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BOOK REVIEW

Bhangya Bhukya, Subjugated nomads The Lambadas under the rule of the Nizams (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2022), pp. 296. Price IRS 695.00 only.

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This book is a revised version of the author's thesis. He has traversed through a neglected field and hence filled an academic vacuum.

After the introductory remarks, he talks about the hey days of the Lambadas, also known as Banjaras, etc. Contemporary historians of Mediaeval India make references to them. Bhukya quotes from the writings of Ferishta calling him Perishta (pp. 32 and 36) but has included him correctly in the bibliography. The Lambadas carried foodgrains, salt and other goods. They supplied provisions to the army of Aurangzeb during his campaigns as also to the British later on. The British commanders regulated their activities and they were not allowed to sell merchandise to the enemy. They depended on animals for the transportation of goods and most of their earnings were spent on feeding them. They also acted as hired transporters for native merchants. But the restrictive salt regulations of the East India Company and the introduction of the railways hit them hard. The author points out, "...by the end of the nineteenth century the Lambadas had proved to be the losers. The majority were forced to settle down as cattle raisers, agriculturalists, and agriculture labourers and a few resorted to dacoity during bad seasons" (p. 72).

Ch. 2 covers "Policing cattle, policing nomads". The second half of the nineteenth century was a crucial time for the Lambadas. On p. 78. Bhukya says, "When they were forced to lay down their long-standing food grain trade, they turned to cattle raising for trading milk vending purposes" (emphasis added). He adds that they established themselves as the main cattle breeders in Hyderabad State. However, on p. 80 he

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remarks, "... besides the fact that the cattle were their primary source of income, that they could not give up cattle raising even after losing their traditional occupation of transporting food grain." These statements cause confusion in the mind of the reader. Involved in transporting merchandise, Lambadas would obviously have required many heads of cattle. Then how did they *turn* to cattle raising? However, their cattle wealth was also problematic for them. Bhukya correctly points out, "Unlike plough-cattle, these cattle were constantly driven from one place to another in search of grazing pastures and water, especially during the hot seasons and famines when there was scarcity of fodder" (p. 88). The Government put restrictions on grazing in its land and when the Lambadas trespassed they were penalized for trespassing was like stealing. Besides, widespread contagious diseases constituted a serious problem. The Government made serious efforts neither to treat the infected animals nor to vaccinate them.

The subject of Ch. 3 is 'delinquent subjects.' Owing to the transition from a nomadic to a settled peasant life from the second half of the nineteenth century, many Lambadas strayed into dacoity. They were then termed as criminal tribes and like the other criminal tribes subjected to severe restrictions. However, Bhukya takes a sympathetic view and justly too, "Rather, some Lambadas took to dacoity when colonial interventions destroyed their long-standing livelihood practices and threw them into perpetual impoverishment. In other words, the phenomenon of this sort of dacoity was a response to colonial rule" (p. 129). But in the next page he goes to the extreme and practically equates banditry with the freedom struggle: "... most banditry found in colonial India was a reaction to and consequence of colonial rule" (p. 130). Then he contradicts himself by saying, "... dacoity in Hyderabad became particularly rife due to the distressing situation caused by recurrent famines" (p. 131). Again, he remarks that the Government made little attempt to catch the dacoits and punish them. He thinks, "Historically, it represented a form of *chout* (tax) collected by groups such as the Marathas and Adivasi chiefs" (p. 136). In fact, it was *chauth* which had been imposed by the Marathas! The Criminal Tribes Act was invoked against the Lambadas with all the attendant evils. They were also sent to the Andamans where some of them died in the very first year owing to harsh living conditions. Bhukya also makes a passing reference to the work of the Salvation Army among the Lambadas.

When it comes to the modern forms of land relations, Bhukya discusses the introduction of the ryotwari system. It created a non-cultivating powerful landed class with legal deeds. In essence, the Lambadas became tenants-at-will and lost their lands to the moneylenders. The

Government took some steps for their protection which were ineffectual. The Lambadas struggled against their plight in which their womenfolk also participated.

Ch. 5 is on "Articulating cultural differences, contesting power" which meant the consolidation of the Lambadas as a social and political entity. Traditionally the Lambadas had created their own judicial and governing systems. Bhukya discusses the two cultural movements which took place and which raised their overall conditions. The first movement was launched towards the close of the nineteenth century by the religious saint Seva Bhaya and the second in the beginning of the twentieth century by the Lambadas who had received school education. Animal sacrifice was an integral part of their religion. Merramma was their beloved goddess. Seva Bhaya was her disciple. This movement led to self-assertion by the Lambadas. The other movement led to a conflict with the traditionally dominant classes. The establishment of Osmania University led to more such conflicts. As Lambada language did not have its own script, books were written in Deonagari and Telugu scripts. This facilitated growth of education among their children. Educated Lambadas resisted the dominant classes.

All this discussion ends with the inevitable conclusion that during the period under study the Lambadas suffered on the one hand because the top-level power structure of the state although reformist stigmatized and marginalized them, while on the other hand at the local level the local officials, moneylenders and landlords deployed the new forms of governance and law in extortionate and oppressive ways. Bhukya's conclusion is that their predicament was indeed dire. He remarks, "The criminal stigma attached to their community was detrimental to earning an honest livelihood and made them an easy target for such officials" (p. 239).

It is a well-documented work based on extensive published and unpublished sources. The author has consulted archival materials in India as also abroad. Besides, oral sources have been used. Therefore, the end product is enjoyable to read. The pictorial presentations are also impressive. At the same time, the book has some weaknesses. Sweeping statements are found in it. For example, Bhukya says, "The Lambadas and their cattle soon became the main target of the state" (p. 74).