

The Local Business Communities in Medieval Bihar: A Survey

Dr. Shubhra Sinha*

Abstract:

Bihar is a very fertile region of Gangetic plain. It is known for agrarian and non-agrarian production from time immemorial. This article looks at the role of the local business communities in commercial activities during medieval period. The commodities like cheap cotton clothes, opium, saltpetre had attracted a large number of migrant traders from different parts of India like Khatri, Marwaris, etc. and the traders of Central Asians as well as the Europeans. They established link with the local producers through the local business communities who helped them in procurement of goods at cheap prices. The local business communities were highly hierarchical, segmented, based on caste, function and profession. Being mostly involved in the rural economic activities they were confined to their respective local area. The kind of recognition which the migrant communities received is absent in context to the local business communities but their role cannot be neglected.

Keywords: *Banias, Pethias, Gunj, Sinduriyas, Kalwars, Sunris, Nuniahs, Goldars, Paikars. Gossain, Poddars.*

According to a Sanskrit shloka¹ (verse) of all the professions trade is the most lucrative profession where the Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) bestows immense wealth. Other professions like agriculture, service (of the ruler) does not yield much wealth and hence it is inferior as a profession in comparison to the trade and commerce. This comment illustrates not only the importance of economic activities like trade and commerce but also reflects perception of a merchants of Bihar during the period under review.² Varna-Ratnakara a Maithili text from north Bihar while discussing the social and cultural life of fourteenth century Mithila and Bihar not only provides a vivid picture of the city life, the kings and their subjects but also of the castes and classes based on occupation. The author Kavisekharacharya Jyotisara Thakura who adorned the court of the Karnata rulers of Simraon (near the border of Nepal) was related to great Maithili scholar Vidyapati. In

Associate Professor, Department of History, Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi