

Women in Rural Bengal: A Painting of Uttar Dinajpur (1985-2005)

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*'Jhiki-miki kore jal srimati nadir
Oi khane amader khar matir kutir'*

Every morning they cross over the roads the nice women of the villages. They are not share croppers; they are not land holders in personal capacity except by virtue of marriage. Their spouses may be small plot holders either by purchase against maigree money or by land distribution by the government. Some are from little rich families. They are the rural women of Bengal who are so sweet, so polite and hard working. They are not literate in the sense of formal education. Most of in their communication. Most of them in their communication are not school goers-naturally they are deprived of day's modern education. So they are un-literate (not literate) but not un-educated. Why? The reason is wisdom domain over their intellect. They are guided by their institution, perception and societal values. What are their societal values? These are nothing but the principles of continuity of generation but matriarchal in nature. They maintain to acknowledge their identity of patriarchal line but their families are governed by their mothers who help them and guide them in every walk of life. The village women society of Uttar Dinajpur district is composed of numerous communities or groups like Adivasis e.g . Rajbanshis, Santals, Oraos, Mundas, domiciled Biharis and so-called economically backward (Refugees from east Bangal) Bengalees . Their occupation i,e . The roads to earning are mainly dependency on agriculture or small farming. They themselves do not plough the lands but help the males in cultivation and agriculture works, like sowing seeds, earthing of saplings, nursing the plants, watering the plants and picking up weeds from the lands to nourish the trees to produce abundantly. They also do the work of fencing the lands with bamboos as North Dinajpur is famous for Bamboo bushes .They are very diligent and round the year cultivate many kinds of seasonal vegetables like pumpkin, gourd, brinjals, jhingas (cucurbitaceous plants of fruits), Barbati, cucumber arum etc. In the winter season they produce cabbages, cauli-flowers, beans, carrots-white & yellow, coriander leaves, green chilies with other commodities like ginger, onion, garlic etc . Potatos are the most important crop which earns a lot of money. Different kinds of pulses like kalai, mug, masur, arhar etc . Also they produce.

The paddies the most common agrifood for Indian and mustard seeds for edible oil are produce by them with the help of their spouses. Paddies are procured thrice in the year while wheat's are cultivated in pre-winter season .They also produce live stocks which are an important source of income. In a corner of their house they keep ducks, hence, goats and sometimes pigs also. The cows are their nearest and dearest animal. Mostly each of them owns a cow. They collect grasses from roads, bushes and vest lands for their cows to feed. Hay stocks are abundantly available for cows. They sell milk and cow dung cakes for fuel in cooking. Some keep bees for honey. Some are tea leaf pluckers in small tea gardens and some. Some of them are engaged in tiny cottage industries like tailoring, embroidery phulkari katha stitching, making brooms from dried cocconut leaves and bamboo baskets or dalas-kulaas-dal bories-achars or pickles. Some of them are bidi-binders. They also prepare parched rice, flattened paddies and rice powders by dhakis which are our tiffin's . But now a day's most of them go to husking mills with paddies nad wheats . Some are engaged in threshing the paddies and husking them in their house by khekhis . Some of them work in brick kiln or as a helper in construction work.

Some do part time jobs in house. They also prepare liquor from palm fruits and date juices. Though they are not addicted to liquor but a few of oldest like smoking from bidis and traditional hukaas . A few are engaged in sari farming by producing cocoon for silkyarn . Mealies are also produced nad sold by them in markets. Some do jute works. Now come the question-What is their role in marketing? There are no good marketing in villages as system is not profitable. Earlier they sold their produces generally sitting under the shades of big trees-near high roads. Some of them sell their product to the middlemen who sometimes swindle them. Naturally for two decades they directly go to the suburban markets to sell their commodities as their green vegetables are in a short time . Every morning they go to the municipal market in a body or scattered with their baskets of vegetables which are jhuris or dalas on their heads. Sometimes they themselves act as middle women by purchasing vegetable from small Pangs of hunger drive them out. Others remain in houses with domestic works like cooking, cleaning of utensils, and to swap the house with cow-dung. They also boil paddies to send for husking in the mills as the sunned rice's are less preferred by Bengali people .They carry on their baskets the bunches of different kinds of green leaves like methi, hinche, thankuni, kalmi nimpta, motor-shooti, spinach and also green chillies . They sell fruits like bananas, guavas olives. Palm fruits lichies, mangoes and jack fruits they spend the money by earning from sales of vegetable and fruits in purchase of kerosene, firewood, hair oil, salt etc. And occasionally by purchasing handloom saris, sayas, blouses and sometimes to purchase medicine for seasonal illness of their children. Day by day they are getting modernized and purchase imitation ornaments, silver ornaments for purpose of marriage of their daughter. Some go to cinements, yatras or Weekly one day is fixed for them to go to hats i,e Periodical bazaars. It is their important source of pleasure to gather weekly hats for chattering. They like to go on foots, chappals to put on and walk bare footed which is a sign of good health. But they are very clean and well dressed. Green coloured saris are favourite to them probably the symbol of youthfulness. Red coloured saris are propitious and meant for festive. They purchase from haats vermilion, bindis, bangles, cheaper aluminums utensils nod readymade garments for their kids. Earthen pots, light Tiffin foods like jilipis, sweets nod murkis . They carry their children on back by tying a knot with a nice of cloth in front of the breast. All of them put on three part dresses i, e . Sari, blouse and petticoat. Saris they put on are traditional Bangla style, In winter season a scarf is common to all. They are very docile in nature generally they not quarrel with anybody and don't utter rude words except a slang word 'tui', that is third category of addressing anybody .they are very respectful to elders . They get married within ten to fourteen years of age and become mothers in early age. Deprivation of opposite gender relationship in their communities is rare. So there are rare cases of molestation or showing disrespect to women by male counterparts. This is one of the reasons of peace in their communities. They don't hanker for higher education may be it is their idea that modern ways of life would disturb their peace and order in life and higher education would pollute their environment which teaches only to become selfish with self reliance. Though dire poverty is the main cause for which they don't aspire for modern urban life it is impressible that when their adult daughters will get education they would become ultra modern and make their own decisions and feel specially North Dinajpur is back-ward in rate of literacy (48.63 p.c.) in compared to other districts? The govt. report says in addition to 'School cholo obhijan' the plan to start of 'education for all' has been after survey report which revealed that 28,822 children in the age group of 5 to 8 years and 1,57,666 in the age group of 9 to 13 years are still out of school . (Report SNS April Religious taboos intermingle with culture here. Besides community Sharadiyapuja, Nabanna utsav in the month of Agrahayana that is important harvesting month

is favourite festive observed by all. Chhat puja is also held in the month of kartika, Manasha Mangal verses are their common folk song held during winter season when paddy field work is off. Communal riots don't happen and stir them. They always maintain communal friendship with almost sincerity. They seldom find to attend mandirs but attend kirtan sammelons organized by petti landlords. The Muslim women keep Rojas in Ramjan period and distribute sweets in the day of Id-e-Milad . They are on the same time mother housewife and the bread earner of the family. Patience is their important quality of character. They are really the assets of our ravaged society and degraded age. When the consumerist culture is destroying the peace of every individual. What their common minimum needs to day are-pure drinking water especially in times of summer and rain, clean roads and sheds to protect from sun heat and rain water. They need sufficient health centre to get advice and deliver their children safely. They need nutrition for both body and mind. Primary education should be must for them though they are intelligent. They need modern outlook to swim in sea of globalization. My god anglo mania may not let them down. Local input it enough. They need satiation and cement roads across the villages, concreted sheds for rest and regular supply of rations doled by the F.C.I. They have been enthused to participate in politics after the of 33 p.c. Reservation for candidates has been passed for panchayat seats. Thos ladies are elected who have at least education or money power. Otherwise they would have no voice. They don't understand political term Right and liberty nut they fell the psalm of equality and liberty .They except respect from society. Naturally they need power sharing in

Development works to taste the fruits of participatory democracy. Nobody pluck fruit for others. This is the value of the day. As they are honest they cannot be bridged but they can be lured by self-helf dole and B.P.L. Cards. There is no alternative for honest labour. So un till now parochial politics could not pollute them. They are bhumi lakshis of Bengal. They are peace lovers. Let us pay respect to them. Though they are green stuff marketers or producers they are the necessary part of our silent nonviolent civilization which moves in snail's velocity in the villages. Villages are the oxygen of India. Self sufficient villages were the dream of Mahatma-ji. So village don't know feminism but they are born feminists. In the language of professor Amartya Sen Freedom is development. Then in spite of poverty they are developed though in the least but in the modern sense of the term. According to news thirty percent of the 78 million rural households in India go without power live below poverty line. Rajiv Gandhi Gramin Vidyut Karan Yozana aims to provide rural electricity informal structure and household electrification within five years which is the part of the National C. MP of government. It will be extended to west Bengal by the state government economic planners with NGOS which would give the rural women opportunities for cottage handicrafts manufacturing in large scale nad scop for processing of fruits and vegetables like potatos, Rice, Pineapple etc . Non conventional education centers have been set up by LF State government in Islampur sub-division of North Dinajpur district which has the lowest literacy rate as 19.8, 26.26, 23.68 percent in Goalpukhar I , Islampur and Goalpukhar II block, respectively under District education programme (DPEP) . The district lacks girls, school and the reason for low literacy rate is due to parents, reluctance to send girls to co-ed schools nad drop-outs for early marriages a survey report revealed. Another survey report says that above seven hundreds of villages are marketed under developed in the district of North Dinajpur by the department of panchayat and development. West Bengal (Paschimbanga) panchayat and gram Unnayan Daptar in 2004. Large amount of money has been spent on welfare schemes by the state government like DPEP. National food for work programme, RSVY etc sponsored by the centre during Recently the Prime Minister said, "We must create social safety nets that protect the

marginalized from adverse consequence of the changes”. Naturally the civil society and the state will strive to promote the opportunity for quality life of the village women by creating self employment facilities and thus promote their self development .Women issue is a class issue as well as an issue of social justice no doubt .Resource allocation and proper unitization of resource of the location may ensure improvement of their standard of living.

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