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THE FESTIVAL OF RAKSHABANDHAN IN MUGHAL INDIA

Amit Kumar Singh*

Abstract

Rakshabandhan in Mughal India was a popular as well as elite festival. The origin of Rakshabandhan is purely Hindu but as we go back in history, we find its historical imprints especially in Mughal age. In this paper my endeavor is to find the historical imprints of the festival Rakshabandhan in Mughal period and examine how it was celebrated in both Hindu and Muslim Communities.

Keywords: Rakshabandhan Humayun Rani Karmawati Mughal India

Introduction

Prominent historian M.L. Roy Chaudhary gives an account of the festival of Rakshabandhan in Mughal India and declare Humayun as a Rakhibandh Bhai of the family of Rana of Chittaur. * Akbar went a step further and included the festival of different communities in the list of holidays of empire. Rakshabandhan day was declared a holiday by Akbar.† Jahangir also gives prominence to Rakhi.‡ Muhammad Umar argues that Akbar made it a court festival and got Rakhi tied around his wrist. Thus, it became the custom of the courtiers and other.

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* Chaudhary, M.L. Roy, "The State and Religion in Mughal India" Indian Publicity Society. Calcutta, 1978. P 318.

† Ibid 319

‡ Ibid 208, 209, 258

Rakhi in Mughal India

This practice was re-instituted by Jahagir in his 8th regional year, but after sometime, the festival was given up till it was revived by Shah Alam II. A lady used to tie Rakhi on the wrist of Shah Alam to whom he declared his sister in reciprocation of her services.[§] P.N Chpda argues that Rakhi is the greatest festival of Brahmins which is observed on the full moon day of Shravana. Though this is the festival of brothers and sisters, but the royal priests also fastened Rakhi on the right wrists of their patrons. Further, he states that Akbar made it national festival and had a Rakhi tied on his wrist on the occasion of Rakshabandhan. Jahangir during his regime revived it and ordered that “the Hindu Amirs and the head of caste should fasten Rakhis on my arms on the auspicious occasion of Rakhi.”^{**}

Rakhi as a Mughal Court Festival

The significant Mughal sources indicate that in the Mughal age Rakhi was not a popular festival whereas Rakhi was an elite class festival. As A.L Shrivastava states that Akbars conduct in the matter of celebrating of different communities was guided by political motives to please his Hindu subjects, who comprises the vast majority of the population.^{††}

In memoire of Jahangir, we find a different description about the Rakhi festival that he prohibited this practice for non- Brahmins and permitted only Brahmins to tie holy strings of silk on the occasion of Rakshabandhan. It is not mentioned in Tujuk that Jahangir ordered to tie Rakhi on his arm by Hindu Amirs and heads of regions.^{‡‡} He mentions in Tuzuk I Jahangiri that he prohibited the practice of Rakhi for all Hindus except Brahmans.^{§§}

AbulFazl says Rakhi is Hindu festival celebrated by only Brahmins. in Ain e Akbari writes ‘in month of sarvana (Sawan/July-August) purnmasa, the 15th of the light half of the month, this is the greatest festival with the Brahmans throughout the year upon which they fasten the amulet called Rakshabandhan on the right wrist of the principal people. It is a cord of silk and the like, decorated by some with jewels and pearls.’^{***}

[§] Umar, Muhammad “Islam in Northern India” MunshiramManoharlal Publication, Delhi, 1987, p.418

^{**} Chopra, P.N. “Society & Culture during Mughal age (1526-1707), Shiv Lal Agrawal and co. Agra, 1963. Pp. 96-97

^{††} Shrivastava, A.L., Akbar the Great, Vol 1, Delhi, P. 471

^{‡‡} Jahangir, “Tujuk-i-Jahangiri”. Vol.1. Eds. Henry Beveridge, low price publication, Delhi, 1989. P.246

^{§§} Ibid p 351

^{***} AbulFazl, Allami, ‘A-in ‘I Akbari, Vol-3, translated by, Colonel H.S. Jarrett, Oriental Publication, 1978.

Akbar celebrates Rakhi

Badaoni describes Rakhi as a festival of Brahmins and this tradition was adopted by Akbar as a court custom. He tied Rakhi on his wrist as a blessing of Brahmins. His descriptions in *Muntkhab-ut-Twarikh* depicts the prominent and highly respectful position of Brahmins in Akbar's reign. He writes 'On the festival of the eight day after the sun entering Virgo in this year he (Akbar) came forth to the public audience-chamber with his forehead marked as the custom of the people of India, and he had jeweled string tied on his wrists by Brahmins by way of blessing, the chief and nobles adopted the same practice in imitation of him, and presented on that day pearls and precious stones, suitable to their respective wealth and station. It became the current custom also to wear the Rakhi on the wrist, which means an amulet formed out of twisting linen rags.'^{†††} Here Rakhi is a custom which also followed by the noble of Mughal court in imitation of Emperor.

Jahangir's account of Rakhi Festival

Jahangir also gives the detailed descriptions of Rakhi festival and opines 'there is for this caste (Brahmins) as appointed day and that is the last day of the month of Savan, the second month of rainy season, they consider it an auspicious day, and the worshippers go on that day to the bank of rivers and tanks and recite enchantments, breath upon cords and coloured threads; on another day they fasten them on the hands of rajas and great men of the time, and look on them as good Omen. They called this thread Rakhi. That is preservation (Nigahdast).'^{†††} Where Akbar considered Rakhi a symbol of blessing, Jahangir took Rakhi as a means of preservation. Jahangir envisaged Rakhi a ritualized Hindu practice rather than a festival.

Conclusion

In Mughal period, though Rakhi is mentioned as greatest festival of Brahmins by AbulFazl and Badaoni but in practice we don't find any element of festivity in celebration of Rakhi in Mughal India. Rakhi was being practiced among the elite class and it was not a commoner's festival. Though in Mughal age the historical evidence of Rakhi depicts its two pictures. First in the court

^{†††} Al- Badaoni, 'Muntkhab-ut-Twarikh, Vol.2, translated and edited by W.H. Lowe, *Acadmica Asiatica* Publication. Patna, 1973, p.269

^{†††} Jahangir, "Tujuk-i-Jahangiri". Vol.1. Eds. Henry Beveridge, low price publication, Delhi, 1989. P.246

^{†††} Ibid p 244

and second by the principle people of society. Common people didn't look involved in this celebration.

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