

## Economic Activities as Depicted in Prem Sumarag

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Out of constant confrontation between Hindu and Muslim societies for centuries, Guru Nanak Devji, the leading teacher of the age (*jagat guru*) carved out a new community (Sikhs) towards the beginning of sixteenth century providing new way of life (*rahit*), which was continued to be extended and strengthened by his successors.<sup>i</sup>

Finally, the elevation of the Sikh community into the Khalsa and dissolution of the personal *Guruship* by his last successor, Guru Gobind Singh towards the end of seventeenth century created a situation in which the *rahit*, the code of Sikh belief and practices, came into focus, and evolved into the new genre called the *rahit-namas* in eighteenth century.<sup>ii</sup>

*Prem Sumarag* is also an important rehitnama whose authorship and date of compilation is debatable. In '*Prem Sumarag*' the author expresses his views on the welfare of the society. He presents the ideal norms to public and the members of the Sikh society that they should adopt the way of Khalsa, which is based on welfare of each and everyone. The Khalsa, with a direct divine sanction behind it, was created to dispel inequality. The work, of course, was not written in a historical vacuum and author wrote it with a purpose. Therefore, my present paper is endeavored to find out and put up to give glimpse of the economy at the times of the compilation of *Prem Sumarag*.

*Prem Sumarag* contains small quantity of economic evidences, but it reflects the glimpse of economy at the times of Prem Sumarag. We can estimate from the views of author regarding agriculture, mercantile, service, eating things, wild animals, birds, fishes, money lending, division of property, property to woman etc. However, the author prefers occupation of mercantile than agriculture. He also recommends for soldiering as well, money-lending professions. Actually, these things were given preference in the times Maharaja Ranjit Singh when he started to give salary to the soldiers. Moreover, we can estimate the standard of living from the construction planning of a house that these were constructed of mud or bricks. Besides, (*diwankhaana*), a portico, a stable and a built well were also the part of house. Further, the author also recommends that the owner should lay out a garden, a small tank with fountain and a pavement in a house.<sup>iii</sup>

The author explains that the people use the different kind of foods including intoxications and meat in diet besides domestication of animals and economic status of the women. This explanation of the author reveals that the whole society was not economically affluent, however, there was a section of people most probably the nobility and feudal lords in the society which was really very affluent and maintaining high standard of living according to the standard of age during which the author composed the *Prem Sumarag*.

The prescribed rituals were started to be performed by the nobility, feudal lords and the Maharaja himself, so it was natural to be imitated by the masses at large. It seems that such type of economy redeveloped after the annexation of the kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Lahore kingdom. But, some religious Sikh movements (Nirankari, Namdhari and Singh Sabha Movements) were came into existence after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849 by the British and they started the work of socio-religious and economic reforms so it seems that the nature of the *Prem Sumarag* suggests the certain reforms in the economy, which were to be observed hereafter.

The author confidently says that it is the duty of the Raja (king) to see the welfare of all the subjects. In this connection, he explains that the Raja (king) should make it sure that nobody should be without means of subsistence being necessary for delivery of justice to his subject and it should be made sure that all subjects are contented with the working of the Raja.<sup>iv</sup> For enhancing economic activities, the king should adopt such strict mechanism that the person who professes a particular profession, he cannot abandon it. Nor anyone else persuades him to do so and adopt any other profession. Nor he should adopt another's profession. He should be called by his actual name with his profession but not attach his caste with his profession.<sup>v</sup>

In *Prem Sumarag*, the author puts up his views regarding the different types of occupations. Most importantly, a Sikh must be more honest in his behavior. Further, he says that the Sikh of the Khalsa should not do shop keeping and join the service (*chakari*) under others He may sell his home made item in the market (bazaar) and do not feel shy of it. In view of the author, the profession of business (*saudagiri*) is the best while agriculture (*kheti*) is the best of all.<sup>vi</sup> He does not only mention about the scope of agriculture. He also mentions the varieties of production directly and indirectly connected with the agriculture such as vegetables, fresh fruits and dried food, confectionary, curd, wheat flour, lentils and rice.<sup>vii</sup> He mentions about the spices that were the part of cuisine. He refers to clove, cardamom, pepper, nutmeg, mace, saffron and musk, black peppers, *trifhala*, cumin, asafetida and onion.<sup>viii</sup> He recommends cow's milk to be drunk daily because it has fourteen types of qualities beneficial to health.<sup>ix</sup> Similarly, clarified butter (ghee) is also good for health. Few pieces of cardamom should always be in water pitchers so as to keep the water fresh and clean.<sup>x</sup> Although, he does not mention directly about the agricultural productions yet his frequent references to cereals, lentils, spices and milk products certainly indicates that these would have been popular harvests at that time.

The author describes about the use of intoxicants in *Prem Sumarag*, its kinds and its consuming methods. First, he

gives the description of liquor (*madh*) and opium (*aphim*). However, according to author, opium is widely used by the people as form of intoxicant (*ama*).<sup>xi</sup> If opium is not affordable then the cannabis (*bhang*) will be its substitute being cheaper and easily available. In a case, a man prefers to consume the poppy (*post*) pod; he should limit it to two and a half pods only. However, according to author use of liquor (*daru*) was strictly prohibited being against tenets of Sikhism as it makes the person lethargic.<sup>xii</sup> It seems that these intoxicants were sown in the Punjab or imported from outside.

Although, *Prem Sumarag* does not mention the domesticated animals specifically yet reference to use of milk and clarified butter indicates that the cow was the popular milch cattle of the people. Further, he mentions that camel, mule, horse, oxen (*bahil*) and other cattle would have been domesticated.<sup>xiii</sup>

The author puts up his views regarding the different types of occupations being practised by the people as means of subsistence. He visualizes that no profession of any kind should be considered as deplorable and one should not feel shy of.<sup>xiv</sup> Every body should do his business more honestly and diligently.

A Sikh should not serve as domestic servant (*chakri*) nor he should adopt the profession of shop-keeping (*tarzookashi*). Albeit, he approves manufacturing of saleable articles sitting at home to sell them in the market. While the author candidly admits that trading (*saudagiri*) is an honourable profession however, the cultivation (*kheti*) is more honourable instead.<sup>xv</sup> The author of *Prem Sumarag* clarifies that a merchant should pay a levy of 12 annas per 20 rupees once at the place of purchase, which he should enter in the daily register. He will charge two *annas* per item worth twelve *annas* where he sells that item. He has to pay no toll tax (*rahdari*).<sup>xvi</sup>

The author mentions about moneylenders and persons who are involved in indebtedness. One should avoid being under debt. The moneylender (*sahukar*) should provide money to the borrowers as loan. He should not refuse. If he has no money for the purpose then he should manage it from his resources somehow. It is considered an act of kindness.<sup>xvii</sup>

The author in *Prem Sumarag* talks about charging of interest in certain conditions. According to the author, it is permissible to charge interest if loan money is given for business purposes and construction of house, and moneylender can ask the borrower to pay loan back.<sup>xviii</sup> It is obligatory for the borrower to pay back the loan in all circumstances. During this period, he should not indulge in luxurious life. He should not play tricks while he gets the loan and be dishonest in paying the due interest. The borrower should pay back the loan to the lender on his own.<sup>xix</sup> It seems that providing loan and charging interest on it was an established practice at times of the author. In *Prem Sumarag*, the author discusses the various rates of interest to be charged while lending money to the borrower. On loan for running business, interest rate should be nine *annas* for 100 rupees per annum. If it is for the purchase of land or a house, it should be one rupee for 100 rupees per annum, for purchase of animal, it should be 12 *annas* for 100 rupees and for purchasing slave, it should be eight *annas*. It was a taboo not to charge more interest. The author informs that it was common social belief of the people that if anyone found charging more interest than the

fixed one, he would be punished suitably in the court of *Akal Purakh* (God).<sup>xx</sup>

The author in *Prem Sumarag* also favors to join the employment (*chaakri*) of soldiering (*sipahgiri*) under some peculiar circumstances. He is of the view that if a man do want to have employment then he should get the service of a dedicated soldier. He should never indulge in looting during warfare. He should be contented with his monthly salary and should serve his master obediently and fearlessly.<sup>xxi</sup> The author reminds the Sikhs of their history and the time of *Maharaja* Ranjit Singh, who brought many reforms in his army as discipline, organization and equipment of warfare as well as he fixed the regular monthly salary of every soldier.

The author recommends a Sikh should set aside a portion of his salary for his *Guru* that may be fortieth part, a twentieth part or a tenth part as he deem fit. Thereafter, he should allocate money for his parents and *parshad*, thereafter for his personal clothing, food, and toiletry. Remaining money should be kept safe for meeting the needs of rainy season days.<sup>xxii</sup>

The division of the assets of the deceased person is another subject that has been dealt with by the author of *Prem Sumarag*. Regarding it, he writes that if any person serving under the Maharaja or wealthy person dies without bequeathing his property amongst his heirs or dies heirless, his property should first be confiscated and deposited in the royal treasury. Thereafter dues (*mutalba*) of the State should be deducted then the balance of assets should be handed over to his heirs. In a case, the deceased is a debtor then debt amount should be paid to the creditor and the remainder amount should be delivered to his heirs.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The author further clarifies that if the deceased person has no heir, then recover state's share from his property first, thereafter pay back his outstanding debt, only then his remaining property should be deposited in royal treasury under head charity (*bakshdaan*) so that it would be used for the welfare of needy persons.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Fortunately, the deceased person has daughter's son (*dohtra*), in that event, the daughter's son will be the owner of deceased property. However, he will be responsible to pay back the outstanding loan that stands in name of the deceased person.<sup>xxv</sup> It is a common belief among the people that if some one dies as debtor would be punished in the court of Almighty. Only debt free person will get salvation and can be exonerated from his sins after his death.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Further the author describes that if any direct descendents (*puttar*, *potra*, *natta*) of the person, up to fourth generation happen to survive, they are entitled to inherit the property of the deceased, In case, these descendents are not alive then the property should pass to the fourth generation of female descendents like *beti*, *potri*, *natti*. In other case, if female generation of fourth generation is not existed then it will belong to the brother, brother's son and grandson. He comments that there should be no discrimination among female descendents. If there are no such relatives; it passes to his uncles (*chacha* and *tayya*) and their descendents.<sup>xxvii</sup> The author reminds that it is better for a person to divide his property amongst daughters, daughter's sons, daughter's daughters, sisters, sister's daughters, sister's sons and brothers while he is alive.<sup>xxviii</sup>

He too writes about division of property among the offspring of first or second wife. He throws a good deal of light on the matter, If a father has property whether in form of goods or land and dies after leaving behind his four daughters of first or second wife, he explains the system of division of the property in such type of cases. One-fourth share of the property will go equally to the first and second wives provided they are live. When only one wife is alive then the whole one-fourth share of the property should go directly to her while rest of the share should go to her daughters in equal portion.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The author resolves the matter of dispute, if any arises between the father and his son over the distribution of the property. In this regard, he remarks that if such situation has actually come and they are inimical to each other also are not on speaking terms. In the meanwhile, the father passes thereby the estranged son cannot assert his claim over his father's property. However, his brothers will be legitimate claimant to their father's property.<sup>xxx</sup> In case, the estranged son has expressed sorry for his misbehavior and his father has forgiven him before his death. Only then, the son is entitled to receive his share in his father's property.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The author mentions that if an employee of the state (*maharaja*) passes away, it is the first duty of the state to ensure that the loan taken by the employee has actually been paid. Thereafter, any state dues standing in name of employee that should be deducted from his remuneration and the remaining should be given to his heirs. The state should not be temptuous for his property.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The author also covers the matter with regard to the distribution of goods that are found in kind or cash on the way. If any one finds cash while travelling, firstly, one-fourth portion of it should go to the landholder from where the goods have been recovered and the the remaining will remain with the person who has actually discovered.it. In case, the actual

owner of the property is identified later on then the property should be returned to him only after deducting one-eighth of it.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

In *Prem Sumarag* the author gives his views regarding entrusted things. If someone entrusts some valuable thing to somebody and that thing is lost or taken away by the thief, the owner of the thing should not demand the same to get back solacing that it is the Will of the God.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The author recommends that every sell or purchase should be in the form of a written document. If someone wants to sell his a horse or a cow or an elephant or any type of animal, he should inform the officer concerned and get his written document approved containing the conditions and price of saleable animal. The interested person can buy the animal of his choice if its owner has the authentic document. If he has no document, then get guarantee for it.<sup>xxxv</sup>

In *Prem Sumarag*, the author gives description regarding the mode of purchasing. If someone wants to purchase a house or a mansion or a garden or land that should not be less than the area of one *biswa*, It should also be ensured while purchasing new house that the immediate neighbour belongs to your order/religion (*panth*). Because neighbour belonging to different religion would be troublesome.<sup>xxxvi</sup> All required legal documents pertaining to house should be got ready duly signed by the witnesseses. If the current owner has purchased it from someone else, then the old documents should also to be attached with new transanction deal.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In this way, we can say that Prem Sumarag gives a lot of information about economic activities at the time of compilation of Prem Sumarag. It gives the idea about the different occupations, variety of crops, means of transportation, rate of interest and distribution of property among heirs.

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