

BASUDEV GODABARI DEGREE COLLEGE, KESAIBAHAL



BLENDED LEARNING STUDY MATERIALS UNIT - II

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

3rd SEMESTER PAPER - V

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BASUDEV GODABARI DEGREE COLLAGE, KESAIBAHAL

Self Study Modull details

Class – III Sem

Subject – History

Paper Name – History of India III (C.750-1206)

Paper - V

Unit -2

Plan unit – II

Agrarian Structure and Social change

- 1) Agricultural Expansion crops
- 2) Land lords and peasants
- 3) Proliferation of cast
- 4) Peasantization of Tribes

Date	Time	Topics Covered	
30.08.2020	10.15 to 11.15	Introduction of self study and discuss about the subject matter of an agricultural expansion crop.	
07.09.2020	10.15 to 11.15	Discuss about land lords and peasants	
14.09.2020	10.15 to 11.15	Proliferation of caste in the context of early medieval Indian	
21.09.2020	10.15. to 11.15	Discuss about the subject matter of peasantization of tribes	
28.09.2020	10.15 to 11.15	Doubt clearing class and question discussion	

You can also used the following books

Suggested text Books

- 1) Kalyani Publishers Chitaranjan Satapathy
- 2) Kitab mahal
- 3) B.D. Chattopadhyaya. The making of early medieval India
- 4) R.S. Sharma and K.M. Sri mali comprehensive History of India VOL- IV (A & B)

Learning objectives

After learning this unit you should be able to

1. Name two famous Chinese travellers of early medieval time.
2. What is Dharmasastna?
3. Why at Beruni is Famous?
4. What was the most important reason of agrarian expansion?
5. Name the four caste of Indian society.
6. What do you mean by forced labour?
7. What is double cropping on do-fasli?
8. Differentiate between land lord and peasant.
9. Who are untouchables in Indian society?
10. Define tribe.

Unit- II :

Agrarian Structure and Social Change

Chapter: 5 :
Agricultural Expansion: Crops

Chapter: 6
Landlords and Peasants

Chapter: 7
Proliferation of Castes

Chapter: 8
Peasantization of Tribes

AGRICULTURAL EXPANSION: CROPS

5

One of the major features of agrarian economy during early medieval period is agricultural expansion. This phenomenon of agricultural expansion began with the establishment of brahmadeya and agrahara settlements through land grants to Brahmanas from the 5th century C.E onwards, acquired a uniform and universal form in subsequent periods. The centuries flanked by the eighth and twelfth witnessed the processes of this expansion and the culmination of an agrarian organization based on land grants to religious and secular beneficiaries, i.e. Brahmanas, temples, and officers of the government of Indian kingdoms.

In the early medieval period agricultural expansion meant a greater and more regular use of advanced agricultural techniques, plough cultivation and irrigation technology. Institutional management of agricultural processes, control of means of production and new relations of production also played an important role in this expansion. With this expansion, new type of commercial activities in agricultural and non-agricultural commodities increased.

Historical Source

The most important source material for the study of this early medieval period is the huge number of inscriptions. Most of the inscriptions of this period are belonged to the category of copper plates or 'tamrapatta'. These copper plates recorded transfer of revenue free landed property by royal orders to recipients of the grant. The practice of issuing land grants became fully established from the fourth century onwards and assumed an all-India proportion after 600 A.D. Most of the copper plates record the creation of revenue-free grant of land gifted to a brahmanas or a religious institution. The copper plates are invaluable for understanding of rural economy, especially for understanding the process of transfer of landed property, rural settlement pattern, crops, irrigation projects, peasants and agrarian revenue demands. The grant also throws light on important merchants and craftsmen whose presence as important witnesses to the pious act of donation of land was recorded. These inscriptions also inform us about various types of market places from some of which were collected tolls and customs (sulka), thereby indicating the revenue bearing potential of trade.

Information on agricultural trade and urban centres is available from 'Dharmasastras' and 'Smritis' literature. Commentaries on these texts such as the commentaries on the Manusmriti and 'Yajnavalkyasmriti' also offer some data on this subject. Relevant data can be gleaned from technical treatises like the famous lexicon, 'Amarakosa' by Amarasimha (5th -6th centuries C.E), the 'Aahidhanachintamani' and the 'Desinamamala' by Hemachandra (11th-12th century) and the Lekhapaddhati. Some impressions of commercial activities are available in the vast creative literature, e.g. the works of Kalidasa, the 'Mrcchakatikam' of Sudraka, the 'Dasakumaracharita' of Dandin and various types of Jain texts. It is important to take note of the fact that two well known Jaina texts 'Jagaducharita' and 'Vastupalamahatmyam' were biographies of two premier merchants of early medieval Gujarat.

Non-indigenous textual materials like the Chinese accounts of Fa-hien (early 5th century C.E), Hucin Tsang (first half of the 7th century), It - sing (late 7th century) and Chau ju Kua (C.E 1225) are invaluable sources for the understanding of trade in India. Arabic and Persian texts on geography and travels by Sulaiman (C.E 851), Ibn - Khordadbeh (C.E 882), Al - Masudi (C.E 915), Buzurg - ibn - Shahriyar (C.E 995), the anonymous author of Hudud- Al- Alam (C.E 982), Al - Beruni (C.E 973-1048), and Al- Idrisi (C.E 1162) are replete with information on Indian commodities and India's trade linkages with West Asia. To this may be added the late sixth century C.E accounts of the Syrian Christian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes and the famous descriptions of India by the Venetian traveller Marco Polo (late 13th century). Coin is also an important source of this period. The gold coinage of the Gupta Emperors was imitated by a number of smaller powers in the seventh century C.E. Numismatic sources has been interpreted by some scholars as a prime indication of dwindling commerce, especially foreign trade of India during the 600-1000 period.

Agrarian Expansion

The above evidential sources suggest agrarian growth and rural expansion on an unprecedented scale. The patronage extended by kings, princes and chiefs to agriculture, improvement in irrigational facilities, increasing knowledge of agricultural sciences etc., were some of the major factors which strengthened rural economy. The declines of towns have caused the migration of a number of skilled artisans into the countryside. The dispersal of technical skill along with artisans and craftsmen into the countryside stimulated agrarian growth. Land grants in tribal frontiers brought virgin and barren lands under cultivation. About fifty ruling powers were in existence in the seventh to twelfth centuries, in the Deccan (South) and Central India. They were spread over Maharashtra, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Orissa and Bengal. The new ruling dynasties in this region issued their own land grants which indicate the existence of officials, army men etc. in their kingdoms. Each of these states depended on revenues from land and agriculture. In fact, in post-Gupta times agriculture constituted the basis of the state. Thus, the rise of states leads to the agrarian expansions.

and grant: Major reason for agricultural expansion

The agrarian expansion, which began with the establishment of brahmadaya and agrahara settlements through land grants to Brahmanas from the fourth century onwards, acquired a uniform and universal form in subsequent centuries. The centuries between the seventh and twelfth, witnessed the processes of this expansion and the culmination of an agrarian organization based on land grants to religious and secular beneficiaries, i.e. Brahmanas, temples and officers of the King's government. However, there are important regional variations in this development, both due to geographical as well as ecological factors.

However, the land grantees could neither cultivate the land themselves nor collect revenues. Hence, the actual cultivation was entrusted to peasants or sharecroppers who were attached to the land but did not legally own it. It-Sing, the Chinese pilgrim to India in the late seventh century AD informs us that most of Indian monasteries got their lands cultivated by servants and others. From the sixth century peasants and share-croppers were specifically required to stick to the land granted to the beneficiaries. So they could not move from one village to another, instead they had to live in the same village to cater to all its possible needs. Consequently a new agrarian economy emerged in the pos-Gupta period. This new agrarian economy, and the new agrarian structure in particular to be characterized by a number of salient features, such as the grant of barren as well as cultivated land, transfer of peasants to the grantees, imposition of forced labour, restrictions on the movement of the peasants, delegation of fiscal and criminal administrative power to religious beneficiaries, remuneration in land grants to officials, growth of the rights of the grantees, multiplicity of taxes, growth of a complex revenue system and wide regional variations in the agrarian structure.

Cultivation was extended not only to the hitherto virgin lands but even by clearing forest areas. This was a continuous process and a major feature of early medieval agricultural economy. There is a view prevalent among some scholars that land grants started in outlying, backward and tribal areas first and later gradually extended to the Ganga valley, which was the hub of the brahmanical culture. In the backward and aboriginal tracts the Brahmanas could spread new methods of cultivation by regulating agricultural processes through specialized knowledge of the seasons (with astronomical predictions), plough, irrigation, etc., as well as by protecting the cattle wealth. However, this is not true of all regions in India, because land grants were also made in areas of settled agriculture as well as in other ecological zones.

The chronological appearance of the land grant system shows the following pattern:

1. *Fourth-fifth centuries : spread over a good part of central India, northern Deccan and Andhra,*
2. *Fifth-seventh centuries : eastern India (Bengal and Orissa), beginnings in Western India (Gujarat and Rajasthan),*

3. *Seventh and eighth centuries*: Tamil Nadu and Karnataka,
4. *Ninth century*: Kerala, and
5. *End of the twelfth century*: almost the entire sub-continent with the possible exception of Punjab.

TYPES OF LAND GRANTS

The system of land grants was related as the gift of land, which was based on the importance of Dana. The idea of Dana or gift to Brahmanas was developed by Brahmanical texts as the surest means of acquiring merit (punya) and destroying sin (pataka).

1. *Brahmadeya (Gift to Brahmanas)*

A brahmadeya is a type of a grant of land either in individual plots or villages given away to Brahmanas making them land owners. It was meant either to bring virgin lands under cultivation or to integrate existing agricultural settlements into the new economic order dominated by a Brahmana proprietor. These Brahmanas donees played a major role in integrating various socio-economic groups into the new order, through service tenures and the peasantization of shudras in the existing brahmanical social order.

The practice of land grants as brahmadeya was initiated by the ruling dynasties and subsequently followed by chiefs, feudatories, etc. Brahmadeya facilitated agrarian expansion because they were: (a) exempted from various taxes or dues either entirely or at least in the initial stages of settlements (e.g. for 12 years); (b) also endowed with ever growing privileges (pariharas). The ruling families derived economic advantage in the form of the extension of the resource base, moreover, by creating brahmadeyas they also, gained ideological support for their political power.

Lands were given as brahmadeya either to a single Brahmana or to several Brahmana families which ranged from a few to several hundreds or even more than a thousand, as seen in the South Indian context. Brahmadeyas were invariably located near major irrigation works such as tanks or lakes. Often new irrigation sources were constructed when brahmadeyas were created, especially in areas dependent on rains and in arid and semi-arid regions. When located in areas of intensive agriculture in the river valleys, they served to integrate other settlements of a subsistence level production. Sometimes, two or more settlements were clubbed together to form a brahmadeya or an agrahara. The taxes from such villages were assigned to the Brahmana donees, who were also given the right to get the donated land cultivated. Boundaries of the donated land or village were very often carefully demarcated. The various types of land, wet, dry and garden land within the village were specified. Sometimes even specific crops and trees are mentioned. The land donations implied more than the transfer of land rights. For example, in many cases, along with the revenues and economic resources of the village, human resources such as peasants (cultivators), artisans and others were also transferred to donees. There is also growing evidence of the encroachment of the

rights of villagers over community lands such as lakes and ponds. Thus, the Brahmanas became managers of agricultural and artisanal production in these settlements for which they organized themselves in to assemblies.

2. *Secular Grants*

These types of land grants were given to the non-brahmins, officers of the state and others as a gift or remuneration. It created another class of landlords who were not Brahmanas. The gift of land on officials in charge of administrative divisions is mentioned as early as 200 A.D., but the practice picks up momentum in the post-Gupta period. From the literary works dealing with central India, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar and Bengal between the tenth and twelfth centuries references were found about the various kinds of grants to ministers, kinsmen and those who rendered military services. The rajas, raja-putras, mahasamantas; etc. Mentioned in Pala land charters were mostly vassals connected with land. The incidence of grants to state officials varies from one region to another.

3. *Devadanas (Gift to temples)*

Large scale land gifts were given to the religious establishments, both brahmanical and non-brahmanical. These centres worked as nuclei of agricultural settlements and helped in integrating various peasant and tribal settlements through a process of acculturation. They also integrated various socio-economic groups through service tenures or remuneration through temple lands. Temple lands were leased out to tenants, who paid a higher share of the produce to the temple. Such lands were also managed either by the Sabha of the brahmadeya or mahajanas of the agrahara settlements. In non-Brahmana settlements temples became the central institution. Here temple lands came to be administered by the temple executive committees composed of land owning non-brahmanas.

The supervision of temple lands was in the hands of Brahmana and non-Brahmana landed elite. The control of irrigation sources was also a major function of the local bodies dominated by landed elite groups. Thus the Brahmana, the temple and higher strata of non Brahmanas as landlords, employers and holders of superior rights in land became the central feature of early medieval agrarian organization. The new landed elite also consisted of local peasant clan chiefs or heads of kinship groups and heads of families, who had the rights of possession and supervision. In other words, several strata of intermediaries emerged between the King and the actual producer.

An important aspect relating to land grants is the nature of rights granted to the assignees. Rights conferred upon the grantees included fiscal and administrative rights. The taxes, of which land tax was the major source of revenue, theoretically payable to the King or government, came to be assigned to the donees. The amount of taxes was based on the sanction of the dharmashastras.

RIGHTS OVER AGRICULTURAL LAND

The authors of Smriti works like Yajnavalkya and Brihaspati, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land. According to them holders of rights of different grades were: the Mahipati (the king), Kshetrasvamin (the master of the land), Karshaka (cultivator) and the sub-tenant. Landgrants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-inefeudation. The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords, which lived off the surplus produced by the actual cultivators. The religious establishments in eastern India and the south with their enormous donations in land, cash, livestock etc. emerged as landed magnates at Ramagiri in Orissa and at Nalanda in Bihar. The Nalanda monastery enjoyed the gift of 200 villages. Moreover, land and villages were given away to the temples in south India during the reign of the Pallavas. The Chola records, in the succeeding period, more frequently refer to such devadana (literally 'given to gods') gifts of land.

From the Pallava period onwards temple servants were remunerated through assignments of land. The implications are obvious. Religious establishments became landed beneficiaries and in turn they gave plots of land to their dependants such as petty officials, artisans, musicians, attendants etc. Such assignments could be subleased to the actual tiller of the soil. Likewise, temple land was leased out to tenants for cultivation. Grants of land to temples from the Pallava period onwards resulted in the growth of a complex system of land tenure. Intensification of the process, especially from the eighth century onwards, created a class of peasantry which was overburdened with taxes and which was subsistent to a class of dominant landlords with superior rights in land.

Land grant charters bestowed the beneficiary with superior rights over and above those of the inhabitants in the donated villages. The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes. He could collect regular and irregular taxes and fixed and unfixed payments. The list of taxes in the inscriptions end with the expression 'adi' meaning 'et cetera' which could be used to the advantage of the landlord, when necessary. The donees enjoyed these exceptional advantages in addition to such regular taxes like: bhaga, bhoga, kara, uparikara, hiranya, udranga, halikakara, etc. In fact, the peasantry in early medieval India was subjected to an ever increasing tax and rent burden. The Vakataka grants list fourteen types of dues. The Pallava records specify eighteen to twenty two of dues.

The superior rights of the beneficiary in land are clear in the charters belonging to northern Maharashtra, Konkan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. The donees were empowered with the right to evict the peasantry at will and to replace them with new peasants. From the seventh century onwards grants give away water resources, trees, bushes and pastures to the donee. The trend accelerated after the tenth century. The transfer of these resources to the donee not only affected the peasantry of the donated villages adversely but also strengthened the power of the donees. Forced labour is referred to in the Skanda Purana. Inscriptions too suggest that by the fifth-sixth centuries vishti was a well entrenched

practice in western, central and southern India. In addition, the clause appeared in the landgrant charters asking the peasants to carry out the orders of the donee. In regions such as Chamba, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Eastern India the condition of the peasants clearly suffered a decline.

CROPS AND PLANTS CULTIVATED

Varieties of cereals, including rice, wheat and lentil; legumes, vegetables and fruits are mentioned in the Amarakosha which is dated to the Gupta period. People possessed the knowledge of fruit grafting as is evident from the Brihat Samhita. Huien Tsang mentions varieties of rice, mustard, ginger, numerous vegetables and fruits. The Harshacharita similarly provides a good account of crops and plants. We come across references to different types of rice, sugarcane, mustard, sesame, cotton, wheat, barley and pulses. Various kinds of spices such as turmeric, clove, black pepper and ginger were also grown. Vegetables such as gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, beans, garlic etc. were produced. Among fruits one may mention coconut, areca nut, jackfruit, oranges, mahua and mango. Betel leaf was also grown. Some of these plants and fruits are also recorded in the inscription of the period. Bana's Harshacharita had a wide geographical canvass and in addition to the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains it included descriptive details about Assam, Bengal and Central India.

Therefore, we come across references to bamboos, cotton plants, loads of flax and hemp bundles in Central India, and cane, bamboo and silk in the context of eastern India. In the Pallava and Chalukya territories roughly spread over Tamil Nadu, the Western Deccan and parts of Karnataka rice, millets, gingelly and sugarcane were cultivated. The fruits that were grown included plantain, jackfruit, mango and coconut. Unmistakably, the number and variety of crops, fruits and vegetables are striking. The presence of brahmanas and artisans in rural settlements, land reclamation, certain changes in technology and the expansion of irrigational facilities stimulated the proliferation of crops and plants. The consequence of all these developments was unprecedented growth of rural economy.

Indian agriculture during the early medieval period was not static. New techniques were constantly being evolved and adopted in the field of agriculture and drastic changes took place not only in terms of techniques involved but also in the patterns of crops grown. In north India there were two crop seasons: kharif and rabi. In Rajasthan it were known as 'siyalu' (autumn) and 'unhalu' (spring). In south India on the basis of specific variety of rice cultivation there existed two crop seasons 'kuddapah-kar' and 'sambpeshanam'. In south India particularly black soil areas contained enough moisture that made possible agricultural production all the year round. Certain crops like sugarcane, indigo, etc. required one year to mature. The cultivation was largely do-fasli (double cropping) unlike the European single crop production. Ibn Battuta also observes double cropping, a norm in India. He remarks, "The Indians sow twice a year. When the rain falls in their country in the hot season

they sow the autumn crop, and harvest it sixty days later. When they harvest these sixty days after sowing then, they sow the spring cereals... They are sown in the same ground where the autumn crops are sown for their land is generous and of good heart. As for rice, they sow it three times a year, and it is one of the principal cereals in their country'. S. R. Bhandari informs us that in certain cases in Punjab even three or more crops were cultivated.

In Rajasthan double cropping was possible only in clayey soils, in lighter soils it was rather rare. Crops grown on rain fed tracts fetched low prices as compared to the crops required artificial means of irrigation. A.R. Kulkarni (1969) concludes that in Maratha region, that only in the 'Des' area where black soil could be found rotation of crops was possible. Along the coastal regions where soil largely contained marine deposits was favoured for garden crops. Where irrigation facilities were available, second crop was possible otherwise in the Maratha region usually one crop was raised.

Cropping pattern still continued to be the same in the Gangetic plains. Largely wheat, barley, gram, pulses, sugarcane, cotton, oil seeds (sesame, mustard, etc.), etc. were grown in the tract. Barley was the major crop grown in Rajasthan. However, it was not the favoured crop in the regions of Bengal, Bihar and Assam. Gram was extensively produced in western Rajasthan but later its production declined sharply. In southern part of India rice was the staple crop of the region on wet lands (nancai). Other important crops grown in south India were cholam, ragi, varagu, sesame, flax, groundnut, cotton, etc. In medieval Orissa, Kashmir, and Assam also rice was the staple crop, though wheat, barley, pulses, gram, etc. were also produced in the region. In Kashmir almost 2/3rd of the land was covered under paddy cultivation grown on abi (irrigated) land. Bihar was also known for its rice production. However, in Rajasthan rice was not at all produced.

The areas flanking the Western Ghats were famous for the production of spices. Besides, spices other items of production were aniseed, cumin, coriander, caraway, dit, etc. Long pepper grew wild in the forests of Champaran (Bihar). Opium was produced largely in the regions of Malwa and Bihar. Opium, cotton and indigo were also grown in the Merta region of Rajasthan. During the medieval period san/sunn-hemp dominated over jute in terms of production in Bengal. It was also produced in Ratnagiri district in plenty, used largely for making fisherman's nets, ropes, etc. Coffee (qahawa) was a known drink among the elites. It was largely imported from Arabian Peninsula and Abyssinia. A coarse variety of it was produced in southern Maharashtra. Kashmir was known for its saffron. Among the garden crops Ibn Battuta speaks high of mangoes. Bernier is full of praise of the mangoes of Bengal, Golconda and Delhi. The entire Konkan coastal belt produced mangoes, coconuts, betel-nuts, betel-vine, areca-nuts, palm, pineapple, jack-fruit, sweet potatoes, etc. Des gardens in Maharashtra with irrigation facilities were famous for production of grapes, betel leaves, figs, etc. Alberuni found the use of betel-leaf (pan) fairly widespread in India. Amir Khusrau (13th century) in his *Ajiz-i Khusrawi* mentions as much as 42 varieties of it.

The evidences and detailed instructions on agriculture are found in the Brihat Samhita, Agni Purana, Vishnudharmottara Purana and Krishiparasara. The importance of manure for crop cultivation is clearly laid down in the Harshacharita. It is mentioned that cowdung and refuse were used for manuring the fields. The Harshacharita also speaks about different types of cultivation like: plough cultivation, spade cultivation and slash and burn cultivation. The popularity and wide prevalence of the land measure called 'hala' during this period underlines the significance of the plough. The Kashyapiyakrisisukti, a text whose core is placed in the eighth-ninth centuries, deals with all aspects of agriculture in detail.

The Harshacharita speaks of some irrigation facilities in the region around western Uttar Pradesh. It mentions such devices for irrigation as the Udghataghati and the ghatiantra. Inscriptions from Bengal mention rivers, rivulets and channels in the context of rural settlements and their boundaries and we also come across the expression devamatrika (watered by rain) suggesting the dependence of agriculture on rains and rivers. In South India tanks and reservoirs were built to irrigate the fields. In some cases they were the major landmarks in the countryside; this goes to suggest their importance.

In South India there were elected committees (eri-variyams) in the villages to look after the construction and maintenance of tanks and reservoirs. Several Pallava rulers are credited with the construction of such irrigational facilities. By the tenth century araghattas or irrigational wells were in vogue in rural south eastern Marwar in Rajasthan. It may be assumed that they had come into use at an earlier date.

During the early medieval period there was an increase in irrigation sources such as canals, lakes, tanks and wells (kupa and kinaru). The accessibility to water resources was an important consideration in the spread of rural settlements is shown by regional studies. Keres or tanks in south Karnataka, nadi (river), pushkarini (tank), srota (water channel) etc. in Bengal and ghatta-wells in western Rajasthan used to be natural points of reference whenever distribution and transfer of village lands had to be undertaken. Naturally, the concern for water resources contributed to the extension of cultivation and intensification of agricultural activities. Water-lifts of different kinds operated by man and animal power were also known. Epigraphic sources record the construction and maintenance of such irrigation works between eight and thirteenth centuries. Many of the lakes/ tanks of this period have survived well into the modern times. Some of them were repaired, revived and elaborated under the British administration. The step wells in Rajasthan and Gujarat became extremely popular in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. They were meant for irrigating the fields as well as for supplying drinking water.

The increase in the number of irrigation works was due to an advance in irrigation technology. There is evidence of the use of more scientific and permanent methods of flood control, damming of river waters, sluice construction (with piston valve and cisterns)

both at the heads of canals and of lakes and tanks. Flood control was achieved gradually through breaching of rivers for canals and mud embankments which ensured the regulated use of water resources. Maintenance of lakes/ tanks etc. i.e. desalting, bund and sluice repair was looked after by a special committee of local assemblies and cesses were levied for the purpose.

Royal permission was accorded for digging tanks or wells, when gifts were made to Brahmanas and temples. Land was demarcated for construction and maintenance of canals and tanks, etc. Digging of tanks was considered a part of the privileges enjoyed by the grantees and an act of religious merit. Hence, resourceful private individuals also constructed tanks.

Advanced knowledge about weather conditions and their use in agricultural operations is noticeable in the texts like the 'Gurusambhita' and 'Krishinarashwara'. More than one hundred types of cereals including wheat, barley, lentils, etc. are mentioned in contemporary writings on agriculture. According to the 'Shunyapurana' more than fifty kinds of paddy were cultivated in Bengal. The knowledge of fertilizers improved immensely and the use of the compost was known. Cash crops such as areca nuts, betel leaves, cotton, sugarcane, etc. find frequent mention. 'Rajashekhar' (early tenth century) tell us about the excellent sugarcane of north Bengal which yielded juice even without the use of pressing instrument. Commodity production of coconut and oranges assumed special importance in peninsular India during this period.

Marco-Polo hints at increased production of spices when he says that the city of Kinsay in China alone consumed ten thousand pounds of pepper everyday which came from India. He also mentions the great demand for Indian ginger in European markets. Harvesting of three crops and rotation of crops were known widely. Thus, advanced agricultural technology was being systematized and diffused in various parts of the country causing substantial boom in agricultural production.

DEVELOPMENT IN MARKET SYSTEM

The early medieval economic organization was a predominantly agrarian and self-sufficient village economy. Its production was mainly subsistence oriented and was not in response to the laws of the market. Craftsmen and artisans were attached either to villages or estates or religious establishments. So was no significant role for traders and middlemen. They only procured and supplied iron tools, oil, spices, cloth, etc. to rural folk. In other words, the functioning of the market system was extremely limited. After eighth century, there was a rapid increase in the number of agrarian settlements and the growth of local markets initially for local exchange. Subsequently, the need for regular exchange within a region and with other regions led to organized commerce. This in turn led to the emergence of merchant organizations, itinerant trade and partial monetisation from the ninth century. Agricultural products came to be exchanged with items of long distance trade carried on by itinerant traders. This development

also led to a change in the pattern of landownership towards the close of the early medieval period. Merchants and economically influential craftsmen, like weavers, invested and purchased lands.

IMPORTANT FEATURES OF EARLY-MEDIEVAL AGRARIAN ECONOMY

A number of views have been put forward regarding the nature of the overall set up of the early medieval agrarian economy. Some historians named it as a manifestation of feudal economy, while others called it as a peasant state - society. The salient features of 'Indian Feudalism' are:

1. *There was the emergence of hierarchical landed intermediaries like Vassals and officers of state and other secular assignee who had military obligations and feudal titles. Sub-infeudation by these donees to get their land cultivated led to the growth of different strata of intermediaries. It was a hierarchy of landed aristocrats, tenants, share croppers and cultivators. This hierarchy was also reflected in the power and administrative structure, where a new type of lord-vassal relationship emerged. Hence, there was unequal distribution of land and its produce.*
2. *Forced labour was originally a prerogative of the King or the state. But it was transferred to the Brahmana and other grantees of land, petty officials, village authorities and others. In the Chola inscriptions alone, there are more than one hundred references to forced labour. Even the peasants and artisans come within the jurisdiction of the forced labour. As a result, a kind of serfdom emerged, in which agricultural labourers were reduced to the position of semi-serfs.*
3. *Due to the growing claims of greater rights over land by rulers and intermediaries, peasants also suffered a curtailment of their land rights. Many were reduced to the position of tenants facing ever growing threat of eviction. A number of peasants were only 'ardhikas' (share croppers). The burden on the peasantry was also caused by heavy taxation, coercion and increase in their indebtedness.*
4. *With the rise of new property relations, new mechanisms of economic subordination also evolved. The increasing burden is evident in the mentioning of more than fifty levies in the inscription of Rajaraja Chola.*
5. *It was relatively a closed village economy. The transfer of human resources along with land to the beneficiaries shows that in such villages the peasants, craftsmen and artisans were attached to the villages and hence were mutually dependent. Their attachment to land and to service grants ensured control over them by the beneficiaries.*

In brief, the immobile peasantry, functioning in relatively self-sufficient villages with varna restrictions, was the marked feature of the agrarian economy during the 7th to 12th centuries. Historians, with their evidence of south Indian sources said about the existence of autonomous

peasant societies. According to their views, autonomous peasant regions called the 'nadus' evolved in south India by early medieval times. They were organized on the basis of clan and kinship ties. Agricultural production in the nadus was organized and controlled by the 'nattar' i.e. people of the nadus, organizing themselves into assemblies. Members of this assembly were velalas or non-Brahmana peasants. Their autonomy is indicated by the fact that when land grants were made by the kings, orders were issued with the consent of the 'nattar'. As per the order they demarcated the gift-land and supervised the execution of the grant because they were the organizers of production. The Brahmins and dominant peasants became allies in the production process.



LANDLORDS AND PEASANTS

6

LANDLORDS

The northern plains areas are highly fertile. Its alluvial deposits were known for high productivity, intensive cultivation and highly commercialized agriculture. Thus northern plains represented comparatively 'developed' social formations. The region was largely governed by uniform regulations during the early medieval period. The prominent social groups at the creamy layer consisted of the 'zamindars' or the landlords, petty government officials like 'muqaddam' and 'chaudhuri', rich peasants, local merchants, and moneylenders. The village also contained sizable population of the ordinary peasants, independent artisans and the village menials or labourers.

The rais, rana, and rauts of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy appear to represent 'bigger' chiefs in the rural hierarchy by thirteenth century. The chaudhuris (headman of 100 villages), khots, and muqaddams (village headmen) are the heads by the late thirteenth century. During the early medieval period the zamindar or the landlord class emerged, which for almost six hundred years occupied the centre stage in rural aristocracy. The rural elite other than their caste / clan base maintained a strong military force, including the garhis (fortresses). They enjoyed superior rights in comparison to common peasants. They were organised mainly on the basis of caste and clan ties. Their territories were often contiguous to the territories of other clan members.

At this point it will be interesting to trace the process of assimilation of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy and the growth and emergence of the zamindar class in the rural society. The origin and growth of the class of the zamindars in the emergence of the Rajputs as caste/class, a phenomenon just preceding the beginning of the medieval period.

PEASANTS

Peasants were not a homogeneous group. The rich peasants often formed part of the rural elite. They were commonly termed as khwud kashta, kalantaran, or paltis (resident cultivators, in Maharashtra they were known as thani; while in eastern Rajasthan they

were called gharuhala and in western Rajasthan the privileged class of muqati and prasatiformed this category) and halmir in Persian documents. They possessed their own granary, well, house, and ploughs. They used to get their land cultivated with the help of hired labour in addition to their family labour.

Next to the elite were the ordinary peasants (raiya, reza riya, karsas) in the rural hierarchy. They formed majority in the village. The pai/pahi kasht (in western Rajasthan they were known as osari, bahra gaon ka; outside cultivators), and the muzarian (share croppers) were next in the hierarchy. There appears to have existed considerable economic differentiation. This economic differentiation got 'reinforced and consolidated by the caste system'. Pahi (their counterpart in the Deccan was upari) were not the resident cultivator but they were peasants cultivating the lands in villages other than their own. Usually they were the migrants from the neighbouring villages/porgonos to the villages either deserted or where cultivable land was available. They were generally assessed at concessional rates (1/3 of the produce). The village patel (village headmen) normally played an important role in bringing these new asamis (pahi). State encouraged the pahi to settle in new villages. In such cases ploughs, oxen, manure and money were provided by the state. There appears to be a tendency on the part of higher castes to opt for pahi (outside cultivators) cultivation and get the assessment done at concessional rates. There is also some evidence to suggest that there was a tendency on their part to convert the pahi land into khwud kashta holdings. However, they did not possess the right to sell their holdings or assign them on ijara (revenue farming).

The burden of taxation was probably highest upon the peasants in medieval period. A late seventeenth century dastur-ulamal of porgono Jhakin eastern Rajasthan clearly illustrates that the raiyats had to pay at the rate of 50 percent of the produce, while patels, patwaris, mahajans, and pahi paid 40 per cent; the Rajputs were to pay 25-33 per cent; while the chaudhuris and qanungoes were charged even less (25 per cent). Khwud kashta peasants were also exempted from paying their cesses like house and marriage taxes. These small peasants were constantly under debt for meeting the expenses for purchasing seed, plough, oxen, etc.

The pahi had the permission to build their own establishments (chhaparbandi) and they possessed their own ploughs. These pahi were instrumental in the growth and expansion of cultivation. Since the land was available in abundance these pahi could assume the proprietorship (malik). Thus the khwud kasht (self cultivated) and pahi kasht were infact not mutually exclusive categories, instead the division between the two was not very rigid. However, during the nineteenth century as a result of introduction of proprietorship laws the position of the pahi got reduced to tenants at-will.

The muzarian were the tenants who used to cultivate the land of superior castes/landholders. They also served as state sponsored tenants. In that case they were asked to cultivate surplus lands or abandoned lands. In the village there were also share-croppers. They were

referred to in Rajasthani documents as sanjhedars. Rajasthani documents show that these share-croppers were assessed at differential rates. One who belonged to superior castes was normally assessed at concessional rates; while the peasants had to pay the land tax at normal rates.

In western Rajasthan, there was another category of peasants called basi. These basi peasants are those peasants who 'would move wholesale with their master to new 'settlements'. They were not necessarily cultivating the land of the village where they would reside instead they could cultivate more than one village's land.

Generally speaking peasants were hard pressed. Even though they were proprietors, their position was almost like semi-serfs for they were not allowed to abandon the land. In case of their flight officials were asked to bring them back by the use of force. Peasants often took money from moneylenders to pay land revenue, and for seeds, oxen, etc. as well as for maintaining their life. On account of high interest rates these loans amounted to as high as five times the principal amount in some cases.

The cultivation of superior landholders largely depended upon agricultural labourers (majurs, halis). These landless labourers/'menial castes' formed about one sixth to one fifth of the village population. The 'menial castes' were prohibited to take on agriculture thus provided a vast battery of 'reserve' labour force. Tanners, scavengers, dhanukers, etc., when not pursuing their professions, worked as agricultural labourers. They were compelled to perform begar (forced labour) by the superior castes. The agricultural labourers/menials were so crucial in the rural society that they formed 'pillar of Indian peasant agriculture'. Another important aspect of medieval rural society was complete absence of agricultural slaves, though the slavery was rampant in the urban areas.

The above description clearly points out that the medieval rural society was highly stratified. This stratification was the result of many factors like: (a) availability of seeds, oxen, agricultural implements, Persian wheel, wells for irrigation, etc. as the resource base; (b) the higher castes were assessed at lower rates and lower castes had to pay revenue at much higher rate; (c) nature and pattern of crops produced further intensified the gulf, that those who could produce cash crops would be better placed than those cultivating food crops.



PROLIFERATION OF CASTE

The early medieval period was a period of proliferation and fragmentation. The existing Varnas were split up into many castes and numerous new tribes and castes were annexed to and incorporated within them.

Increasing pride of birth, characteristic of feudal society, and the accompanying self-sufficient village economy, which prevented both spatial and occupational mobility, gave rise to thousands of castes in India during the early medieval Period. The changes in economy were also a result of emergence of certain new castes and decline of certain old ones. For example, the constant transfer of land of land revenues made by princes to priests, temples and officials led to the rise and growth of the scribe or the Kayastha caste which undermined the monopoly of Brahmans as writers and scribes. Similarly, the decline of trade and commerce led to the decline in the position of the Vaishyas. The process of proliferation and multiplication of castes was yet another marked feature of the social life of the period. Many new communities, which are known to us by the generic term Rajputs, were also recognized as Kshatriyas during the period. The foreign elements, which could not be put in any three higher classes, were naturally designated as the Shudras. The guilds of artisans gradually hardened into castes due to lack of mobility in post-Guptas times. The maximum affected people were the Shudra and the mixed castes.

The process of proliferation appears to be most striking among the Brahmans. The Brahmans stood at the top of the social hierarchy during and post Gupta period. They had regained their power and were responsible for reinterpreting the regulatory canons of life as laid down by the earlier texts. However, Brahmans had numerous subsections now divided on the basis of many criteria such as knowledge of Vedas etc. Getting birth in a Brahmin family was a privilege. Brahmans had freedom from death-sentence, exemption from taxes, precedence on the road, lesser punishment for certain offences in comparison with other castes. Many writers have documented the exemption of the Brahmans from capital punishment. The most severe punishment for a Brahmin was banishment. When a Brahman killed a man, the former

had only to fast, pray and give alms. On the other hand, if somebody killed a Brahmin, he was ought to be greatest sinner and performed the worst crime. No punishment or remorse could wipe off the *Brahman-hatya*, the greatest crime of those periods!

Many Brahman castes were named after the type of ritual they practiced or the branch of Vedic learning they cultivated but the most important factor in the multiplication of their castes was the growth of strong localism. In land charters the brahmans are identified by their gotra, by the male ancestor's names sometimes extending up to four generations by the branch of Vedic learning and finally by the original home the village from where they come. By late medieval times the Brahmans of Radha, Bengal, had come to be divided into 56 sub castes based on their original villages. In the fourteenth century Harisimhaddeva determined the relative status of the Maithil brahmans, who came to be divided into about 180 original homes and eventually their total original homes or sub castes shot up to about 1,000. If the total Maithil population is taken as 150,000, it will roughly mean one sub caste for every 1500 Maithils. An eleventh century Pala grant shows that sometimes a brahman was identified by his connection with as many as three villages, and the practice became more widespread later.

In the Kshatriya community proliferation was caused mainly by the emergence of a new people called the Rajputs. No other community developed so much of racial and family pride as the Rajputs did. Some of them may have descended from the original Kshatriya stock. Probably the Kalukyias, Palas, Candellas etc., were local tribes who were given respectable Kshatriya lineage by the Brahman genealogists. The Bactrian Greeks, Shakas, Parthians etc., because of the absence of any strong religion or culture of their own, were absorbed into the Hindu social system as second class Kshatriyas. Really the Kshatriya castes multiplied from the 5th and 6th centuries when Central Asian people such as the Huans and Gurjars joined their ranks as Rajputs.

Vaishyas in the early medieval India were almost degraded to the Shudra community. In fact, Alberuni also did not find any difference between the Vaishyas and Shudra. If you are a Vaishya or a Shudra, and you dared to recite the Vedas, your ruler would cut off your tongue! One difference was that the Shudra had freedom to sell all kinds of goods, but the Vaishya were forbidden to carry on transactions in some specified articles like salt, wine, meat, curds, swords, arrows, water, idols etc.

The sudras came to have the largest number of castes in early medieval times. The earliest law books mention 10 to 15 mixed castes, but the law books of Manu, a work of the 1st century, enumerates 61 mixed castes. A huge increase in the number of Sudra castes can be inferred from the *Vaijayanti* and also from the *Abhidhanacintamani*. Some texts state that thousands of mixed castes are produced as a result of the connection of Vaisya women with men of lower castes. The conquest of the backward peoples living in the jungles and forests by brahmanised princes from agriculturally advanced areas enormously added to the number and variety of Sudra castes. Priests granted land in many subjugated territories where they

inducted the indigenous aboriginal tribal peoples into their cultural fold. This process may have been also peaceful, but peaceful or otherwise is succeeded because of the superior material culture of the brahmins who not only taught new scripts, languages and rituals to the preliterate people but also acquainted them with plough cultivation, new crops, season calendar, preservation of cattle wealth etc. The tribal peoples were not always given the same place in the Brahminical order and even the same tribe broke up into several Varnas and castes.

The middle ages saw a phenomenal growth in the number of impure sudras or untouchables, who were first noted in the 4th century. Medieval legal texts describe the untouchables as eaters of cows. Twelve categories of untouchables are mentioned in early medieval law books but the actual number might be much more. Detailed rules in the law books suggest an increase in the number of chandals. It is difficult to explain this large increase in the number of untouchables.

Most untouchable castes were backward tribes whose induction into the Hindu system was accomplished through brahmanisation and through the spread of Hinduised Buddhism. Certain tribal people could not be fully absorbed in the Hindu society because of their being very backwardness and hence had to be pushed to the position of untouchables or possibly those who offered stiff resistance to the process of conquest and Hinduisation were dispossessed of their lands in the villages and forced to settle outside.

Since brahmanisation took place on a very large scale in early medieval times the number of untouchable castes increased substantially. In earlier times certain varieties of hunters and artisans were rendered untouchables, but now even some agriculturist castes were condemned to this position. This may have happened not so much on account of the hatred of princes and priests for agriculture as on account of their contempt for the backward agriculturists who opposed the new order. On the other hand the fact that a good number of sudras were reduced to the position of untouchables must have given satisfaction to the remainder who now practically took the place of the vaisyas in social hierarchy.

Another significant process which led to the multiplication of Sudra castes was the transformation of crafts into castes. As trade and commerce weakened in post Gupta times craft guilds tended to become stagnant, immobile, more hierarchical and more localised. Trades and guilds gradually constituted themselves into closed exclusive groups resembling castes for all practical purposes. Craft villages are mentioned in ancient texts, but now they find place in medieval inscriptions. Thus we hear of two villages which belonged to the potter caste. Modern specialisation means skill and proficiency in the craft wherever and whenever it can be acquired but medieval specialisation meant attachment to the master, to his place, and to the family which practiced the craft.

Another factor for proliferation of castes was religious affiliation. The parallel between the multiplication of sects and that of castes in medieval times is very close, and the former helped

the latter. Savism, Vaisnavism, Buddhism and Jainism- each one of these religions proliferated into numerous sects not so much due to basic differences in doctrines as due to minor differences in rituals and even the food and dress, which all were sustained by regional practices. Between the followers and the Supreme God, the teacher acted as an intermediary just as a vassal acted as an intermediary between the actual tiller of the soil and the king. In course of time members of the sect began to behave as members of a caste. They remained confined to their sects and refused to inter-dine and sit together with members of another sect. By late medieval times these sects became full-fledged castes.

The Varna system was also modified by transformation of the sudras into cultivators and the relegation of the vaisyas to the position of the sudras with the result that the newly founded Brahminical order in Bengal and South India provided mainly from Brahmans and sudras. The most spectacular development was the proliferation of castes which affected the Brahmans, the Rajputs and above all the sudras. These social changes can be understood in terms of a strong sense of feudal localism fostered by closed economic units on intense preoccupation with land and in the context of the absorption of the tribal peoples into the Brahminical fold through conquests and land grants.

Crafts based caste groups

Another significant process that further advanced the process of proliferation of jatis was the process where the crafts were transformed into caste groups. The guilds and the trader groups, the srenis themselves acquired caste status and became closed groups. The head of a guild is often referred to as the jetthaka or pamukkha in early Buddhist literature. Often he is referred to after the occupation followed by the guild of which he was the head, e.g., 'head of garland makers' (malakara jetthaka), 'head of carpenters' guild' (vaddhaki jetthaka), etc. Setthis were merchant-cum-bankers and often headed merchant guilds. The guild head could punish a guilty member even to the extent of excommunication. It appears that normally headship of a guild went to the eldest son. Succession is mentioned only after the death of the head and not in his lifetime, which would suggest that the head remained in office life-long. We can also locate the emergence of local crafts into castes groups as mixed castes such as the napita, tambulika, citrakara, svarnakara, malakara, modaka, and many others. These obviously were various crafts where the people involved in those crafts emerged as new jatis in the mixed caste group. We do get references to crafts villages such as the Kumbharapadraka that belonged to the potters. Along with the crafts the religious affiliation too played a role in the proliferation of jatis. The emergence of various sects had close affinity with the jatis they emerged from and the gods they worshipped.

The process of proliferation of the caste and jati was initiated in the early historical phase as the urbanization spread in the sub-continent under the Mauryan rule. This process was consolidated in the early medieval context. It engulfed the agrarian as well as the nonagrarian groups such as the pastoralists, the gatherers hunters and the forest dwellers.

The process was not limited to the higher caste groups alone as has been observed above, but was certainly geared to gain a high caste status in order that wealth and power could be obtained and legitimized. The high ranking in the caste group went with resultant wealth and power. The process was certainly hierarchical in nature and sought to legitimize the power and the wealth of the high caste groups. Thus, the caste groups consolidated, either in a feudal mode or in an integrated emerging polity across the length and breadth of the subcontinent. This consolidation was not limited to the higher caste groups alone but as a phenomenon was experienced across the entire social spectrum.

Indian society had degenerated in general during the period. In fact, it was almost a 'decaying society.' The caste system had divided the Hindu society into several castes and classes and injected the venom of humiliation, inequality, prejudices, untouchability and hatred among several sections. Following were the chief features of the Indian society:

1. *The society became fragmented into innumerable castes and sub-castes due to the absorption of foreign elements into the Hindu fold.*
2. *Members of the original castes discarded their prescribed functions and entered occupations that suited their skill, interest and economic prospects.*
3. *Land grants and seizure of power gave rise to several types of landed people. With the strength of greater power and landed property a person sought a high position even if he belonged to a lower Varana. This created a complex situation as those who were economically well off but socially belonging to a low caste, they had to be accommodated in the society, for money wielded a power which the society could not ignore. So new rules had to be framed to recognise the position of the landed gentry.*
4. *The tribal people were also admitted into the Hindu society, and thus every tribe was now given the status of a separate caste.*
5. *Emergence of the tantricism into religion led to the use of magic spells and belief in several types of superstitions.*
6. *The Hindu society lost its liberalism.*
7. *The Indians lost contact with the outside world.*
8. *The practices of 'Sati' or 'Jauhar' and polygamy from which Indian society suffered increased.*
9. *The number of 'Devdasis' and prostitutes increased.*
10. *Education was confined to a 'few sections of society'.*

The post-eighth century social organization which seems to have prevailed till the establishment of the Turkish political power in the thirteenth century, was marked by: (a) modifications in the varna system such as the transformation of shudras into

cultivators thereby bringing them closer to the vaishyas, (b) newly founded brahmanical order in Bengal and South India wherein the intermediary varnas were absent, (c) rise of the new literate class struggling for a place in the varna order, (d) phenomenal increase in the rise of new mixed castes, (e) unequal distribution of land and military power, which, in turn, accounts for the emergence of feudal ranks cutting across varna distinctions, and (f) increasing evidence of social tensions. This social change led to the proliferation of caste as a whole.



PEASANTIZATION OF TRIBES

The tribes were largely semi-nomadic in nature and of pastoral variety. The dominant form of sustenance among the tribal communities was pastoralism. There was subtle movement of the tribals towards sedentarisation. (This process of sedentarisation of the pastoralists continued unabated throughout the medieval period. The commercialization of agriculture and the increase in the extent of cultivation were the two crucial factors behind this transformation. The assimilation of tribes into rural social categories could be discerned by different terminology used for them by modern historians and contemporary chroniclers. In the case of Jat tribe this process is clearly evident.) As they moved northwards they abandoned pastoralism and opted sedentary agriculture. Yuan Chwang mentions them as cattle herders. Similarly, in the Persian translation, they were referred to as pastoralists, soldiers and the boatmen. (Alberuni (c. 1030 AD) records them as 'cattle-owners and low Sudra people'. Irfan Habib (1976) argues that their northward migration in southern Punjab from Sindh towards Multan occurred sometime around 11th century.)

Assimilation of tribal society in agricultural society

The tribal societies that got assimilated into agricultural society appear to have subsumed their tribal identity with some sort of 'caste' in the existing rural caste based multi layered hierarchical society. The social position of these tribals so assimilated into the rural society was often fragile. D.D. Kosambi in his 'An Introduction to the Study of Indian History' argues that tribal 'elements being fused into a general society' got assimilated into the broader social structure. Their status in the hierarchical varna categories largely depended on the profession they pursued. Agricultural communities, generally speaking, joined the peasant caste of that region. However, the hunting-gathering tribal groups generally formed the lowest ranks, outside the four fold varnas. Irfan Habib believes that the tribals formed a substantial part of rural 'menial proletariat'.

Historians have tended to broadly distinguish between brahmanic and nonbrahmanic villages in this period. Within brahmanic villages, a further distinction is

made between an 'agrahara' (a settlement of brahmanas) and 'devadana' (a settlement oriented around a temple). The intervention of brahmanas in rural society involved the imposition of bureaucratic and priestly elite. It imposed a level of 'Sanskritization' on local cultures. This was established through the 'varna-jati' system with its ideology of difference and well-defined hierarchies. At the ground level, however, it is nearly impossible to order rural society into the idealized categories of the 'Dharmashastra' texts. Within villages there existed a range of groups - from brahmanas to samantas (officials), peasant castes and servile groups. Meanwhile, the transformation of tribes into castes or the 'peasantization of tribes' was gaining rapidity in this period. The medieval period, in particular, was to see the rise of peasant castes like the Jats and ruling lineages like the Rajputs to the centre stage of history. While the varna system provided the overall normative model for such 'incorporation', the categorization of jati allowed for regional variations in the relative positioning of such groups.

Socio-economic aspect of feudalism

The socio-economic aspect of feudalism in India was intimately connected with the transformation of the Sudras and tribals into peasants from the Gupta period onwards. In the older settled areas Sudra labourers seem to have been provided with land. In the backward areas a large number of tribal peasantry was annexed to the Brahmanical system through land grants, and they were called Sudras. Therefore, Huien Tsang describes the Sudras as agriculturists, a fact corroborated by Al-Beruni about four centuries later.

The rise of the Sudra and tribal peasants is another important development of early medieval period. There is sufficient reason to believe that Sudras were also becoming peasants in good numbers, as several law-books show that land was rented out to the Sudra and tribal for half the crop. This would suggest that the practice of granting land to Sudra sharecroppers was becoming more common. Huien Tsang describes the Sudras as a class of agriculturists, a description which is confirmed by the Narasimha Purana compiled before the tenth century A.D. Thus, from the point of view of the rise of feudalism the transformation of Sudras from the position of slaves and hired labourers into that of agriculturists should be regarded as a factor of great significance.

Land grants led to peasantization of tribes

The point has been made that the land grants opened virgin land to cultivation in Bengal and elsewhere. This obviously is done on the basis of the use of the terms khila, aprahata, which indicate grant of uncultivated land. When cultivated and settled areas were made over, many of these terms continued to be used as a matter of convention in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The forest area containing the land endowed to more than one hundred Brahmins is described as "having no distinction of natural and artificial". Instances of land grants made to numerous Brahmins through the same charter in backward or less developed areas are many. The Nidhanpur copperplates of Bhaskarvarman speak of land grants to more than two hundred Brahmins in the Sylhet region, now in Bangladesh during the seventh century.

The result of settling so many Brahmans would not be not only to strengthen state authority in the area of Sylhet but also to develop the area agriculturally. The donation of land in a backward area created obvious possibilities for the expansion of agriculture (A new expertise was brought by the priestly and the other beneficiaries who migrated from the middle Gangetic plains or similar advanced areas in search of better livelihood. For example the knowledge of calendar which could impart a good idea of the rainy and sowing seasons.) The tribal people were beef eaters and killed cattle indiscriminately. The Brahmans inculcated the idea of the preservation of the cattle wealth which naturally gave a boost to agrarian economy. Since the Brahmans had to organize production themselves, they needed ploughmen and cultivators. The idea of inferiority and superiority embedded in the Varna hierarchy could enable them to mobilize the tribal people and fringe Hindus for peasantry.

Agricultural Expansion: A major factor for peasantization of tribes

Agrarian expansion led to the peasantization of tribes. There are indications of agrarian expansion in the early middle ages. Several texts deal with the founding of villages. The importance of the village looms large in the 'Mayamata', covers a chapter called the layout of villages (This is a text probably during the Chola times. Similarly, the Silparatna, has a chapter dealing with the traits of villages. The explosion in rural settlements in the early medieval period, when the status of kings was determined according to the number of villages he possessed. It is easy to estimate the rural population. Hsuan Tsang's figures for Harsa's army may enable us to speculate on its size in northern India. The Chinese pilgrim tells us that Harsa maintained sixty thousand war elephants and one hundred thousand cavalry.) Each of the tribes is more than three times the number given by classical writers for the Maurya horses and elephants. The figures for Harsa's army therefore suggest rapid increase of population in northern India. R.S Sharma hence proposes that, since towns generally show decline in the seventh century this could be seen as nothing else than an explosion of the population in the countryside. It is impossible to think so such an explosion without tremendous agrarian growth.

Urban contraction and migration of people to villages

Urban contraction was an important cause of agrarian expansion. Western India provides many examples of migrations of town dwelling Brahmans to the countryside where they were donated land by the ruling class.) This would boost production because of the increasing burden of rent on the peasants. This factor could also push production in backward regions which would additionally benefit from the introduction of better knowledge of agriculture by the beneficiaries. (In some texts there were also evidences of the work of paddy producing areas, in the tenth century there were evidences of recipes for treating the diseases affecting the plants.) Special attention was also given to horses, which were in great demand by the chiefs and princes for their cavalry and personal use. (Animal husbandry was improved because of advances made in the treatment of cattle disease. The knowledge of fertilizers improved immensely and the use of the compost was known. Innovations in agricultural

techniques may be noted, like the big plough and pounder which was used for turning the hard soil. Irrigation facilities were expanded, and the law books lay down severe punishments for those who cause damage to tanks, wells, ponds, embankments. Wells were meant for irrigation in the fields but they would be equally useful for supplying drinking water and also for irrigating gardens. There were also machines for lifting water that were operated by men, oxen or elephants. The use of iron implements attained a new peak in this period.)

The increase in the number of varieties of cereals including rice, wheat and lentil as well as in fruits, legumes, vegetables etc., is striking. According to the Sunya Purana more than fifty kinds of paddy cultivated in Bengal. It will thus appear that introduction of new crops, expansion of irrigation facilities and innovation in agricultural techniques contributed to the growth of agriculture. It seems that agriculture and agrarian settlements in the middle ages received special attention from the rulers, landed beneficiaries and immigration artisans. The knowledge of irrigation techniques, paddy transplantation, preparing fertilizers, weather conditions based on observations, various kinds of cereals as well as some other aspects of agriculture was systematized and diffused in various parts of the economy. The most striking feature is the rise of nearly fifty states, each with an agrarian base. In this period we hardly know of any state which owed its existence to trade considerably or significantly.

Land grants not only contributed to agrarian growth but also shaped the social configuration in the countryside. This was an alternate social structure of the peasantry. The indication of the beneficiaries armed with numerous fiscal and administrative rights lowered the status of peasants. There is clearly a differentiation in the countryside. Members of the upper caste Varnas continued to enjoy high status but elderly persons of the village apparently peasants were now replaced by a different category comprising 'greater' or 'greatest' men called mahattara and mahatma respectively. Ranking among the peasantry was now based on fiscal and administrative authority and not mainly on birth. The village elders or headmen were apparently qualitatively and functionally different from the general run of cultivators or peasants who ordinarily belonged to low castes and tribes and they were the actual tillers of the soil. If these village elders and peasants are seen as various levels of beneficiaries they give a clear idea of hierarchy of subinfeudation in the countryside.

In the first part of the medieval period two distinct trends can be discerned. One is the contraction of towns and the other is the extension of villages. Rural expansion seems to have been facilitated by the migration of artisans to the country where they formed part of the jajmani system.) The six hundred years following the third century saw the expansion of the self-sufficient village and the contraction of the urban sector dominated by crafts and commerce. The economic ties between the village and 'the new town' became one-sided. The town depended on the taxes collected from the villages but contributed very little to its economy. The 'new urban' phenomenon marked by garrisons, palaces, pilgrim centres and temple establishments better suited the landlord and the feudal system of the classical type. It neither

posed a threat to the rural aristocracy nor created conditions for the liberation of the struggling peasantry. Such a development naturally detracted from the dynamism of the early medieval period.

It is clear from the above discussion that proliferation of caste and peasantization of tribes did exist during medieval times in India. It led to the solidification of castes and the intermixing of the existing ones.) Tribal people too were brought into the light of proliferation and were taken under the brahmanical order. Furthermore, an interesting factor and contributor to proliferation of castes is the creation of sects within religions that came to be subsequently be created as castes later on. All these factors, in the opinion of R.S. Sharma, play a role in agrarian expansion during the middle ages. This is consequently seen with the advancements in irrigation, tools, and other novelties, hence there is an increase in not only the agrarian base but also an intellectual base with the coming in of new innovations and a new knowledge and know how. (Hence, it is clear to say that these processes did relate to the expansion of agriculture and an agrarian base. The expansion of agriculture ultimately led to the peasantization of tribes.)



17. In South India the village body entrusted the duty of looking after the construction and maintenance of tanks and reservoir were known in which name?

Ans. (*Eri-varlyams*)

18. Advanced knowledge in weather condition and their use in agricultural operation is noticeable in which text?

Ans. (*Guru samhita and Krishinarashwara*)

19. Forced labour was originally a prerogative of whom?

Ans. (*King*)

20. Basi was a category of peasants living in which part of India?

Ans. (*Western part of Rajasthan*)

Fill in the blanks:

1. The gift of land to Brahmana is called _____.

Ans. (*Brahmadeya*)

2. The gift of land to temples is called _____.

Ans. (*Devadana*)

3. The most important source material to study about Indian Agriculture during medieval times is _____.

Ans. (*Inscriptions*)

4. Most of the inscriptions of this period are belonged to the category of _____.

Ans. (*Copper plates or tamrapatta*)

5. _____ is the writer of Amar-kosa.

Ans. (*Amar Singha*)

6. Jaina text Tabadu charita and Bastu palamahatmyam were biographised on two premium merchants of _____.

Ans. (*Gujarat*)

7. _____ was the Chinese pilgrim to India in the late seventh century.

Ans. (*It-sing*)

8. The supervision of temple land was normally in the hand of _____.

Ans. (*Brahmana*)

9. Mahipati was a term used to describe _____.

Ans. (*King*)

10. Kshetraswami was a term used for _____.

Ans. (*The master of the land*)

11. In early medieval times Kershaka was a term used to describe _____.

Ans. (*Cultivator*)

12. Nalanda Monastery was situated in _____ state.

Ans. (*Bihar*)

Model Questions

UNIT - II

(CHAPTER - 5, CHAPTER - 6, CHAPTER - 7 & CHAPTER - 8)

1 Mark Questions:

Answer the following in one word:

1. What was the main reason for expansion of agriculture in early medieval times?
Ans. (*Land grant*)
2. How many types of land grants were there in India in early medieval period?
Ans. (*Three types*)
3. Who was the Chinese traveller to visit India during the first half of the seventh century?
Ans. (*Huen Tsang*)
4. In which year the Arab traveller Al-idrisi visited India?
Ans. (*1162 A.D*)
5. Who was the Venetian traveller to visit India in 13th century?
Ans. (*Marcopolo*)
6. Who was the writer of Abhidhan Chintamani?
Ans. (*Hemachandra*)
7. Nalanda Monastery enjoyed the gift of how many villages?
Ans. (*200 villages*)
8. The idea of "Dana" or gift was developed by which text?
Ans. (*Brahmanical text*)
9. According to which text more than fifty kinds of paddy were cultivated in Bengal.
Ans. (*Sunya purana*)
10. Who were Maqaddams in early medieval times?
Ans. (*State officials*)
11. What is common among the terms Bhoga, Hiranya, Udranga, Haliakora?
Ans. (*All are taxes paid to king*)
12. In which purana the term "force labour" is mentioned?
Ans. (*Skanda purana*)
13. Which foreign traveller has mentioned in his book about the double crop pattern in India?
Ans. (*Ibn-Batuta*)
14. In which region of India spices were produced in large quantities?
Ans. (*The region flanking of Western Ghat*)
15. Which region produced the largest quantity of mangoes in India?
Ans. (*Bengal*)
16. Udghataghati and Ghatiyatra were related to what?
Ans. (*Devices used for irrigation*)

13. Bhaga was a type of _____ paid to king.

Ans. (*tax*)

14. Uparikara was a type of _____ paid to king.

Ans. (*tax*)

15. The proliferation of caste was most prominent among _____.

Ans. (*Brahmins*)

16. _____ stood at the top of social hierarchy.

Ans. (*Brahmins*)

17. The most important reason for the peasantisation of tribes was _____.

Ans. (*Agrarian expansion*)

2 mark question.

1. What is Dharmasastra?
2. Name two famous Chinese travellers of early medieval times.
3. Why Al-Beruni is famous?
4. What was the most important reason of agrarian expansion?
5. Name some important crops cultivated by farmers during early medieval times.
6. Who was Marco-polo? When did he visit India?
7. Name the four castes of Indian society.
8. Who supervised the temple lands?
9. What do you mean by forced labour?
10. What is double cropping or do-fasli?
11. In which part of India spices were produced in large quantity during early medieval times?
12. Which part of India produced mangoes in large quantities?
13. What was the duty of Karanas?
14. Who are untouchables in Indian society?
15. Define tribe.

3 mark questions:

Write short note on following within 6 sentences:

1. Crops cultivated during early medieval times.
2. Types of land grants during the period 700-1200 A.D.
3. Brahmadeya
4. Temple Grants
5. Secular grants
6. Sources of information on agriculture during early medieval period.
7. Market facility for farmers during early medieval times.
8. Geographical pattern of agrarian expansion during early medieval times.
9. Indian caste system.

10. Craft based caste groups during early medieval India.
11. Rise of new mixed castes.
12. Rise in the states of Sudras.
13. Social disabilities of untouchables.
14. Assimilation of tribes into Hind caste society.
15. Rise of new sub-castes among Brahmin.
16. Rise of new literate classes.
17. Growing rigidity of social order.
18. Peasantisation of tribes.
19. Rise of Sudra peasants.
20. Agrahara.

Long Questions:

1. Discuss the various factors leading to agricultural expansion during early medieval times.
2. Analyse the main features of agrarian relation during early medieval times.
3. Write a descriptive note on various crops cultivated in India during early medieval period.
4. Discuss in brief about the types of land grants during early medieval India.
5. Analyse in brief about the various agricultural facilities provided to farmers during early medieval times.
6. Trace the circumstances leading to the evolution of landlordism in India during the period 700-1200 A.D.
7. Differentiate between landlord and peasant.
8. Describe the various duties and obligations of a peasant to landlord.
9. Discuss the various reasons for the proliferation of castes during early medieval India.
10. What do you mean by proliferation of caste? Discuss the various factors for the rise of new castes in India.
11. Write a brief note on status of untouchables during early medieval times.
12. Discuss the various factors responsible for degeneration of Indian society during the period 700 - 1200 A.D.
13. Was the proliferation of castes and jatis limited to the upper caste only? Comment.
14. What do you mean by peasantisation of Tribes? Discuss it in detail.
15. Discuss the factors responsible for the peasantisation of tribes.
16. Examine the circumstances under which the tribes became peasants?