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Arup Biswas
MA Student, University of
Gour Banga, Malda, West
Bengal, India

Riya Singha
MA Student, University of
Kalyani University, Nadia,
West Bengal, India

An overview of Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities in post-independence era

Arup Biswas and Riya Singha

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Abstract

This research provides a historical perspective on Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj in post-independent era. Based on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, the study reveals that contribution to the local economy in those cities. The study also highlights about Jain culture, other community development program, including the education, religious devotion and their cuisine. Also a brief account of the migration of Sherawali Jain. The study also highlights problems faced by Sherawali Jains after independence.

Keywords: Sherawali Jain, post-independence era, Azimganj-Jiaganj, community development, cuisine, religious aspects, migration

Introduction

After Independence, the Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities continued to play an important role in the social and cultural fabric of the region. The Sherawali Jain's are a prominent Jain community known for their religious devotion and their contribution to the local economy. Azimganj and Jiaganj, located in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, have been home to a significant Jain population for centuries. The Sherawali Jain's in particular, trace their origins to sherawali region of Rajasthan, from where they migrated to this part of Bengal many generation ago. Over the years the Sherawali Jain community preserved its distinct cultural identity while integrating with the broader multicultural fabric of Azimganj and Jiaganj. They continue to celebrate their traditions, customs, and festivals, maintaining a close-knit community sprit.

Literature review

A review of the literature on the condition of Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities after independence reveals a wealth of scholarship on this topic. This section provide an overview of some of the key works in this area. On of the most influential studies of Jainism in Murshidabad is the book "Jainism in Murshidabad: A socio-cultural study of Sherawali Jain community" by Dr. Malti Jain (2017) ^[9]. This book provides an in depth socio-cultural study of the Sherawali Jain community in Murshuidabad. It covers various aspects of the community's history, culture, religion and social practices.

Another important work on this subject is "Jainism in West Bengal" by Dr. Ujjwal Kumar (2019) ^[10]- this paper focus on the history and development of Jainism in West Bengal, with a particular emphasis on the Sherawali Jain community in Murshidabad. It discusses the community's migration to the region, their socio-economic status and their religious and cultural practices.

Another most important scholarship on this subject includes the book "History of Jainism in Murshidabad" by Dipendra Nath Chakraborty (2012) ^[11] this paper provides a historical overview of Jainism in Murshidabad, with a focus on the Sherawali Jain community. It discusses the community's early migration to the region, their role in the local economy, and their contribution to the cultural and religious landscape of the region.

Corresponding Author:
Arup Biswas
MA Student, University of
Gour Banga, Malda, West
Bengal, India

“Jain community in Murshidabad: A study of socio-economic condition” by Dr. S.K. Ghosh (2003) ^[12] is another important paper about this topic. This paper examines the socio-economic condition of the Jain community in Murshidabad, with a focus on the Sherawali Jain community. It covers various aspects of the community’s economic activities, including their involvement in trade and commerce, and their contribution to the local economy. Fifth most important scholarship on this subject is “Sherawali Jain Temple in Murshidabad: an Architectural and cultural study” by Dr. P.K. Bhowmick (2014) ^[13] – this paper provides an architectural and cultural study of the Sherawali Jain temple in Murshidabad, which is a significant pilgrimage site for the Sherawali Jain community. It discusses the temple’s architectural features, religious and cultural practices associated with the temple, and the role of the temple in the community’s religious and cultural traditions.

Overall these studies provides valuable insights into the history, culture, and socio-economic condition of the Sherawali Jain community in Murshidabad. They shed light on the community’s contribution to the local economy and cultural landscape and provide a deeper understanding of the community’s religious and cultural traditions.

Methodology

To explore the condition of Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities after independence, the following methodology used.

Literature Review: Being with a through review of existing literature on the Sherawali Jain community in India, with a specific focus on their history, culture and practices. Some existing research on the community in Murshidabad district or local areas.

Analyzing Importance of Sherawali Name’s: How they came to known as ‘Sherawali Jain’ is discussed. There are two type information found behind the name of Sherawali Jain.

Historical Contextualization: Placing the emergence of Jain community in Murshidabad district between 1700 to 1765. This may include analyzing migration, prominent Jain families, Sherawali cuisines and after 1947 their socio-economic condition.

Analyzing impact of Sherawali Jain in Azimganj and Jiaganj: Discusses the Sherawali Jain community has a rich history and culture and they have played a significant role in the economic and social development in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities.

Overall, the methodology will involve a combination of literature review, analysis of primary source and contextualization with in the importance of Sherawali Jain community in murshidabad after independence.

Condition of Sherawali Jain after independence in Azimganj and Jiaganj: Before describing the status of Sherawali Jains in the post-independence era, the significance of their name is discussed.

The meaning of Sherawali name’s: Ese Jain’The opulent Jain families are known to be Sherawali. They migrated

from the Rajasthan to Bengal almost 300 years ago. There are two types of information about how ths came to known as ‘Sherawali Jain’. According to the first data the name ‘Sherawali Jain’ appears to be a combination of two distinct elements. ‘Sherawali’ and ‘Jain’. Here’s the meaning of each element.

Sherawli: ‘Sherawali’ is a term commonly used in Hinduism to refer to the goddess Durga, particularly in her form as the fierce warrior goddess. In Hindu mythology, she is depicted as riding a lion or tiger and is known for her strength, courage, and protective nature. The term ‘Sherawali’ is derived from the Hindi word ‘sher’ meaning ‘lion’ and ‘wali’ meaning ‘protector’ or ‘guardian’. Therefore, “Sherawali” can be translated as ‘she who is the protector like a lion’.

Jain: ‘Jain’ is a term associated with Jainism, an ancient Indian religion that emphasizes non-violence (ahimsa), truth, and asceticism. Followers of Jainism, known as Jains, believe in the existence of eternal souls and practice strict vegetarianism, as well as other forms of self-discipline. The term ‘Jain’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Jina’, which means ‘conqueror’ or ‘victorious.’ Therefore, ‘Jain’ can be translated as “one who has conquered worldly desires and achieved spiritual victory.”

Considering the combination of these two elements, “Sherawali Jain” could be interpreted as a name that represents a person with the qualities of strength, protection, and victory over worldly desires. Its worth nothing that Jainism and Hinduism are distinct religious traditions, and the combination of terms from both traditions in a name might be an individual choice reflecting a personal or familial connection to both religions.

According to second data, ‘Sherawali’ is spelled ‘sheherwali’ by many people and if look for the meaning of the word ‘sheherwali’, will find that ‘sheher’ means ‘city’ and ‘wali’ means ‘people’. all these Jain families were engaged in business, due to which they traveled from one city to another for their business purpose and so they came to known as sheherwali’s.

Emergence the Jain’s in Murshidabad

The arrival of Jain’s in Murshidabad dates back to around 1700 to 1765, the dominant Jain actors were the ‘Jagat Seth’s’ (Banker of the World), a line of merchant bankers who had migrated to this region from Marwar in Rajasthan. His father’s name is Hiranand Gailara, they belonged to the ‘Oswal Jain families of the Gailara gotra’. Hiranand Gailara migrated from Nagpur to Patna in the sixteen century and became a successful banker and merchant. He had six sons, Manikchand is one of them, who moved from Patna to Dacca, played an important role in advocating the transfer of the capital of Bengal from Dacca to the town of Maksudabad on the east bank of the river Bhagirathi.

Murshid Quli Khan (Nawab of Bengal), the new capital was renamed ‘Murshidabad’, and appointed Manikchand as the deputy Diwan tasked with the organization and supervision of revenue collection and management of the treasury of Bengal. He earned the title of ‘Jagat Seths’ for his work efficiency.

Responsibilities of revenue collection and financing the nawab and others notable persons made him an important player in the eighteen century Bengal. Manikchand’s (Jagat

Seths) progress and position are reminiscent of other Jain sects in the western India.

After 1765 came the second wave of Jain migration from western India to this region. This time can be saw a rise in the influx of Rajput kshatriya Jain's, who initially followed the footsteps of the Jagat Seths and eventually formed banking and financial setup's independent of them. The Dudherias, Singhis, Nowlakhias, Dugars, Kotharies and many other families settled down in Murshidabad. They came to be known as Sheherwali (Urban)/sherawali Jain community of Murshidabad and quickly went on to become zamindars in Azimganj and Jiaganj areas adjoining Murshidabad. In the 19th century, with a steady decline in status of the Jagat Seths, the Sherherwali/Sherawali Jain community went on to become icon of wealth and pomp in Murshidabad. They playing a important role in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious life of the area ever since.

Religious aspects

Although the Jain's of early modern Bengal were not homogeneous in character, but one thing in common was a strong sense of community, harnessed on religious lines, which got particularly amplified because of Murshidabad's proximity to Mount Pareshnath, one of the principle Jain pilgrimage sites which is believed to have been the place where 20 of the 24 Jain tirthankaras (ford makers) had attained moksha.

Jagat seths, being staunch practicing Svetambara Jains acted as true leaders of the Jain community in early modern Bengal and not only initiated construction of Jain temples in and around Murshidabad but also contributed to the religious welfare of the community by obtaining revenue-free lands surrounding Mount Pareshnath from the Mughal emperor Muhamad Shah. Jagat seths has taken a leading role in building Jain temples in Murshidabad, organized pilgrimage and lavish religious donations. This was respected and eventually emulated by the Sherawali Jain's and it was establishing a strong Jain presence in the religious landscape of early modern Murshidabad.

To notice its roots back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the areas of Azimganj-Jiaganj(Murshidabad) today forms a cluster of 13 active Jain Svetambara temples which by Jain religious level entitles the location of the temples to be called a tirtha(pilgrimage site). Around these shirnes a lesser-known Jain visual culture developed influencing the evolution of Jain identity in the last 250 years in the province of Bengal.

Sherawali Cuisine

Rajasthan is known for its extreme climate and scarcity of water. Food in Rajasthan had to be cooked keeping extreme climate conditions in mind- which meant that food had to last for more than a day without the need to reheat. In order to compensate the shortage of water, milk and ghee was used liberally. The flavors were bold and spicy. Fresh vegetables were not available. Instead they used lentils, bajra, beans, commonly. Some famous Rajasthani dishes are 'Dal-baati-churma', 'Kor Sangri' etc.

When Sherawali jains settled in Murshidabad, they found fresh water, fertile land and a verity of fresh vegetables. As a result of which there was a different change in their cooking. While in Bengal, their cuisine was influenced by Bengali, as well as Nawabi influences. Do not forget that at

this very time, the Portuguese, French, Dutch, Armenians were all at Bengal – the region being a hub of trade and politics. It is the Bengali local cuisine that acted as the melting pot where all these cultures marinated and stewed. The end result is a unique culinary experience. But they ate food according to the rules of Jainism, they never ate roots vegetables like onions, garlic etc.

Bengali influence

Coming to Bengal from Rajasthan, they started using some Bengali language like water (Jal), tree(gaach), curry(torkari). Along with that, Bengali influence appeared in their cooking. A lot of their recipes include the use of pnach phoron spice, which is a very common whole spice blend of cumin, fennel, fenugreek, nigella and brown mustard seeds used in regular cooking in Bengali. They also included fresh vegetables like wax gourd (potol), jackfruit, plantain (kach kola), bottle gourd, ridge gourd, cucumber, and fruits that were found abundantly in Bengal in their diet.

Nawabi influence

The Sherawali cuisine had a nawabi influence as they used a liberal amount of rose water, kewra water in their preparation's especially sweets. The used of dry fruits, saffron and rose water shows the Nawabi influence in Sherawali jain cuisine.

Sherawali jains love to eat sweets, before, during and after a meal. Many eat sweets like malpua, chhana bora or raskadam with a glass of milk during breakfast. The Oswal Jains were love to eat mangoes that grows in summers. They make kachhe amm ke kheer (raw mango kheer) with unripe mangoes to prepare kheer. The mango was grated, boiled to remove the sourness and then cooked in milk, saffron, sugar, rose water.

Pumpkin, which is widely used in Bengali cooking, is used by jains to make 'kumra ka murabba'. In this case, however, the Mughal influence can be observed.

Savory snacks are a norm for the sherawalis. They made kachories stuffed with cucumbers (A local produce) and named it 'khira ka kachori'. Beside there were some famous main course dishes are 'Kela Parwal ka Jhoigri', 'kheera Shimla Mirch ka Tarkari', 'Pnach torkari' or 'pnach mishali torkari'. Sherawali cuisine makes finer choices on how to cut and chop the vegetables, including grading of vegetables. Take for examples the peas, the smaller ones are used in salads, the medium-sized ones are used in curries, while the larger ones are used in kachories as stuffing.

Influence of Sherawali Jain in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities after independence

The Sherawali Jain community in Murshidabad, West Bengal, India is a small but vibrant community. Just as they played an important in this region during the pre-independence period, they have also played a similar role in post-independence period. After independence sherawali Jains participated in the development of this region. They have also supported various community development projects. Which have had a positive impact on the lives of the people in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities. The Sherawali Jain community also influenced in education and health. They established some health care and education institutions.

It is important to note that not all members of the sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj left the region

after India's independence in 1947, while some members of the community did migrate to other parts of India or overseas, many chose to stay in Murshidabad and continue their business and activities. Here ever, there were some factors that may have contributed to the migration of some members of the community after independence. One such factors was the partition of India in 1947, which led to the creation of separate state of Pakistan. This resulted in the displacement of millions of people, and many families were forced to leave their homes and migrated to other parts of India. Additionally, the political and economic changes that occurred after independence, may have also played a role in the migration of some members of Sherawali Jain community. The government of India implemented various polices and reforms aimed at promoting economic development and social equality, which may have affected the tradition of businesses and social structures of the community. More over the rapid urbanization and industrialization of India after independence may have also contributed to the migration of some members of the community. As new economic opportunities and jobs emerged in others parts of India, some members of the community may have felt compelled to migrated to these areas to seek better opportunities and improve their economic prospects.

Discussion

The topic of exploring the Sherawali Jain's contribution to Azimganj and Jiaganj cities in post-independent era. Here is a brief account of their arrival in Bengal from Rajasthan. Manikchand came to Murshidabad from dhaka holding the hand of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. The prosperity of the Manikchand family made other Jain families interested in coming to Bengal. First they got involed in banking business, later acquired Zamindari. Later they merged with other communities in Azimganj and Jiaganj and became one. But they did not forget their religious principle. Although they ate fresh vegetables of the region, they never ate any roots vegetables like onion, garlic, etc. however, even after independence, the Sherawali Jains have been associated with this region, and are also involved in various types of development work.

Finding

The finding of the study of An overview of Sherawali Jains in Azimganj and Jiaganj in post-independent era from a historical perspective suggest that role of Sherawali in this region shaped by a variety of factors, including religious devotion, contribution of local economy, role pf others community development program. The development of The Sherawali Jain community in Murshidabad, West Bengal, India is a small but vibrant community of Jains who have made significant contribution to the development of the region. The community has a rich history and cultural, and they have played a significant role in the economic and social development of Murshidabad (Azimganj and Jiaganj cities). The community has its own temple, the Sherawali Mata Mandir, which is a popular pilgrimage site for Jains and non-Jains alike. The temple is located in the heart of Murshidabad and attracts a large number of visitors during the Navratri festival. Apart form the temple, one of the key findings the Sherawali Jain community has established various education and healthcare institution in the region. For example can be said the Jain Svetambara Zamindar of

Jiaganj, Sripat Singh Dugar decided to established a college for higher education in the oldest municipality of Murshidabad district. In April, 1949, he gifted magnificent palatial out-house at Jiaganj with a donation of Rs 75000 to fulfill his dream which is now Sripat Singh College. The people of this region were so influenced by the Sherawali Jains that many schools and college were built in their name like Rnai Dhanya Kumari College (RDK college), the wife of Sherawali Jain landlord of Jiaganj, Sripat Singh Dugar. They also supported various community development projects, which have had a positive impact on the lives of the people in Murshidabad. The community has also played a significant role in the promotion of Jainism in the region. They have organized various events and religious gatherings to spread the teachings of Jainism and to promote harmony and understanding among different communities. Despite being small community, the Sherawali Jains have earned the respect and admiration of the people of Azimganj and Jiaganj. They are known for their hard work honesty and dedication to their community and the region as a whole.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical perspective on an overview of Sherawali Jain community in Azimganj and Jiaganj cities in post-independent era provides valuable fact. This topic elaborates on how Azimganj and Jiaganj have influenced their culture, economy, education and other aspects. Sherawali Jain played a significant role in building schools, college and hospitals during post-independence era. Along with that, their role was prominent in the development of other communities. A new mixed culture developed in the region, with culinary innovations as well. But not everyone stayed in this region after independence, many sherawali Jain families migrated to other state or other city for their business purpose and other reasons.

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