances wherein the right kind of intentions, motives

68. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, (1580-1627), p. 111.

69. Ibid, p. 64 (Section on Sir Thomas Roe).

70. Ibid, p. 60 (Section on Nicholas Worthington).

71. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 190.

72. Ibid, p.p: 176-177.

73. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p.81.

behind charity was given importance. For example Manucci mentions an instance wherein alms when collected for a convent were approved, but, when it was collected for personal use by selfish people, then it was extracted from them.⁷⁴

IV

The Travellers' Accounts give us instances of the ruling class resorting to their whims and fancies oblivious of the results on the poor of the resultant poverty. Pelsaert foreexample mentions that despite the hardships and miseries that it meant for his subjects, the emperor went to Kashmir for his holiday.⁷⁵ He says in reference to Kashmir, "All the nobles curse the place, for it makes the rich poor, and the poor cannot fill their stomachs there, because everything is excessively dear ; but apparently the king prefers his own comfort or pleasure to the welfare of his people."⁷⁶ Pelsaert also refers to Sultan Parwiz as being unmindful of administration, leaving soldiers unpaid, their numbers diminished, and while their pay reduced; revenue of villages being increased leading to impoverishment of the country and the enrichment of the courtiers.⁷⁷ Manucci in the same light mentions the

74. Niccolao Manucci, Memoires of The Mogul Court, pp.65-68.

75. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.35.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid, p.38.

plundering at the instance of Shah Alam just because he wanted his Hakim Niccolao back with the result that the "poor wretches stripped bare"⁷⁸. This kind of inconsiderate behaviour heaped miseries and poverty therefore on the victims which is narrated by the Foreign Travellers. Pelsaert mentions it in rather strong words when he says that the ruling classes' bellies hunger for the bread of the poor.⁷⁹ Bernier writes that "so many poor who compelled to follow the unfeeling monarch in the pursuit of games are left to die of hunger, heat, cold and fatigue."⁸⁰

V

Poverty was considered a virtue in the society, it was the way of life of some which was respected by society. The austere, poor beggars - dervishes were given charity, looked upto. Edward Terry mentions that the compliments were "as salam allakam" and the reply "walaoy kum salam" or "Gareb-a-Nemoas" (Gharib Namaz) i.e. I wish you the prayers of the poor.⁸¹ This being an extention of the blessings of the poor, is a reflection of the fact that prayers of the poor were looked upto implying that atleast ideologically

78. Niccolao Manucci, Memoires Of The Mogul Court, p.156.

79. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p. 57.

80. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-68, p.145.

81. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, (1580-1627), p. 87.

poverty in Mughal times was not considered a stigma. There is an echo often of a similar kind in the works of the Bhakti Saints, Folklore (which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter). Thevenot mentions a Convent of the Vartias in the province of Lahore, who vow poverty besides chastity and obedience and any trespassers against this were rigorously punished. They practised poverty whether in eating or sleeping-habits. They ate only that which they got in charity after begging wherein the whole amount of food collected was distributed equally among them and they eat but once howsoever hungry they may feel; they can possess no money.⁸²

VI

The Travellers' Accounts also speak in terms of division of society between haves and have nots. Francois Bernier mentions that "in Delhi there is no middle state", a man living there must either be of the highest rank or live miserably.⁸³ The absence of the middle strata probably suggests the kind of exploitation and miseries existent. Bernier adds on that though he was well off, yet he himself often did not have enough "were-withal" to eat as the

82. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot & Careri, p. 86.

83. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire A.D. 1656-68, p. 252.

bazaars were ill-supplied and containing nothing but the refuse of the grandees.⁸⁴ Tavernier writes that from "Chakenicouze to Caboul, forty Coss", there were only three poor villages, where bread and barley for the houses could seldom be obtained and therefore he advises one to carry supplies with you there.⁸⁵ Tavernier also mentions the miserable state of Delhi. He writes that Delhi was much broken down and nearly in ruins after Shah Jahan shifted to Jahanabad from Agra, only sufficient of it remaining standing to afford a habitation to the poor and that only three or four nobles of the court reside at Delhi, in large enclosures (in which they have their tents pitched).⁸⁶ Delhi being a premier town in Mughal times, its ruinous state tells much of the realities of poverty in those times. Kashmiri people are described as for the most part poor by Pelsaert. He writes that cotton cloth was very dear and inborn poverty prevented change of raiment.⁸⁷ Remarkably yet he describes these people as physically strong despite the scanty food they get.⁸⁸

84. Ibid.

85. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p.74.

86. Ibid, p.78.

87. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.p. 34, 35.

88. Ibid.

The fact that Bernier was apprehensive about poor ambassadors being not welcomed at court because they couldn't give rich presents to the emperor is a significant perception.⁸⁹ His concern at the servants, carriage etc. of the ambassador and the rest of the paraphernalia not being impressive speaks much of what significant import wealth and exhibition of it carried in those times.⁹⁰

VII

A significant thing about the Travellers' Accounts is the absolute contrasts that they draw between the rich and the poor be it in the ceremonies, way of living, habits etc. These kind of perceptions of poverty and affluence is significant in view of the fact that foreexample the ruling class does not pay attention to highlighting this contrast.

The religious ceremonies performed by the two are one of the ways which shows the contrast. Even the Pagodas attimes of the poor people (who dwelled in the forests and mountains) were different wherein they "take a stone, and rudely trace a nose and eyes with yellow^{or red} colour upon it, and all⁹¹ the family then worship it." Pilgrimage is another such example, "Each one travels according to his station and

89. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-68, p. 138.

90. Ibid.

91. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 175.

means, some in Pallan Keens or litters, others in carriage, and the poor, some on foot and others on oxen, the mother carrying her child and the father the cooking utensils.⁹² Interesting is Taverniers' remark in reference to the Pagoda at Benares on the anointing of the people (the forehead for example) according to their caste. Here he mentions that the poor idolaters are anointed with yellow colour and he says that "in the empire of the Great Mogul, those who are anointed with yellow belong to the most important tribe, and are the least impure."⁹³ In reference to the bathing in the auspicious eclipse, Tavernier mentions that the Brahmans remain on land to receive the richest pilgrims and those who give them most, dry their bodies, and give them fresh clothes, "then they make them sit in chairs. The absence of mention of the reception of poor in these circumstances shows that this contrast between the two was a reality, given importance to by the ones of the religious class viz. the brahmans."⁹⁴

Marriage ceremony is another place where the contrast is brought out clearly. The wealth of the bridegroom determined the cost of the bracelets presented to the bride,

92. Ibid, p. 190.

93. Ibid, p. 182.

94. Ibid, p. 193

being of gold, silver, brass or tin, those of the poorest being of lead⁹⁵ only. Similarly it is according to the wealth of the bridegroom and the credit that he enjoys with great persons that nuptials are celebrated with great pomp and expenditure.⁹⁶ Ganges water was very expensive which was given out to each of the guests ; the more the bridegrooms gave them to drink (Ganges water) the more generous and magnificent was he esteemed.⁹⁷

Similar was the case of the death ceremony attimes. Tavernier mentions that, that woman in Bengal must be very poor if she doesn't come to the banks of the Ganges to wash her dead husbands' body and herself before being burnt as sati.⁹⁸ He mentions that women travelled even more than twenty days' journey for this purpose even though the bodies started emitting an unbearable odour.⁹⁹

Ornaments worn by the rich and the poor are also contrasted. Tavernier mentions it in reference to Sati that women wore bracelets, earrings and rings according to their station and wealth - these ornaments being made of gold or silver; the poorest wearing them of copper and tin.¹⁰⁰ Edward Terry has given differences in the style of making of ornaments of the two besides the metal.¹⁰¹

95. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p.197.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid, p. 166.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid, p. 165.

101. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, (1580-1627), p. 94.

Travellers' Accounts have in length gone on to contrast the houses of the rich, and the poor in Mughal times. Edward Terry has contrasted the two kinds of houses by highlighting the good material i.e. timber, brick, stones of many kinds and marble of different variety and colours used by the "better sort"¹⁰². While he says that the houses of "meaner sorts" had earthen walls mingled with straw.¹⁰³ He calls the houses of the "meaner sorts" as very poor and bare.¹⁰⁴ Pelsaert has also taken up houses of the poor and mentions them as being built of mud with thatched roofs.¹⁰⁵

The mode of travelling of the two has also been contrasted by the Foreign Travellers. Edward Terry mentions that men of "better quality" used mules, horses, camels, caoches of two wheels whose top and back were covered, front and sides open.¹⁰⁶ While he mentions that the "men of inferior sorts" walk from place to place and that their women travelled on "little oxen" and their children on asses.¹⁰⁷ Similarly the contrast in the mode of travel of the two in the case of pilgrimage is brought out (which has been discussed earlier).

102. Ibid, p.90.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

105. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.61.

106. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, (1580-1627), p. 91.

107. Ibid.

The kind of contrast that is brought out in the availability of justice to the two is all the more significant as this was an important reason for perpetuating the contrast. The justice available to the two was different. Especially because the rich can influence favourably and put plenty of money in cases which the poor cannot. Bernier mentions that justice even if available, the poor couldn't afford it (with a journey to the capital for it) or if he did reach the royal residence, "he would find the friends of his oppressor busy in distorting the truth and misrepresenting the whole affair to the King.¹⁰⁸ It being a matter of money and influence which the poor lacked. He also quotes an instance wherein the Qadi with beatings forced them to settle their cases out of Court.¹⁰⁹ Bernier also mentions that justice was really meted out only among the equally poor, "who have no means of corrupting the judges and buying false witnesses."¹¹⁰ There is even the mention of a day in the week when the emperor heard in private the petitions of the persons selected from the lower orders, presented to the king by a good and rich old man.¹¹¹

108. Francois Bearnier, Travels In The Mogul Empire,
A.D. 1650-1668, p. 235.

109. Ibid, p. 237.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid, p. 263.

The coins of the two have been mentioned as different too. (which was moreso a reflection of the differences in the economic station of the two). Gold, mentions Pelsaert was not so much traded in, it being in the kings' treasury and since the great men hoarded them. For the poor he mentions Cowries, or white sea - shells which pass at eighty to a pice.¹¹²

A hierarchy was maintained even while meting out punishments. Father Monserrate as such mentions that princes were sentenced to Gwalior, noble offenders were handed over to other nobles for punishment and the base-born were either entrusted to the captain of despatch riders or to chief executioners. As it is mentioned by the Foreign Travellers, there was a division in society between the rich and the poor. Moreover this probably saw to the strengthening of stratification in society.¹¹³ Also punishment was most probably stricter on the ordinary people as Manucci; taking the example of Aurangzebs' order to let only a particular length of beard be maintained (if found otherwise, it was cut), says it wasn't carried out except against ordinary people. Since Manucci

112. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p.29 - A pice he says was equal to half a dam, fifty eight or more of it went to a rupee.

113. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, A.D. 1580-1627, p. 10 (Section on Father Monserrate).

says that the official dared not meddle with the nobles or soldiers for fear of receiving injury to himself.¹¹⁴

The extent of submission that the inferiors had towards their superiors brought out by Edward Terry who says that the compliment of inferiors to their superiors was "I eat your bread and salt".¹¹⁵ He also says that they (poor) either put their right hand first on earth or fell down on the knees and then bowed their heads on the ground; implying that the differences between the poor and the rich was carried on to the heights of the way they greeted, bowed (since this reference has been mentioned so as of the 'poor' specifically)

As such this absolute contrast that the Travellers' Accounts draw out makes clear the stratification in Mughal Indian society, stratification which had entered the lives of people of those times as well, and in their way of conducting themselves. The fact about brahmans giving preference to the rich i.e. the ones who could give them enough in charity at the time of the religious bath (which has been discussed above). These religious pandits also therefore were after all lending support to the sharp divide in society as was the law of the land, the justice available etc.

114. Niccolao Manucci, Memories of The Mughal Court, p.18.

115. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, A.D. 1580-1627, p.92 (Section on Edward Terry).

VIII

The travellers' perception and categorisation of a person as 'poor' goes beyond the economically poor categories and encompasses the poor state for example of an abandoned child, of superstitions people willing to undergo self-inflicted physical torture as a result, miserable fate of the widows who were attimes forced to burn themselves as Sati.

Travernier describes the "poor infant" who is unwilling to take its mothers' feed (as often happens) who is then placed in a cloth and tied by the four corners to the branches of a tree and thus left from morning to evening.¹¹⁶

Due to this superstition, the children in Bengal have often been found whose eyes have been torn out. Then the baby is taken back to try whether it is willing to suckle and should it still refuse, he is taken back to the same place. This is done for three days in a succession after which if the infant is still unwilling, he is abandoned.¹¹⁷

Travellers' have also taken up the miserable state of a widow forced to burn herself as sati by her family and

116. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 167.

117. Ibid.

society. Bernier describes the "poor little creature" who was weeping and was forced to be burnt, by being tied hand and feet lest she ran away after seating her on the wood.¹¹⁸ In that situation she was burnt.¹¹⁹ Father Monserrate also mentions this miserable state.¹²⁰ He says that they were made more or less insensible by drugs and taken half drugged to the pyre and that if they hesitated, they were driven forcibly to the fire and if they tried to leap out, they were held down by poles and hooks.¹²¹

The Foreign Travellers also refer to the people who carried on superstitious ceremonies in Mughal India as "poor people". Tavernier is one of them. He finds the procession carrying the idol from the direction of Tatta to Tirupati with a following of more than 2,000 persons as "poor", "blind" people.¹²²

Tavernier also mentions instances of superstitious people willing to undergo self physical torture as "poor people". The reason he got from them for undertaking such penances was that they were doing it in memory of the first

118. Francois Bernier, Travels In The Mogul Empire, A.D. 1650-68, p. 314.

119. Ibid.

120. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, 1580-1627, p.13.

121. Ibid.

122. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels In India, p. 191.

man, Adam. One of these feast by the idolaters in Bengal in which these "poor people" hooked themselves (hooks of iron attached to the branches of trees) by the back of their bodies and they remained suspended like this for an hour or two and in two days they were entirely cured by drugs given by the brahmans.¹²³ The second instance he gives of this festival is of them lying on the bed of the points of iron with the points entering deep into their flesh while their relatives and friends got them presents which they distributed later to the poor.¹²⁴

This kind of diversification of the category of 'poor' is a useful contribution of the Travellers' Accounts.

IX

Famine is one situation of absolute deprivation wherein the existent poverty is further aggravated and ones not poor are reduced to poverty. Ralph Fitch writes that during famine people sold their children for very little.¹²⁵ Manucci writes about famine in Goa due to want of supplies, especially wheat. He writes that he impressed upon Shah Alam and succeeded in getting provided wheat for Goa.¹²⁶

123. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travel In India, p.198.

124. Ibid.

125. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals 1580-1627, p. 17.

126. Nicolao Manucci, Memories of The Mogul Court, p. 161.

The 'poor' have been treated as a separate category in details by the Foreign Travellers as far as their houses, food, sleeping habits, drinks etc. are concerned and thereby have been perceived by them to be in a miserable state.

The poor houses have been described by Careri as made of mud walls, covered with palm leaves.¹²⁷ At another place, he mentions them to be built with wattle crushed over with mud and covered with straw or palm tree leaves.¹²⁸ (also see the earlier discussion of the artisans' houses).

The poor mans' drink is mentioned as toddy. it is added that not every poor man was permitted this luxury as caste rules among the Hindus interdicted in many cases all alcoholic beverages.¹²⁹ Manucci mentions that so accustomed were the Mahometans to intoxication that the poor people, who had not enough funds to procure spirits, in-vented another beverage called in the language of the country as bhang.¹³⁰ This kind of mention of a separate beverage for the

127. Thevenot and Careri, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, p.p. 158-159; this is in reference to New Daman; he adds that here most of the Moors and Gentiles live, having their shops of several trades along the ill contriv'd streets.

128. Ibid, p. 178-this is in reference to Salzete Islands where he writes, poor, wretched Gentiles, Moors and Christians lived.

129. Ibid, p. XLIV.

130. Manucci, p.17. He also writes here that bhang was nothing but leaves of dried hemp ground down which intoxicated as soon as taken.

poor shows the reflection on how they were different from the affluent and how they coped up with lack of something due to economic hardships by supplementing it with an alternative.

Pelsaert mentions that poor burnt cow-dung, mixed with straw and dried in the sun, which was also sold.¹³¹

Edward Terry has distinctly written about the sleeping and eating habits of the poor too. He writes that the poor slept on the ground, in the dry season, with a cloth under them.¹³²

Edward Terry also writes about the poors' eating habits. He writes that their "ordinary food" was made of coarser grain which was baked into bread and was both "wholesome and hearty".¹³³ He mentions their "principal dish", which was "seldom eaten" to be rice boiled with green ginger to which they added little pepper and butter.¹³⁴ (Also see as discussed under the artisans.)

131. Pelsaert, Jahangirs' India, p. 48.

132. M.A. Ansari, European Travellers Under The Mughals, 1580-1627, p. 92.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.

XI

As such though providing us with information beyond also, yet one can discern a thread of ideas linking the various perceptions (viz. that of the Ruling Class, Travellers' Accounts, Bhakti Saints works, Folklore which I am looking at in this work. For example on the question of stratification in society in the Mughal times which they all highlight along with attempts at maintenance of status-quo in society.

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CHAPTER - IV

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY IN MUGHAL INDIA : BHAKTI SAINTS

I

The significance of Bhakti Saints' reflections on poverty comes into focus owing to the fact that the Bhakti Saints were a revered section of society in those times, having a lot of following among Hindus as well as Muslims and as such they should ^{have} exercised potent influences on the idioms, opinions, ideologies of those times. A very significant aspect is that we have Bhakti Saints from a cross-section of society - generally poor eg. Kabir, Surdas, Tulsidas (of ones that I have discussed), of middle section (Nanak of grain merchant class who have also been taken into account), aristocracy (represented by Meerabai who has also been looked at) ; as such they should perhaps reflect their ~~strates~~' opinions, outlook, perceptions. Bhakti Saints identify themselves with the poor, criticise their oppression also. Nevertheless the Bhakti Saints as a whole generally perhaps do not give the concrete conception of how to bring about an alternative mode of society (this has been discussed later), which would alleviate poverty. This being even though they emphatically try to say that, all creations are equal which wasn't being practised in Mughal times. Perhaps unable to remove poverty, they try

to provide compensation for it by means of spiritual emphasis and thereby contribute to the maintenance of status-quo in society (which they also contributed to by being reconciled to fate attributing it to Karma and rebirth and sins which has also been discussed in this chapter). Therefore they weren't social revolutionaries to this extent.

In this chapter besides what has been pointed out above, what has also been looked at is Folklore (including folk-songs, folk-tales, folk-sayings etc) which is a reflector of the perceptions (of poverty) of the masses, a lot of whom were going through, living in poverty. I am, however, using folklore not as an empirical fact, but, rather as a reflector of the value system and wherein see continuum in the value system- Bhakti literature to folklore, therein find it useful. This continuum when existent becomes an indicator of the opinions of large numbers in that society.

A fact of notice is that my generalisations in this chapter are limited to the particular saints whom I have taken into account (Kabir, Nanak, Meerabai, Surdas, Tulsidas, Ravidas).

The Bhakti Saints have not just looked at the economically poor as "poor", but also the social

untouchables, "neech", low castes as depressed too, which had economic connotations too according to them, as high caste meant all the status and holding of property in society (forexample land holding which was an indicator of property held in those times¹). They give additional information when they symbolically, often metaphorically treat categories like "man", "world", "Vedas", "soul", in state of miseries, helplessness or illusions as poor too.(which has also been taken up in this chapter).

II

The Bhakti Saints paradoxically both glorify and resent poverty. As such it amounts to no social revolution in society on their part. Kabir speaks of the poor mans' act in appreciative tones saying that he (poor man) acco ts the rich man with respectful regard if the rich man goes to the poor man and the rich man in a similar situation turns his back towards the poor man.² Meerabai comes out as an

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1. Savitri Chandra Shobha, Social Life And Concepts In Medieval Hindi Bhakti Peotry : A Socio-Cultural Study, Meerut, 1983, p. 65, wherein it is mentioned that a man belonging to uchha kula (or a family of high status) was generally associated with the privileged minority of land-holders and royal officials i.e. people who enjoyed wealth, power and prestige in an essentially feudal society .
 2. Gurbachan Singh Talib,,in consultation with Bhai-Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol.IV, Patiala, 1990, p.2347.

advocate of poverty, glorifying poverty while rejecting richness :

"....All lovely and costly garments are vain.
It is far better to don the recluses' garments live on
Scanty, even saltless meals, and sing praises of the Lord.

Than to enjoy false rich dishes and give thoughts to
the riches of others.
Ever revel in poverty, for it is a match-maker
between thee & thy Lord.

The world does not criticise a woman.

going in company of her poor husband.
But it does scoff & ridicule the lady, however
gorgeously attired, passing her time in gay
company of rich strangers.³

Nanak also attaches importance to poverty and expresses his desire to be one with the disinherited, lowly ones saying that the Lords' grace falls on the land where the humble are cherished.⁴ Moreover he says that one who is one with the lowly and practises loving devotion attains liberation.⁵ Kabir calls that one as being a hero who helps and protects the helpless.⁶

3. Pritish Nandy, tr. Songs of Mirabai, New Delhi, 1975, p.114, poem 65.

4. Gurbachan Singh Talib, in consultation with Bhai-Jodh Singh, tr. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. I, Patiala, 1988 p. 37.

5. Ibid, p.VII

6. Ibid, p. XXV, "He is the true hero who fights to protect the helpless;

Though cut limb by limb, flees not the field."

Significantly when poverty is so lauded then perhaps it is not questioned in society and thereby it perhaps leads to legitimisation of poverty.

Another significant perception on poverty is when the Bhakti Saints point out the lower castes', poors' worship of God as more worthy (which is an example of the spiritual compensation that they provide) Nanaks' following verse makes it very explicit.

" Should anyone out of the higher castes
serve the Lord.

Beyond expression is his merit .

One out of the lower castes that serves
God,

Saith Nanak, may wear shoes made from
my skin. 7 "

The image that one gathers from various folk-tales is that the poor man is perceived as a simple soul who goes places in life. This indirectly seems to be depicted as by virtue of the poor mans' simplicity and, common-sense. What is significant is that folk-lore therefore also attaches virtue to poverty as if these characteristics of simplicity for example were something unanimous among the poor. Herein lies the extension of the perception of Bhakti Saints who also attach virtue to poverty, thereby

7. Ibid, p. XXXIV.

both therefore try to provide compensation for poverty. Yet there's a difference that is, folk-lore also provides economic compensation (the poor growing rich) whereas the Bhakti Saints limit themselves to providing spiritual compensation generally as worldly wealth according to them was transient, futile (as discussed in the course of this chapter).

In this light one can look at a folk-tale from Rajasthan in which a "poor Rajput" who is a simple soul, but, compassionate makes use of what he learnt from a fellow-traveller, uses his common-sense and ultimately gets rich and married to a princess and becomes the ruler of the land after the king's death.⁸ Similar is the folk-tale of the son of a "poor old woman" who in order to get an additional help for his mother set out with a pice and by using his common-sense became the owner of good clothes, a camel and got back a wife for helping his mother and that they lived happily ever after.⁹

Bhakti Saints also reflect that bhakti i.e. devotion to God, irrespective of low caste even of the devotee is

8. Retold by L.N. Birla, Folk Tales From Rajasthan, Asian Publishing House, 1964, p.p. 13-16, entitled, "The Adventurous Rajput".

9. Ibid, p.p. 33-35.

worthy. For example Meerabai mentions that though Shabri was :

"Besides of ugly appearance, poor and devoid of manners,
 She is born in a low caste.
 Yet the Lord careless of all these disqualifications,
 drawn by her love for Him".¹⁰

This is also a reflector of the fact that a spiritual compensation was being offered to the poor maybe to make poverty more bearable. Since they couldn't remove poverty, an acceptance of status-quo in society therefore.

The Bhakti Saints recognise caste-system (a basis for divisions between rich and poor in society) in secular society though not recognising it among true devotees, as according to them, for example Ravidas:

"A family that has a true follower of the Lord.
 Is neither high caste nor low caste, lordly or poor."¹¹

Tulsidas has a different conception for the true Bhaktas as distinct from the rest of society and as such says that poverty is not an important virtue but a source of sorrow and an evil to be shunned as far as possible.¹²

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10. Bankey Bihari, Bhakta Mira, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1971 p. 115, poem 66.
 11. John Stratton Hawley & Mark Juer gensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India, New York, Oxford University Press 1988, p.25
 12. Savitri Chandra Shobha, Social Life And Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry : A Socio Cultural Study, p.67.

He further says that it is only the saint who is praised for his lack of attachment to worldly goods, and for his compassion, charity and kindness to the poor, the helpless, and the virtuous, including the Brahmans.¹² Tulsidas hits against the poor when he laments that the "Shudras consider themselves as learned as the brahmans, enter into disputations with them, adopt an overbearing attitude, participate in "jap", "tap", "vrat", sit on the high seats and discourse on the scriptures."¹³ This (desire for maintenance of status-quo in society) is the reason why Tulsidas considers varnasankara (confusion of the duties of the various sections) as the source of all evil in society.¹⁴

Therefore though a majority of the Bhakti saints themselves came from the poorer sections of society, they are vocal so far as they criticise the exploitation and miseries that the poor suffer in those times (discussed subsequently in this chapter). Nonetheless they recognise caste-system and therefore the gradation in society even though saying that all creations are equal. They as such contribute to maintenance of status-quo in society, all the more to it by

13. Tulsidas, Sri Rama Charita Manasa, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, p. 186 :-

"सूद्र करहिं जप-तप बत नाना । बैठि बरासन कहहिं पुराना ॥
सब नर कल्पित करहिं अचारा । जाइ न बरनि अनीति अपारा ॥"

14. Ibid, verse No. 100 A -

"भए बस संकर कलि भिन्न सेतु सब लोग ।
करहिं पाप पावहिं दुख भय रुज सोक बियोग ॥"

providing spiritual compensation to the poor. (These ideas have been more fully developed as this chapter progresses).

III

The Bhakti Saints like Surdas quite emphatically criticise the oppression that the poor are subjected to resulting in a lot of miseries. Their perception of poverty also extends to bringing forth their poor state, but not giving any call for a considerable change.

Kabir perceives the poor as ones who were not given regard to in society; while the poor man gave regard to the rich man, he got just the opposite in return.¹⁵

The peasants' oppression and harassment by the officials of the empire has been explicitly brought out by the Bhakti Saints. Surdas perceives this injustice which brought miseries with displeasure. He observe : "The patwari is arrogant, and produces a false bahi (account book) which shows a balance against the peasant, the¹⁶

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15. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. IV, p. 2347, "None to the poor person offers regard, Despite millions of efforts, none to him attends, should the poor man go to the rich, Though present his back towards him turns, should the rich man go to the poor man, with respectful regard he accosts him".
16. As quoted in Savitri Chandra Shobha, Social Life And Concepts In Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry : A Socio Cultural Study, p. 68

" अहंकार पटवारी कपटी, झूठी लिखत बही ।
लागे धरम बतावे अधरम, बाकी सबै रही ॥

mustaufi or accountant is high-handed, the Kotwal is¹⁷ deceitful and given the opportunity plunders everything". So surrounded by the oppressors, the peasant must have been very hard-hit.

IV

The Bhakti Saints as such though perceive poverty (of Mughal times in the ways discussed in this chapter)- la 3 it, attach virtue to it, themselves are one of them (and even if of aristocracy forexample Meerabai, adopt the life of poverty and austerity, self-denials), they also are critical of the exploitation that the poor are subjected to. Nevertheless they do not come forth beyond providing spiritual compensation for poverty, something (compensation) which therefore remained at the moral plane.

Though themselves living in the lap of poverty, they seem reconciled to it attributing it to Karma and sins (as discussed in a subsequent section) ; an attitude, perception which is reflected in the folklore too (as taken up subsequently). As such they provide no concrete mode of

17. Ibid

"नैन-अमीन अघर्मिनी केँ बस, जहं कौ तहां छयों ।
दगा बाज कुतवाल काम-रिपु सरबस लूटि तयौ ॥"

achieving an alternative mode of society.¹⁸

Significantly if at all they envisage an alternative mode of society ; they limit it to being at the idealistic plane.

Therefore forexample Nanak Speaks against saints who go begging, speaking in favour of the livelihood earned through hard work and then part of it given in charity-such according to him was a true way of life and that such a one truly knows God.¹⁹ As such Nanak is not going beyond his idealistic plane.

Ravidas envisages, "The City Joyful" visualising an equal society and calling it famous and that "Those abiding therein are prosperous" and that "Neither is there worry of paying taxes, nor does any hold property."²⁰ What he doesn't elaborate upon is how to achieve such a desirable society in those times.

Surdas through the eyes, symbolically of Lord Krishna (who is remembering the simple joys of life of the countryside, cows, cowherds and preferring it to rich Mathura) dreams of such an existence as in Braja. The

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18. + See Harbans Mukhia "The Ideology of the Bhakti Movement: The case of Dadu Dayal," (D.P. Chattopadhyay ed. History And Society : Essays in honour of Prof. Nihar Ranjan Ray), Calcutta, 1978, p.p. 450-51.
19. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. I, p. XXXI.
20. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol.1, p. 729.

following verse shows it clearly :

"Udho, I am unable to forget Braja.

 Surdas says the Lord brooded in silence.
 Repeating these words in remorse."²¹

Surdas herein doesn't speak in terms of how to achieve such a society in Mathura for instance.

Therefore this lends support to the argument that unable to alleviate poverty, what the Bhakti Saints do is provide spiritual compensation for poverty, probably to make it more bearable. Besides there is also the fact that since they voice such ideas, yet are not able to implement them, this as such reinforces status-quo. Nevertheless they are not conspirators to maintain status-quo. There are limitations of time and society and not just of theirs.

V

The attitude of the Bhakti Saints towards wealth is also a significant perception for our study. A central theme repeatedly found in the Bhakti literature of Mughal India is the transient nature of worldly wealth and the futility therefore to acquire it. What is considered as

21. Jaikishandas Sadani, tr., Rosary of Hymns, Selected poems of Surdas, New Delhi, 1991, p.209.

true wealth, priceless wealth is the Nam, devotion to God which is also perceived as a compensation provided to the poor for poverty-as the Bhakti saints express that though poor, it didn't matter as they had Bhakti of the Lord. They also reflect that man is really poor who lacks true piety.²²

The transcendent nature of wealth is brought forth by Meerabai who says that "All the wealth and ornaments of the world are false and ephemeral" and that "Ever revel in poverty, for it is a match-maker between thee and thy Lord."²³ She thereby also provide compensation for poverty in the form of Bhakti to God.

Finding amassing of wealth as a useless exercise Surdas says, "with tireless efforts you amassed much wealth"²⁴ and that neither the rich man nor the poor man carried it on with him (in death implied) and that this very wealth was one of the reasons for landing one in delusion²⁵ and that without devotion to the Lord, "you are

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22. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol.IV, p. 2347:
 "Saith Kabir : He is truly poor,
 In whose heart abide not the Name."
23. Bankey Behari, Bhakta Meera, p.114, Poem 65. + also see Kabir, Bijak, Ahmad Shah, tr. India, 1977, p. 63 -
 "Gold and maidens, horses and Silks :
 great stores of riches endure but a few days."
24. Jai Kishandas Sadani, tr., Rosary of Hymns, Selected Poems of Surdas, p. 39.
25. Ibid.

sold out at the hands of Yama"²⁶. This kind of perceptions of wealth are valuable as indirectly they simply lauding a poor involved in worship of the Lord.

As per the perceptions of the Bhakti Saints, herein Kabir, even the means of acquiring wealth is deceitful and he gives a call for contemplation of Lord. The following lines are to this effect :

"By much deceit does man acquire others' wealth,
And on his progeny and wife wastefully spends it.
My self ! even unconsciously practice not deceit.

.....

Saith Kabir : Know, none is thy friend.
While it is time, why not with thy heart.
Contemplate God ?"²⁷

In a similar strain, is a verse in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib that "For wealth vast multitude dishonoured"; also that "This without evil doing comes not, in death it accompanies not man."²⁸

True wealth is mentioned as being true devotion to the Lord which almost all the Bhakti saints echo, Nanak as such

26. Ibid.

27. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, Patiala 1985, p. 1375.

28. Ibid, p. 884-885.

says :

".....other than the Name Divine no true wealth is....." ²⁹

Emphasising, thus the transcendent nature of worldly wealth and the futility of amassing it, Kabir points out thus in this verse ; he has thus also valued attainment of devotion to the Lord :

"....By the masters' grace is attained wealth of devotion to God,

That at the time of departure accompanies man.

Saith Kabir : listen devotee of God !

None has carried with him wealth and grain stores." ³⁰

Therefore the perception of the Bhakti saints on wealth is valuable to a study of perceptions of poverty, the value thus of which has been highlighted in this section.

VI

One important perception that also contributed to the maintenance of status-quo was the belief also by the Bhakti Saints in karma and rebirth and role of sin in it. Kabir reflects this when he says that he was a brahman in his

29. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol I, p. 289.

30. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p. 1018.

previous life, but was born a weaver (julaha) on account of his sins during that life.³¹

The recognition of caste in secular society by the Bhakti Saints has been highlighted earlier in this chapter. Once they recognised casteism; agreed with it, they recognised gradation in society and therefore the division in society between the haves and have nots.

A recurrent theme in the Bhakti literature, especially those of Meerabai, Nanak, Kabir is that one should remain content as God kept you, without making any complaints.

Meerabai in this light expresses :

"...Be ever content, howsoever He Keeps you.
If for a dwelling place you get the woods or a palace,
or a pleasure garden or a wretched hut, cheerfully
live in it."

My advice is, ye should remain content in
whatever state you find yourself
Singing always the praises of the Lord."³²

Further elaboration is provided on such a perception
by Nanak :

"In the Lords' consciousness is all creation held,
within His gaze movement of all He directs. Himself

31. As quoted in Savitri Chandra Shobha, Social Life And Concepts In Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry, p. 61 :

"पूरब जनम हम ब्राह्मन होते, वोछे करम तप हीन ।
रामदेव की सेवा चुका, पकरि जुलाहा कीहा ॥"

32. Bankey Bihari, Bhakta Mira, p. 124.

guiding actions, Himself exaltation He directs

should He turn away his gaze of favour, Kings he
 reduce to a blade of grass ;
 So that from door to door they beg ;
 None to them throwing charity."³³

Nanak gives a call to be content as the Lord kept,
 without complaining :

".....Whatever He gives, borne must be,
 Ones' own mind should be instructed,
 And no complaint proclaimed.
 As retribution for our deeds, does the Divine.
 Master exact work"³⁴

Tulsidas' lamentation of shudras taking to "jap",
 "tap" and "vrat", of varnasankara³⁵ (as discussed earlier)
 also is a step towards prevention of any change in the
 socio-economic, ideological set-up of those times.

The "poor" being reconciled to their fate is also
 expressed in for example a folk-tale of the Telugus in
 which a weaver (weaving both coarse and fine cloth)
 dissatisfied with his earning meagre profits from it while
 his neighbour derived a large income by weaving coarse

33. Gurbachan Singh, Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh
 Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II., p. 1001.

34. Ibid, p. 1195.

35. Same as 13, 14

fabrics tells his wife that he will go to another place to
 amass a lot of wealth.³⁶ His wife reacts, "of what avail is
 your going to a distant place ? You will get only as much
 as it has fallen to your lot to earn".³⁷ Yet he worked in a
 far-off country wherein he made a lot of money. But on his
 way back he is robbed of everything. He therefore learnt
 very dearly the truth of what his wife had told him and
 lived on his meagre gains thereafter.³⁸ Also in the folk-lore
 runs the glorification forexample of the state of the
 peasant.

The following sayings reflect this :

"Farming is as good as royalty".³⁹

"He who works like a slave, eats like a King".⁴⁰

"The best occupation is farming, trade is middling, but,
 the worst of all is begging".⁴¹

This kind of reconciliation to fate as well as
 glorification of the state of a peasant (a "poor" category
 being so treated) therefore contributes to lending support
 to this whole argument of maintenance of status-quo.

36. G.A. Natesan & Company, Indian Tales of Fun, Folly & Folklore, Madras.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Sohinder Singh Bedi, Folklore of Punjab, New Delhi, 1971, p. 145, saying No. 16.

40. Ibid, saying No. 19.

41. Ibid, saying No. 64.

VII

The Bhakti Saints like Meerabai recognise austerities, self-denials when she says for example,

".....I have renounced all I had,
everything I owned,⁴²
I wear only this saffron cloth".

Symbolically, Surdas referring to the flute (of Lord Krishna) which has "stood in austerity unmoved" and that therefore says for the flute "Shama hasn't accepted me easily".⁴³

In a similar strain Nanak says for the saints and prophets, seekers and devotees that,

"Renouncing the world, Thy acceptance have met with"⁴⁴

This association of austerities, self-denials for the Lord, resulting in acceptance by the lord is a significant perception too as this provides spiritual compensation for those living poverty-stricken.

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42. Pritish Nandy, Songs of Meerabai, p. 29.
+ Also see Bankey Bihari, Bhakta Mira, p. 130, poem 94,
which is an important perception too,
"I rest my faith in Him, and his service.
I know not austerity, pilgrimage or
fasts. I am uninterested in them."
43. Jai Kishandas Sadani, tr., Rosary of Hymns, Selected Poems of Surdas., p. 111.
44. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. II, p. 755.

Yet what Kabir, Nanak emphasise is that austerity is useless when accompanied by true piety. The following verse of Kabir is in this light :

" What good the recitation of sacred texts,
 austerities and worship as such,

 Saith Kabir : By devotion is the Lord attained.." ⁴⁵

Guru Nanak perceives true Yoga as not lying in donning the Yogis' attire, smearing the body with ashes, but, that

".....The Yogi truly so called is one
 who views all
 Creation as equal with an equable eye....." ⁴⁶

Therefore even though the Bhakti Saints are providing spiritual emphasis as compensation for poverty, in the process they are particular about motive, clear hearted devotion behind austerity, becoming a recluse. Therefore poverty in this state too wasn't accepted without qualifications i.e. lack of duality, having true piety in heart.

45. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol.I, p.p.678-679.

46. Ibid, p. XXIX.

VIII

Alongside lauding poverty by the Bhakti Saints, (which has been discussed in this chapter), charity was also given importance. Charity since it legitimises poverty, is important for our study of perceptions of poverty. Nanak is emphatic on looking for the right motives behind charity which was considered a virtuous deed (after all charity was in recognition of poverty which was considered virtuous generally by the Bhakti Saints, it being an attempt towards maintenance of status-quo). The folk literature brings out selfish motives behind charity too, nevertheless showing the importance of charity in the everyday life of the people.

Kabir recognises charity as good deed when he so mentions, ".....alms-giving, many other good deeds are taught"⁴⁷.

Nanak looks for devotion as a necessary accompaniment with charity, otherwise making charity useless and as such he perceives :

".....without devotion to the holy Name.

.....
Performance of millions of good deeds,

..... beneficent actions.

and approved charities.....

of little avail are all these....."⁴⁸

47. Kabir, The Bijak, Ahmad Shah, tr., p. 64.

48. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p. 990.

Nevertheless he strongly recommends charity⁴⁹

Selflessness, ⁵⁰ purity of means have been given due importance by Nanak while undertaking charity. He as such says that "The charitable when giving away charity should feel content.

A Thousand fold reward for their benefactions they seek.

And acclaim from the world."⁵¹

There are examples in folklore of motivated charity. Folk-lore gives importance to charity and there are examples in legends of charity being a means to serve ones' purpose for example to remove the effect of bad stars⁵² to liberate ones' Gods (sun and moon in this particular one "from the diabolic grip")⁵³ This again depicts charity as

49. Ibid, p. 992-993
 True should be known such a one as
 truthful instruction receives.
 "should be compassionate to Creation and
 something in charity give away"

50. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, trs.,
 Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p.1002., "should a
 buylar rob some house, and out of his booty.
 offer charity in his manes' name ;
 In the hereafter shall the offering be
 recognised, And the manes be blanded as thieves;
 And judgements shall be that the mediators'
 hands be chopped off....."

51. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, trs., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p. 987.

52. Sohinder Singh Bedi, Folklore of Punjab, p. 29.

53. Ibid, p. 17.

being pervasive in society (and significantly charity legitimises poverty).

When charity was so pervasive in society as to be considered an antidote for bad stars etc. (as reflected in the folk literature), it showed the extent of concern for legitimisation of poverty through charity, even indirectly attimes, that was sought after.

Symbolically the Lord is seen as the benefactor and man the beggar receiving charity from Lord in the form of his devotion and thereby being glad and satisfied.⁵⁴ The symbolism is a significant perception for us as this contributes to legitimisation of poverty through symbolism of faith and devotion which is the compensation offered and helps the poor to come to grips with the harsh realities of their poverty (by poverty also being glorified, pointed out as preferable) and probably contains the likely volatile discontent among these sections. This kind of perception of poverty is a very significant one for one study enabling us to probe the mental make up of those times, understand

54. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p. 1260 + also see Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. I, p.130, "should one give away in charity citadels of Gold, with splendid horses and elephants; With gifts of land and herds of kine added-still would the mind not be free of pride and arrogance. The mind by the Name Divine penetrated ! Such is the true gift, in charity by the master granted".

the reasons why man lived on a hungry belly and spoke yet of bearing with it, talked of it being a result of their karma and rebirth and the spiritual compensation that they had for their poverty.

In this light this piece of information given to us by Nanak is significant :

"Lord in charity and wisdom art thou perfect.

We Thy beggars.

What shall I seek of Thee ? Nothing in this world lasts:

Lord ! grant me love of the Name".⁵⁵

Charity which was considered a good deed recommended in society; is also seen symbolically as being undertaken by having true piety. This is another extension of legitimisation of poverty. As such Nanak says :

"Those reposing faith in the holy preceptor, lauding the Eternal.

Perform true Charities, disburse donations and exercise compassion."⁵⁶

When Nanak perceives that the Lords' true devotees are considered casteless and that "Nanak at the door of such ⁵⁷ begs alms", it is no less significant a perception because

Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr, 55. / Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol.II, p. 1260.

56. Ibid, p. 1433.

57. Ibid, p. 1500.

compensated so it seems to be a teaching given to the poor not to care for their station in life, but, only to bother about true piety which was virtuous thereby making poor undertaking true piety as virtuous too. Especially it is so since Nanak feels that they (true devotees) are worthy enough to be taken charity from; a first source that he emphasised so positively as a benefactor besides in the form of God.

Folklore also shows the kind of scare that existed among the poor of a situation of famine which they must have wanted to avert at all cost. The following folk-saying is an example :

"Where Jeth is hot and Har rainy,
"Why should famine go near that land."⁵⁸

IX

The Bhakti Saints speak of the low and 'poor' in the same breath, but, their categorisation of low or 'poor' on the kind of basis they perceive is a significant perception. They also perceive poverty in terms of miseries of life irrespective of the station of ones' life; in terms of metaphors too (social, psychological poverty too), which is a valuable addition.

58. Sohinder Singh Bedi, Folklore of Punjab, p.145.
(Footnoted, Jeth as May-June; Har as June-July)

One categorisation that they give us is on the basis of caste implying that for example the ones born as untouchables, weaver,⁵⁹ dyer,⁶⁰ cobbler⁶¹ etc. as poor. For⁶² example Ravidas calls himself of low birth being a cobbler;

"Worthless is my company - day and night this in anxiety
Keeps me.

Evil are my actions, low my birth....."

Besides this kind of categorisation on the basis of caste and birth, the Bhakti Saints have also categorised beyond and related it to Bhakti and the deeds of a person.

An example of this kind of relation in terms of Bhakti to so categorise as lowly is one of Kabir wherein

"Saith Kabir : No one is lowly born.

The only lowly are those :

Who never talk of Ram".⁶³

59. Same as 3..

60. Guru Granth Sahib, vol.IV, p. 2357 ; herein Namdev expresses-"....Lord of Yadava race, low is my caste.
Why didn't Thou give me birth in a dyers,home...."

61. John S. Hawley & M. Juergensmeyer, Songs of the Saints of India, p.25, "My labour is with leather. But my heartboast the Lord....."

62. Ibid.

63. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol.I, p. 679 +
"In the lodgement in womb exists neither family
pride nor caste :

....."

+ Also See Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol.1, p. XXXII, viz.
"....Those forgetting the Lord are the truly low caste.
Nanak, the low caste are those who live without God."

Another example which makes this fact more clear of their perceptions in terms of categorisation as 'poor' on the basis of Bhakti of a person is as follows :

"....Saith Kabir : He is truly poor,
In whose heart abides not the Name."⁶⁴

Nanak categorise untouchables (who were equated to poor as discussed earlier) on the basis of deeds, actions, mental state in the following foreexample :

"Evil doing, hard-heartedness, slander, violence-
These be the real untouchable."⁶⁵
....."

The Bhakti Saints, as pointed earlier also perceive poverty in metaphorical terms, in terms of social, psychological poverty too besides, economic poverty (which is of course obvious.)

Kabir refers in these terms to the human soul as "poor souls" who fall for the traps laid in Veda and Koran. The⁶⁶

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64. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. IV, p. 2345.
65. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol.1, p. XXXIII.
66. Linda Hegg & Shukdev Singh, tr., The Bijak of Kabir, p.52, poem-32, + also p. 112, wherein road has been metaphorically called poor-
"What can the poor road do ?
The travellers don't know where they're going ?
Leaving their own path,
they stumble from wasteland to wasteland".

underlying feature being that they (the Bhakti Saints) generally were for pure devotion rather than rituals and as such the giving of importance to these texts was considered as a "poor" state of the soul, futile by Kabir. Kabir has similarly referred metaphorically to devotion also as "poor devotion"⁶⁷ in a specific one.

Bhakti Saints like Kabir and Nanak also refer to this world as poor because of the illusions, duality, transmigrations that man and this world are caught in. Seemingly to them this state is a poor state which man has to cross over with the help of God. Kabir therefore refers to man as a "poor creature" in the following state :

"He's' bound by fetters,
the poor creature.

He can get free by his own strength.'

Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr,
67. / Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. 1, p. 682.

Or the beloved can free him."⁶⁸

Among these perceptions of poverty which the Bhakti Saints provide as addition, is also the state of helplessness which the Bhakti Saints perceive as 'poor' going beyond the economic poverty in the same. Kabirs' following verse is an example :

"...The whole world by its previous deeds is bound.
It is poor helpless; what blame on it may be cast ?

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68. Linda Hess & Shukdev Singh, tr., The Bijak of Kabir, p.p. 114-115, poem-211, + Also see Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. II, p. 1260,--

"....This poor world in transmigration gripped.
In attachment to duality, devotion has neglected
In association with the holy preceptor is
Divine wisdom attained :
The reprobate his game has forfeited."

+ Also see Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. IV, p. 2352, :
"Brother ! how may we conquer this finely-built fort
whose ramparts are of quality and most of the three qualities
Its army consists of the five evils, twenty-five lower tendencies
like attachment and intoxication or pride,
with powerful maya as trench.
This poor man there cannot prevail : Lord what shall I do ?
Lust its window, suffering and pleasure its door keepers,
Sin and meritorious deeds its gates.
Clamorous wrath is the commander and the mind intractable kin
Pleasure the armour and possessiveness the helmet,
With foul thinking drawing the bow.
Desire abiding in heart its arrows-
With all this is this fort impregnable.
With burning brand of love and rocket of devotion,
The bomb of enlightenment we shot :
By poised meditation was lighted the Divine Light-
Thus at one stroke was it conquered.
As with purity and content by my side I fought,
Were both gates stormed."

In despair must it at last depart, disconsolate.

....."69

There is an interesting verse of Kabir wherein he condemns the feeding of dead ancestors while disregarding the living ones. In this situation, he refers to the "poor ancestors" (dead ancestors) by saying that "These offerings the poor ancestors hardly get-crows and dogs consumethem". He is thereby referring to the dead ancestors; the "poor ancestors" who were probably not regarded when alive and now when tried to be fed by the memorial offerings, "they hardly get" it.⁷⁰

X

The 'Perceptions of Poverty In Mughal India' as given to us by the Bhakti Saints therefore simultaneously attaches virtue to it, glorifies it and also resents it. Despite coming from the lower sections of society poor sections of society generally; the Bhakti Saints though critical of the oppression of the poor and the resultant poverty do not go beyond providing spiritual compensation

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69. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr., Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. I, p. 699.
+ Linda Hess & Shukdev Singh, The Bijak of Kabir,
p.115, verse 212.: "Don't murder a poor creature.
We all share one breadth".
70. Gurbachan Singh Talib in consultation with Bhai Jodh Singh, tr.,
Sri Guru Granth Sahib, vol. I, p. 696.

for poverty. They contribute to maintenance of status-quo in society (something which the other perceptions analysed also reflect) by this kind of compensation as well as by recognising divisions in society on the basis of caste in secular society, by believing in Karma and rebirth (which is also reflected in folklore as discussed). This is despite their repeatedly reflecting that all creations are equal.

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CHAPTER - V

C O N C L U S I O N

In the end it is important to point out that a study of 'Perceptions of Poverty In Mughal India' would be incomplete if one were not to look at the linkages between the various perceptions. There appears therefore to be a continuum of ideas cutting across class, and community barrier, but, it seems to be a continuum having scope for a lot of movement i.e. within the basic structure which is given. There is scope for having a lot of opposite ideas. Yet despite the opposite ideas, the structure remains the same.

The thread of linkage is especially so on the question of maintenance of status-quo in society. A recognition of stratification in society is a recognition of the inequalities, and therefore of divisions between the affluent and the poor. Probably this was motivated so as to contain all elements in society minus frictions. The ruling class reflect this when foreexample in the Ain I-Akbari, the duty of the king is put forth to be to put each category, class in its place; fact that it is emphasised that when (herein) husbandsmen and labourers (categorised as the lowest in the scale) perform this work well strength and happiness flows from their work. The ruling

class by their attempt at maintenance of status-quo were therefore probably trying to maintain their unchallenged, affluent privileged position (which naturally was at the cost of the poor). Travellers' Accounts also reflect this concern with maintenance of status-quo in society when they reflect people as being reconciled to fate and when they point the social immobility preventing any advancement in the life of the poor. They pointed out that with this reconciliation to fate the depressed, poor people won't even make an effort to climb higher from their present status. They give example of servants who foreexample contribute to perpetuating the vicious circle given an opportunity to take advantage of (due to their master's influence) which must have been at the cost of other poor people. Also contrasts in ceremonies of affluent and poor, the recognition of stratification by the priestly class implies these ideas creeping in the everyday lives of the people. Travellers point to stratification guiding meting out of Justice and punishment as well. Thereby with such citations the travellers too point to the attitudes leading to maintenance of status-quo in society. The Bhakti Saints also reflect this attitude when they accept their poor state saying that one should be content howsoever God kept one without protests, they emphasise true piety irrespective of the poor or rich state of the Bhakta. Significantly

they contribute to this maintenance of status-quo also by providing spiritual compensation to poverty, by ~~not~~ suggesting ^{how to achieve} an alternative mode of society and not talking in terms of a major social revolution as such. Their recognition of caste system in secular society lends support to this maintenance of status-quo and Tulsidas' lamenting on confusion of castes in kali age and shudras taking to learning is also to this end.

Charity is a very important action originating in a certain perception of poverty : it functions as a means for recognition of poverty in society; it legitimises poverty, legitimises social and economic inequities and reinforces the status-quo. It is considered a virtue by all the perceptions considered but the significant attitudes, perceptions often are different and are so variously reflected when the motives behind charity differ for example. The ruling class exhibit it as out of their patronizing, sympathetic attitude towards poor though also for selfish motives for example, it is also reflected as at whims and fancies and suitability of the ruling class as has been discussed. The Bhakti Saints go beyond and look for intentions behind charity absence of which (right intention) according to them renders charity useless. In fact they recognise something as a virtue, not even

charity till true piety in the heart of the donor exists. The Travellers' Accounts like the ruling class refer to charity on a regular almost institutionalised basis (by the ruling class as well as by private individuals, religions, institutions etc.) The selfish motives like shifting of an idol to private residence from a pagoda are seen as reasons for charity as well.

Fakirs, dervishes, ascetics according to all these perceptions were a revered section in society who lived in a lot of self-inflicted physical torture and extreme poverty. Bhakti Saints even here emphasise true piety without which even penances were useless.

Famine is one occasion of absolute dispossession in which the poorest condition has been highlighted by the perceptions; giving importance to relief and aid on such occasions.

Therefore the travellers' point to the lot of poor, their wretchedness yet the structure remains unchallenged. The rationale for this seems to be in the fact that if the ruling classes', states' ideas were at total variance with the rest of society then there would be no stability.

Medieval society perceives poverty but was not capable of analyzing poverty because firstly, intellectual

equipment was not there to analyze because economics and sociology develop much later. Secondly, it would involve restructuring which society then was incapable of doing since at no level, not even poor can think of restructuring and therefore great deal of continuum of ideas is there.

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