

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE  
OF The MIDDLE GANGETIC BASIN  
(A.D. 700 — A.D. 1250)**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**1985**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE MIDDLE GANGETIC BASIN (AD 700-AD 1250)" submitted by Mr KUMAR AIKLEY in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

I recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy.

  
(SUVIRA JAISWAL)  
CHAIRPERSON

  
(SUVIRA JAISWAL)  
SUPERVISOR

To  
Anma  
in  
Loving Memory

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Last but not least, I must express gratitude to my Bhabhis Mrs Madhu Verma and Mrs Rekha Verma for giving me inspiration from time to time.

New Delhi

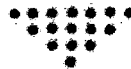
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## INTRODUCTION

### I

The period following the downfall of the Guptas was characterised as the 'dark period' by the conventional historians on account of the 'absence' of large territorial empires. Of late this has drawn the attention of various scholars who have presented a good volume of many enlightening works dealing with the socio-economic and political conditions of the time. Apart from the variations in their theoretical approach in characterising this period on various models, what comes out unanimously from their studies is the fact that the early medieval period was the crucible of many significant structural changes in the realm of society and polity.

The significance of the early medieval period (AD 700-1250) lies in the fact that it marked a departure from the earlier socio-economic setup. It will be our endeavour to examine these changes which is seen as representing a distinct socio-economic formation characterised as Indian feudalism in the context of the social and political structure of the middle-Gangetic basin during the period under review.

Chapter I deals with the physical setting of the region. The topographic variations, the river systems, the fertility of soil, the irrigational facilities and their cumulative effect on the course of history have been examined.

Chapter II deals with the social structure of the middle Gangetic basin as inferred from various inscriptions and literary sources. The chapter describes various castes, their traditional occupations as enunciated in the earlier Sūtra and Smṛti texts and the changes occurring in their occupations and positions in the caste hierarchy during this period. The chapter seeks to describe the proliferation, changing position and role of different castes in the society.

Chapter III is an attempt to analyse the political structure in the light of the recent theories put forward to characterise the early medieval polity. It also deals with the general administration of the period and various grades of officials and the position of the sāmānt - as in the light of the land-grants of the region under review.

## II

As compared with the earlier periods of Indian history, the period under review is rich in source material, both literary and epigraphic. No doubt we do not have a work like Arthaśāstra of Kautilya but specialised works on several aspects of economic and political life are not wanting.

Of literary sources the Purāṇas, the Kāvya, the dramas, the short stories, the smṛtis and their commentaries, the smṛti digests, anthologies and works on grammar, philosophy, technology, information on the land system and

political structure of our area and period. The commentary by Medhātithī on the Manusmṛti is an important source for our period, as Medhātithī refers to the practices of his times.

The Kṛtya Kalpataru of Lakṣmīdhara (12th century), the Minister of Gāhaḍavāla King is in the form of a digest, which sheds important light on the various aspects of the period. Among the Purāṇic studies, two Purāṇas - the Agni Purāṇa of early medieval period, the Kalikāpurāṇa (1050 AD) and the Brhannāradiya Purāṇa hold importance. The Kṛṣivārāśara is a book on agriculture. The Rāmacerita of Saṅdhya Karamādin tells about Rāma Pāla of the Pāla dynasty and is an important source material. The Kalāviveka and the Dāyabhaga of Jimutavāhana, Māyāmata and Menisara written sometimes between the 10th and the 12th century A.D. discuss about the village life, planning where even rulers or powerful chiefs could reside. The Aparājita-prcchā speaks of various grades of feudal chiefs. Among the historical Kāvya the Rajataranginī of Kalhana is of exceptional importance which shed light in general of this age. The Gita Govinda of Jayadeva is also of importance. The Latakamelaka of Saṅkhadhara, who flourished in the reign of Gāhaḍavāla King Govindacandra of Kanauj is more useful for the present study, for they seek to hold up to ridicule the social follies and vices of the age. The Ukṛti-vyakti-prakāśana of Dāmodara Pandit is an unique work on social and economic life in the time of



the Gāhaḍavālas. The bardic literature like Pr̥thvirāja Rāsō also contain some traditions of the period under consideration. The writings of Bāna, a contemporary of Harṣavardhan (AD 606-647), Bhavabhūti and Vākpati in the court of Yaśovarman of Kānya-Kubja (8th century A.D.), Yogeshwara, a court<sup>poet</sup> of Pālas of Bengal (9th century, A.D.), Śriharsa in the court of Vijaya-candra and Jayacandra of Kanauf (12th century A.D.), throw much light on the period.

As regards foreign accounts, we may refer to Hiuen Tsang, I-tsing and Alberuni. Hiuen Tsang's account is most valuable as it contains the statement of a monk scholar who visited from UP to Assam. Dharmasvāmin, a Tibetan monk, visited Bihar during A.D. 1234-1236.

The inscriptions of the period yield reliable evidence regarding the land system and political structure of the age. Being mostly dated records assignable to definite localities, many of them are not altogether free from the traditional literary conventions and the majority of them are grants of lands or revenues to Brahmanas or religious institutions. The land grants of Harṣavardhana, Jayanāga Devokhelga, Jivitagupta II, Pāla, Candra and Sewarulers of Bihar and Bengal, the land grants of Mahendrapāla and Trilocanapāla of Prātihāra dynasty and Gāhaḍavālas of Uttar Pradesh mention gifts of villages or land made to the Brāhamaṇas,<sup>1</sup> gods,<sup>2</sup>

1 Biography of Dharmasvāmin, K.P.Jaysawal Research Institute, Patna, 1959, p.vii.

2 El, XIX, no.49.

great personalities or officers of the state.<sup>3</sup> About eighty inscriptions directly connected with the history of the Gāhaḍavāla dynasty have been found. All these can be taken in three groups. Group 'A' includes those inscriptions regarding land grants or other deeds of kings, queens and princes of the dynasty. Group 'B' records either land grants by Gāhaḍavāla feudatory chiefs owing allegiance to them. Group 'C' are miscellaneous inscriptions recording various deeds of private individual directly subject to the Gāhaḍavāla rule. Out of which, sixtyseven inscriptions belong to the first category. Next group comprises eight inscriptions and only four inscriptions belong to the third category.

Although these inscriptions provide useful information about the land system and political structure of the period under review, they have not yet been fully utilised in any systematic study of the subject. The general pattern of the land grants is almost the same. They begin with the genealogy of the king in verse; then give the details about the grant, generally in prose, next appear certain imprecatory verses; and at the end the names of the engraver, executor, etc. and the date are mentioned. For our purpose the prose portions of the grant are most important. It contains information regarding the constituent parts, types, names, boundaries, nature of the land taxes, officers and other things.

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3 IA, XVIII, pp.134-143.

A large number of books and articles written by Indologists and historians deal with different aspects of the problem we have taken up for study. Prominent among these are the early works of N.S. Subba Rao<sup>4</sup> and S.K. Das.<sup>5</sup> But they do not pay much attention to the early medieval period and concentrate on the period only up to the Guptas and Harsha. By way of illustration we may mention H.C. Ray<sup>6</sup>, C.V. Vaidya<sup>7</sup>, R.C. Majumdar's two volumes in the series.<sup>8</sup> They have each section on socio-economic life, ed. R.C. Majumdar,<sup>9</sup> B.P. Majumdar<sup>10</sup>, Puspa Niyoge<sup>11</sup>. We may take note of some books on specific topics connected with socio-economic life like U.N. Ghoshal<sup>12</sup> which is a good survey of the epigraphic evidences. In addition to these

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- 4 Economic and Political Conditions in Ancient India.
  - 5 Economic History of Ancient India.
  - 6 Dynastic History of Northern India.
  - 7 History of Medieval Hindu India.
  - 8 The Age of Imperial Kanauj and the Struggle for Empire.
  - 9 History of Bengal.
  - 10 Socio-Economic History of Northern India.
  - 11 Contribution to the Economic History of Northern India.
  - 12 Contribution to the History of Hindu Revenue System.

certain other authoritative works for the study of R.S.Sharma,<sup>13</sup>  
 D.N. Jha,<sup>14</sup> R.C. Majumdar,<sup>15</sup> R.R. Diwaker,<sup>16</sup> R.C. Choudhary,<sup>17</sup>  
 B.N.S. Yadav,<sup>18</sup> L. Gopal,<sup>19</sup> Irfan Habib,<sup>20</sup> Rama Niyogi,<sup>21</sup>  
 B.K. Maity<sup>22</sup> and others.

At the same time, the present study is beset with several difficulties. In the first place the materials available are not sufficient to enable a thorough study of all aspects of society and polity during the period under review. Again the

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- 13 Indian Feudalism: Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India.
  - 14 Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times : Studies in Early Indian Economic History - Comprehensive History of Bihar.
  - 15 The History of Bengal.
  - 16 Bihar Through the Ages.
  - 17 History of Bihar.
  - 18 Society and Culture in Northern India in Twelfth Century.
  - 19 The Economic Life of Northern India (c.AD700-1200).
  - 20 The Agrarian System of Mughal India - Cambridge Economic History of India.
  - 21 The History of Gahadavāla Dynasty.
  - 22 Economic Life of Northern India in the Gupta Period.

study of such a subject cannot start with a specific data as is possible in the history of a particular king or a ruling dynasty. Changes in social and political structure do not take place abruptly but are generally the result of a gradual process. This has led us to look back to some of the earlier sources as well. Similarly, certain later sources also had to be utilized as they throw some light on the period under study.

Our study is limited to the region now covered by east U.P. and Bihar. So we cannot freely utilise the records or materials meant for other parts of India except where they corroborate our investigation or help us to make a comparative study.

PHYSICAL MAP OF  
THE MIDDLE GANGETIC PLAINS

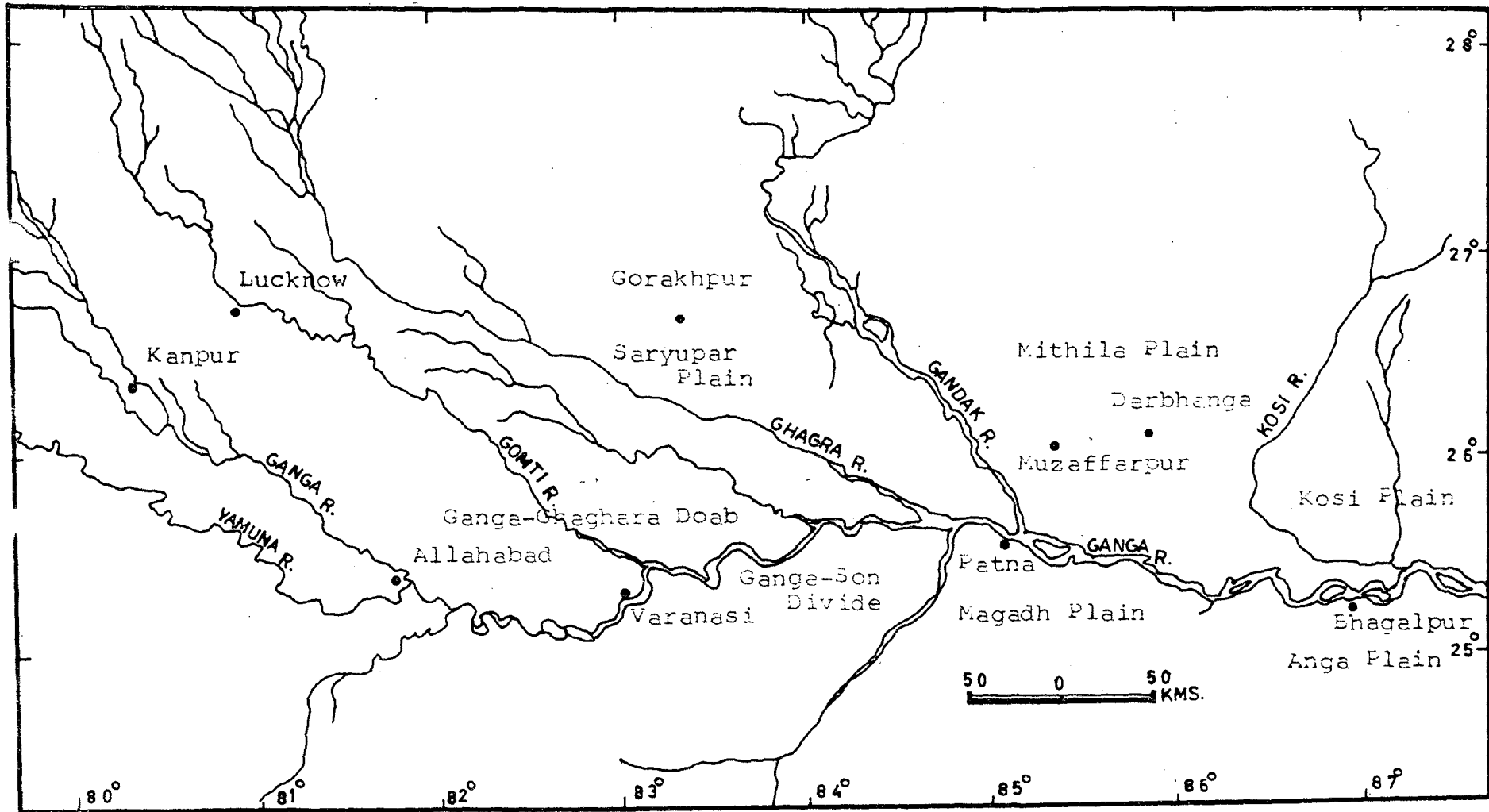


FIG. 1.

## CHAPTER I

### PHYSICAL FEATURE

Middle-Gangetic basin is not a clear-cut demarcated physical unit. This region gains a geographical personality on account of the unity and coherence provided by the cultural and economic patterns. Placed between the relatively dry, mainly Bhangar (older alluvium), doabs of upper Gangetic plain and humid, largely Khadar Bengal, this region is a transitional region with respect to its climate and topography.<sup>1</sup> Indo-Nepal international boundary which broadly cuts through the Bhabar and Terai zone down the Shiwalik, forms the northern limit of this region. Southern boundary "skirts down the face of the hill-spur-scrap and alluvial embayment zone of the Vindhyan-Kohtas-garha Chotanagpur plateau".<sup>2</sup> The Bihar-Bengal state boundary excluding Kisanganj sub-division of Murree marks the eastern boundary of the region. The western limit of the region is marked by the eastern limit of the upper-Gangetic basin. The middle Gangetic Plain, thus, is placed between the Himalayas and peninsular ramparts on the north and south respectively and covers the whole of the Bihar plains and eastern U.P. Thus, dividing Indian sub-continent into three divisions on the basis of its physical

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1 Spate, G.H.K. & Kermonth, A.I.A., India and Pakistan, A General and Regional Geography, 1960, p.565.

2. Singh, R.L., India, A Regional Geography, p.184.

3 Ibid., p.183.

features, i.e. the Himalayan upland, the Indo-Gangetic plain and the peninsular India,<sup>4</sup> it would appear that the middle Gangetic basin forms a segment of the Indo-Gangetic trough but it covers some marginal portions of the other two major formations, i.e., the fringes and projections of the peninsular block in the south and the Siwaliks in the northern part of the Champaran district of Bihar.<sup>5</sup>

Except for the foothills of the Siwaliks and Bhabar in the north and the peninsular uplands in the South, the region is absolutely alluvial and monotonously flat until the hills are actually approached. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of small topographic facets, the plain is not without interest. Although this region cannot be divided into physical sub-units on the basis of any prominent foundation of relief, we, for the sake of convenience, can divide the region into two sub-divisions, i.e., North Ganga plain and South Ganga plain.

#### North-Ganga Plain:

The entire Saryupar and north Bihar plain is essentially built up of vast alluvial cores.<sup>6</sup> The river levels and bluffs, or the sandy features like Dhus of the Saryupar, the ox-bow lakes, Tels, Chauras, dead arms or remnants of the river channels, etc. produce only heterogeneity in the physical land scap.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Law, B.C., Historical Geography of Ancient India, Paris, 1954, p.12.

5 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.189.

6 Spate, O.H.K., op.cit., p.564.

7 Singh, R.L. op.cit., p.191.



The Someswar and the Dun hills of the Siwalik formations are the only hilly tracts of the north Ganga plain which constitute the lowest and outer most of all the Himalayan ranges.<sup>8</sup> Running along the whole length of Nepal, they extend for about 20 miles from the north-west to the south-east.<sup>9</sup> In the foot-hill zone there are three important negotiable passes, i.e. Someswar pass along the Juripani river; the Bhikhana Tori pass along the Kosi river and Marwat pass through the Harha river valley.<sup>10</sup> A narrow elongated moist sub-mountain tract below the foothills called Terai is followed by a sub-Terai belt of marshy land. A wide belt of marshy low lands notably devoid of uplands and characterised by permanent depressions and lakes, follows the sub-terai belt.<sup>11</sup>

The alluvial plain of this region can be divided into two categories: (i) the older alluvium or Bhengar, and (ii) newer alluvium or Khadar.

The older alluvium occupies the higher land not liable to flooding which includes the entire sub-terai region and lands towards the northern side of the region. The land

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8 Diwaker, R.R., Bihar Through the Ages, p.24.

9 Ibid.

10 Singh, R.L., op.cit., pp.189-90.

11 Mandal, R.B., "Some Geomorphic Aspects of North Bihar" in Geographical Studies, Patna Research Bulletin, no.10, March 1978, p.39.

along the Ghaghra and its eastern parts is mostly Bhangar.<sup>12</sup>

The newer alluvium is confined to the flood plains of the river annually inundated by floods. It consists of silt and clay with fine sands deposited on either sides of the river channel and is characterised by the absence of kankar.

The whole region is dotted with numerous ox-bow lakes, tals chauris, dead arms or remnants of the river channels, most of them created due to the changes in the course of various rivers.

#### South Ganga Plain:

The South Ganga plain represents a more diversified surface and regional contrast than the north Ganga plain. In addition to the southern hilly tracts, it is sprinkled with numerous out-lives of Chotanagpur highlands. South Ganga plain is formed by the sediments brought from the Southern uplands and alluvium is relatively coarser. It is devoid of the ox-bow lakes, so commonly found in the northern plain. There are number of hills like the Barabar, the Rajgir-Jethian and more significantly the Kharagpur hills running in elongated ridges to the east of the river Son. The extension of the low lying area called Tal towards the south of the levee of the Ganga is a rather peculiar feature of this region. It perhaps marks the old bed of the Son.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.192.

13 Ibid., p.192.

Drainage:

The whole region is intersected by a complex network of very many rivers. Broadly speaking, this region has a dendritic pattern of drainage, Ganga being the main trunk stream towards which almost whole drainage gravitates. It is the general characteristic feature of the region that the rivers meet at acute angles and several tributaries form parallel or sub-parallel lines to the main stream.<sup>14</sup>

Ganga, a snow-fed Himalayan river, flows keeping a distance with the Himalayas and thus, the northern perennial tributaries have to cover a wider arena and longer distance through their highly meandering courses. As the Yamuna-Ganga system is fed by very many tributaries throughout its course and flows in the direction of increasing rainfall, the plain of the Ganga forms the parts of its water "catchment".<sup>15</sup> The southern tributaries meet the Ganga rather hurriedly because of steeper slope. These tributaries of the Ganga bring enormous quantity of silt during the rainy season to spread as a new sheet of fertile sediments over the soil.

Ghaghara is the main tributary of the Ganga in the eastern U.P. plain. Ghaghara receives the water of almost all the rivers of the Saryupar west of the Gandaka. Rapti, a Himalayan stream, is the chief tributary of Ghaghara and itself

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14 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.193.

15 Spate, O.H.K., op.cit., p.43.

is the recipient of many other smaller streams originating from the Siwalik, the Bhabar or terai plains, etc. Ghaghara like other rivers has a capacity to spill over and enundate vast neighbouring fertile land and rendering them into flat sands. It also changes its course frequently.

Gandak is also a snow-fed Himalayan river and a major tributary of the Ganga. Although Gandak does not receive any important tributary, it has a number of old deserted beds and distributories like spill channels, i.e. the Barni, the Jherhi, the Dats, etc. Due to its high gradient, it is also notorious for floods and changing courses<sup>16</sup> and many deserted beds are testimony to it.

Burhi-Gandaka is another chief tributary of the Ganga. Although it is not a snow-fed river as it rises in the western extremity of the Domeswar range,<sup>17</sup> it carries considerable amount of water throughout the year and taking an exceedingly meandering route, it finally joins the Ganges.

Bagmati rises in Nepal and following a course nearly parallel to Burhi Gandak to ultimately drain itself into latter. It is not a snow-fed perennial stream but since it receives a number of hill streams during the rainy season, it rises quickly to overflow and enundate a large area.

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16 Singh, R.L., op.cit., pp.195-6.

17 Diwakar, R.R., op.cit., pp.29-30.

Kosi, formed by seven important Himalayan streams (Saptakosi), does not receive any tributary in the plain owing to its raised bed.<sup>18</sup> The Kosi has no sufficient space to flow gradually "through the stages of grading, maturely and aggrading it takes a sudden leap from the degraded to aggraded stage with no graded interval."<sup>19</sup> From its mountain catchment of about 24,000 sq. miles largely in shales and sand stones, it carries enormous amount of detritus and sand and thus, despite a flood discharge of about 200,000 cusecs, it tears through the country in numerous capricious channels without following a permanent channel.<sup>20</sup> Due to its dynamic shifts, it has numerous abandoned channels known as Burhi (old) or mara (dead) Kosis. Its notorious quality of flooding quickly results in the frequent transformation of fertile land into arid waste of sand on account of the infertile sediments deposited by it.

Son is the largest among the many tributories received by the Ganga from the southern upland. All the southern rivers have a steep gradient and thus with rain waters during the monsoon, they quickly swell into roaring river but again turn into formidable streams.<sup>21</sup> The Son is wide but has a

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18 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.196.

19 Ibid.

20 Spete, O.H.K., op.cit., p.42.

21 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.196.

narrow flood plain. This river is also notorious for changing its course.

Other tributaries of the Ganga like the Karnauti, the Tons, the Karamanasa, etc., all to the west of Son, and the Punpun, the Mohini and the Chandan flowing to the east of the Son are smaller. Each of them takes a route parallel to the Ganga through the elongated tal. As these rivers flow through a lower level, they cannot drain themselves into the Ganga in spite and, therefore, inundate large area.

Floods are a common feature in the region, especially in the north-Ganga plain. Almost all the rivers of the region swell in volume considerably during the monsoon and are notoriously dynamic in their character. The formations of ox-bow lakes, dead arms, chauris, tals, etc. are the illustrations of their dynamic character regarding changing the courses. The Ganga itself has shifted over 35 k.m. between Bhojpur Tal and Surha Tal.<sup>22</sup> Kosi being the most notorious among the rivers of the region for changing its course, has shifted 115 km west of its original course.<sup>23</sup>

What appears from the foregoing discussion on the various aspects of the geographical set up of the middle Gangetic basin is that, topographically, the entire region is monotonously flat without any significant elevation or

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22 Singh, R.L., op.cit., p.197.

23 Mandal, R.B., op.cit., p.42.

depression. The whole region is intersected by a complex network of perennial as well as seasonal rivers and is characterised by a very fertile land throughout. Although this area does not appear, as has been pointed out earlier, to be a clear-cut demarcated geographical unit, the geographical features played an important role in the course of history. The absence of any prominent geographical barrier and a complex network of rivers certainly facilitated a brisk interaction among the people of different parts. We have evidence to show this kind of interaction among many early historical urban centres like Pataliputra, Vaisali, Sravasti, Varanasi, Kanyakubja, etc. which were connected by many important land and water-ways which, in turn, might have helped the diffusion and transmission of dominant social and political ideologies. That the geographical features of this region were conducive to the emergence of state structures is evident from the fact that the first imperial power of India, the Mauryas, established themselves at Patliputra and were followed by the Guptas with their capital at Prayag and Gahadwals at Kannauj, etc. The emergence of these strong political powers served as a unifying factor in this region and rendered it a distinct geographical entity. The geographical set up, thus, played an important role in the course of history but to reduce historical explanations to the geographical situation only will be inadequate rather a historical, especially in early medieval period when geography became relatively less important in comparison to political and social factors which would be examined in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

#### I

The social structure of the middle Gangetic basin during the early medieval period presents a picture of stratified society which was a continuum of the stratification of earlier times. The only change in it was its growing rigidity on the one hand and its expansion covering a wide range of factors in the society, on the other. The stratification and the gradual rigidity based on the segregation of occupational group was the logical culmination of the various factors at work. But the most striking feature of the Indian social structure was the caste system which has been studied in a greater detail by the scholars.

The origin of the caste system has been traced from various factors, different scholars emphasizing different factors contributing to its formation. For instance Nesfield<sup>1</sup> emphasized the hereditary specialization of occupation at the root of the caste system with the petrification of the guilds into castes in an hierarchical order, assigning lower ranking to the practitioners of a more primitive and ancient occupation in a descending order.

Senart<sup>2</sup> also followed the same line holding occupational factor as important in the origin of the caste system but he

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1 Nesfield, J.C., Brief View of the Caste System of the North-West Provinces and Oudh, Allahabad, 1885.

2 Senart, Caste in India, p.153.



brought to the fore the distinction between the Varna and Jati defining the Varna as a 'class' and identified the Jati with the 'caste'. To him the two institutions were essentially independent of each other but later became incorporated with the grafting of the Jatis on the Varnas by the Brahmanas to maintain their superiority and that the Varna system never corresponded to reality. He traced the origin of the caste system to the Indo-European Kin-grouping corresponding to Roman 'gens'. This view of Senart has been criticized by the later sociologists.

Bougle<sup>3</sup> also held that the Caturvarnya system was more an ideal than anything else. He thought that the system had the Jatis as real groups with three fundamental principles: hereditary specialisation, hierarchy and repulsion or isolation of one group from another. However, he held that the relative purity and impurity of occupations was a greater determinant of the hierarchy than the usefulness or difficult nature of the nature of the occupations.<sup>4</sup>

Again Ketkar<sup>5</sup> stressed that the concept of purity and pollution was at the root of caste exclusiveness.

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3 Bougle, Celestine, Essays on the Caste System Tr. by D.F. Pocock, London, 1971.

4 Ibid., p.38.

5 Ketkar, S.N., History of Caste in India, 2 vols., London, 1911.

Hutton<sup>6</sup> thinks that 'more obvious factors' contributing to the 'emergence and development' of caste system are viz. ecological isolation, magical beliefs about certain crafts, primitive ideas regarding power of food to transmit qualities, tribal concepts of taboo, mana, soul-stuff, totemism, pollution, ceremonial purity, belief in the doctrine of Karma, clash of races, and colour prejudice and deliberate exploitation by a hierarchy. But Hutton's view has been criticised<sup>7</sup> on the ground that in trying to define caste with reference to a number of cultural-behavioural traits and isolating its essential characteristics, he overlooks the fact that caste is primarily a system of inter-related groups in which "differences in distribution of economic and political power are expressed through a cultural language such as restrictions on commensality and connubium, etc."

Dumont<sup>8</sup> thinks that Hutton's 'atomistic' view of the caste does not see the system as a whole in an ideological sense of the term, because caste is above all a system of ideas and values.

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6 Hutton, J.H., Caste in India, Cambridge, 1946, p.1646.

7 Sanwal, R.D., Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon, Delhi, 1976, p.5.

8 Dumont, Louis, Homo-Hierarchicus, Delhi, 1975, p.35.

According to Suvira Jaiswal<sup>9</sup>, Hutton's study shows it clearly that caste is not a sudden artificial creation but an organism which evolved gradually through a multiplicity of factors, even though Hutton regards the caste system as "a composite unit of many individual cells, each functioning independently"<sup>10</sup> and as such unduly minimizes the importance of those socio-economic and cultural bonds which sustain the system making it an organic whole. Despite this, Hutton provides us with a classic investigation into the origin, nature and functioning of the caste system.

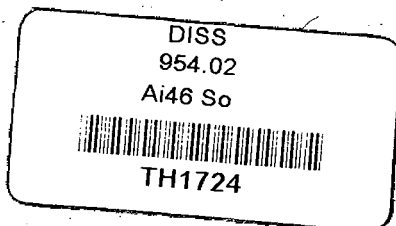
According to Dumont,<sup>11</sup> the reality of caste system derives from the concept of hierarchy which is the "principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole". Hence caste is an organization of hierarchical relationship in which the interdependence of inherent elements within it is essential for the existence of the system. This makes the hierarchical society anti-individualistic and a non-competitive ranking system with no individual initiative in the interest of a higher order.<sup>12</sup>

9 Jaiswal, Suvira, "Studies in Early Indian History : Trends and Possibilities," I.H.R., VI, nos.1-2, 1979-80, p.3.

10 Hutton, J.H., op.cit., p.107.

11 Dumont, Louis, op.cit., p.66.

12 Jaiswal, Suvira, op.cit., p.4.



Dumont's concern is to build a model of caste with (ritual) hierarchy as its central idea in order to contrast it with the Western world-view based on egalitarian values which led him to subordinate all other important aspects of the system in its formation and functioning.<sup>13</sup> What is more, Dumont's hierarchy emanating from the opposition of the pure and impure, makes Indian society stagnant. But such a view overlooks significant changes in class contradictions in the development of Indian history<sup>14</sup> from the post-Vedic period onwards. Though Dumont admits that in modern times caste hardly determines occupation, and that commensality and connubium are on the decline with the weakening of the notions of purity and impurity<sup>15</sup>, nevertheless he says nothing about the gradual dissolution of the caste system.

The continuity and strength of the caste system has evoked two explanations. While P.A. Sorokin<sup>16</sup> thinks that it was a 'satisfactory social distribution of individuals', N.K. Bose<sup>17</sup> takes caste to be a basically non-competitive system of production which safeguarded monopolistic hereditary rights to occupation. However, Suvira Jaiswal<sup>18</sup> thinks that

13 Ibid., p.4.

14 Ibid., p.5.

15 Dumont, op.cit., p.218, Note 112e.

16 Sorokin, P.A., Social and Cultural Mobility, New York, 1959, p.531.

17 Bose, N.K., Culture and Society in India, London, 1967; idem, Man in India, Li, December 1971, p.400f.

18 Jaiswal, Suvira, op.cit., p.7.

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both the views overlook the totality of the system. While the former view holds caste as a static phenomenon, the latter view gives only a partial explanation. Although the system assured the monopoly of hereditary occupation to those with specialized skills and provided a sense of security to them, there are two more factors<sup>19</sup> involved namely, the minimal nature of the integration of lower castes with the wider caste/class society and their strong sense of solidarity, exclusiveness and taboo inherited from a tribal past. Secondly, they tend to imitate upper caste notions of purity/pollution to improve upon their low ranking. Above all, the caste system has ensured the supply of handicrafts and agricultural labour, to upper castes by making upward mobility practically impossible for the menial castes.<sup>20</sup>

The difference between the Varna and Jāti has to be scrutinized further. Trautmann<sup>21</sup> thinks that varna cannot be identified with 'caste' or 'class' since it is a sacred concept and hence immutable, while castes may fuse together or split into smaller castes. Hence he translates varna as 'order' or 'estate'. As already discussed apart distinguished between the varna and jāti which was endorsed by Hutton.

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19 Jaiswal, Suvira, op.cit., p.7.

20 Ibid.

21 Trautmann, "On the Translation of the Varna" in JESHO, vii, 1964, pp.196-201.

Max Weber<sup>22</sup> also held varna as a 'status group' or 'estate' and not class, which had an economic meaning. Sociologists like M.N. Srinivas<sup>23</sup> pointed out the inadequacy of the concept of varna to explain the fact of castes as these exist today. Hence they apply two different models of varna and jāti, the former remaining the same all over India and the latter operating at the local level. They further stress that theoretically the division of varnas are on the basis of functions while the organisation of jāti hierarchy is based on the principle of the absolute purity of the Brāhmana caste and the relative impurity of all other castes.

We may see a distinction between the jāti and the varna, in modern times with the varnas acting as broad categories subsuming within them a large number of jātis in a rather loose fashion.<sup>24</sup> But we find the literary texts confusing the terms e.g. Panini<sup>25</sup> has used the term varna twice for groups mentioned in later law books as jātis or mixed castes and the term jāti has been used for Brāhmana varna.

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22 Weber, Max, Religion of India, The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism (New York, 1968).

23 Srinivas, M.N., Caste in Modern India and Other Essays, Bombay, 1970, pp.63-9.

24 Jaiswal, S., op.cit., p.9.

25 Agrawala, V.S., India and Known to Panini, Lucknow, 1953, pp.75, 91f.

The Yājñavalkya Smṛti<sup>26</sup> though distinguishes between the two terms, yet quite often the two have been confounded. According to Wagle<sup>27</sup>, jāti represents a concept which ascribed status to birth, hence the excellent and low jāti occur in the texts. The general application of the term jāti to well demarcated, exclusive social groups of tribal origin like the cāṇḍāla jāti, the vena jāti, the Nisāda jāti, etc. may suggest that the term was popularized because of the assimilation of tribal groups into the Indo-Āryan social organisation.<sup>28</sup> Because of the hereditary nature of the division of labour in the varṇa system, the varṇa could also signify jāti and hence the interchangeability in the application.<sup>29</sup> This may also suggest that varṇa and jāti were not two different systems but one.<sup>30</sup>

Romila Thapar<sup>31</sup> holds that varṇas represented the theoretical and jāti the functional aspect of the caste.

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26 Kane, P.V., History of Dharmasastra, vol.II, Pt.I, Poona, 1941, p.55.

27 Wagle, Narendra, Society at the Time of the Buddha, Bombay, 1966, p.122f.

28 Sircar, D.C., Society and Administration in Ancient and Medieval India, vol.I, Calcutta, 1967, pp.103-5.

29 Jaiswal, Suvira, op.cit., p.10.

30 Temkiah, S.J., "From Varna to Caste Through Mixed Unions" in Jack Goody, ed., Character of Kinship, Cambridge, 1973, p.191f.

31 Thapar, Romila, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 31st Session, Varanasi, 1969, p.21f.

But according to Wagle<sup>32</sup> Jāti does not emphasize bonds of kinship rather it indicates status position. Dumont<sup>33</sup> has suggested that the varṇa hierarchy is based on functions while the jāti emphasizes the relative purity/impurity of castes. This may suggest that both the terms, varṇa and jāti, have theoretical as well as practical dimensions. Suvira Jaiswal<sup>34</sup> holds that the notion of purity/impurity was in fact further elaboration of the varṇa ideology reflecting a deterioration and hardening of class relations.

## II

The earliest portions of the Rgveda reveal only three major classes - the Brāhma, the Kṣatra and the Viś. The fourth varṇa, viz. the Śūdra appears in the Purusasūkta hymn of the tenth Mandala of the Rgveda which is generally taken to be an interpolation thus representing the conditions during the later vedic society. The origin of the Śūdra class has generally been traced from the Dāsas and the Dasyūs of the Rgvedic age but according to Prof.R.S. Sharma<sup>35</sup> the

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32 Wagle, N., op.cit., p.131.

33 Dumont, Louis, op.cit., pp.71, 148.

34 Jaiswal, Suvira, op.cit., p.13.

35 Sharma, R.S., Sudras in Ancient India, pp.40f.



defeated and dispossessed sections of the Aryans apart from the non-Aryans were reduced to the status of the Sūdras in the scheme of four varnas. These four major classes<sup>36</sup> of the Vedic period were, to some extent, open classes<sup>37</sup> in that the inclusion and absorption of various heterogenous elements in them was a continuous process during the later period.

The term varna has been used to denote the above mentioned classes in the vedic literature. The term jāti is conspicuous by its absence in the vedic literature. Hence the two systems, viz of the varnas and of the Jātis have been differentiated.<sup>38</sup> The Dharmasūtras of Gautama and Vasistha, etc. explained the jātis as the result of the mixed unions or inter-marriages between the members of the different varnas.

The Dharmasūtras use the term 'jāti' for the mixed castes only mostly of the Sūdra status. But the terms like

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36 . The most common names are Brahman, Rajanya, Ksatriya, Vaisya and Sudra or the later Brahmana, Kstriya, Vaisya and Sudra vide Macdowell E. Keith, Vedic India, vol.II, p.252.

37 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.2.

38 Senart, Caste in India, p.153.

Kṛṣṇa-jātiya and Brāhmanajātiya mentioned in the Nirukṭa (XII.13) and Astadhyāyī (v.4.9) respectively, may suggest that the original four varṇas also tended to harden into castes.<sup>39</sup>

The infiltration of the foreign elements following the śaka-pahlava invasions and the growing tendency of cleavages<sup>40</sup> into classes with hostile interests ultimately led to the emergence of the classical caste system to combat these new tendencies and restore and strengthen the earlier social system.<sup>41</sup> The caste system, which appeared to be somewhat stationary in the post-Maurya period invigorated itself in the post-Gupta period following the social and political upheavals due to foreign invasions and the development of feudal tendencies. This led to increasing rigidity on the one hand and expansion due to the inclusion of foreign and indigenous elements on the other hand in the caste system.

We find from various inscriptions<sup>42</sup> an increasing concern on the part of the post-Gupta kings to restore and uphold the ideals of caste system as enunciated by Manu. The Palas are said to have maintained the order of caste.

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39 Kane, P.V., History of Dharmasastras, vol.II, Pt.I, p.55.

40 Hopkins, The Mutual Relations of the Four Castes According to the Manav Dharmasastras (Leipzig, 1881), p.78.

41 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.3.

42 Epigraphia India, vol.XV, no.1, p.3; vol.XXIII, p.150, etc.

The period had inherent in it very many factors like a localised agrarian economy, increasing social and economic immobility and the emergence of a hierarchy of landed aristocracy due to the practice of land grants<sup>43</sup> which contributed to the enforcement of the caste system. According to R.S. Tripathi<sup>44</sup>, the proselytizing zeal of Islam also contributed to such tendencies so much so that the Prabhāra King Bhoga (c.836-885 A.D.) adopted the symbol of vāraha on his coins to reinforce the Hindu ideals. Even Alberune<sup>45</sup> refers to the growing differentiation of castes and their rigidity. But according to Suvira Jaiswal Islam should not have made much impact because the natural tendency, in face of an Islamic onslaught, would be the unity of various social ranks to meet the challenge whereas we find differentiation and rigidity among the castes.<sup>46</sup>

The early medieval period witnessed growing taboos regarding food practices. The inter-dining was greatly restricted due to the growing ideas of Saucācāra.<sup>47</sup> The Brāhmanas maintained restrictions in accepting food from

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43 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.6.

44 Tripathy, R.S., History of Kanauj, p.237.

45 Sachau, E.C., Alberuni's India, vol.1, London, 1910, p.99.

46 Jaiswal, Suvira, "Studies in Early Indian Social History - Trends and Possibilities", IHR, vol.VI, 1979-80, p.23.

47 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.7.

the other three varnas. According to Lakṣmidhara<sup>48</sup> the Brāhmanas could accept food from the other two higher varnas on certain prescribed days and from the sudras in emergency only or as Kālivarjya.

Thus the early medieval period witnessed the adaptation of the caste system to the changing conditions through modification rearrangement and shift of emphasis. It is in this light that we have to examine the different castes and their occupation in the society.

The fact that the society in the middle Gangetic basin was sufficiently stratified by the Gupta period needs no explanation. The stratification of the society was directly related to the economy of the time. More important was the phenomenon of feudalism which had been taking shape right from the Gupta period onwards, initiated by the practice of land grants which was accentuated by the successors of the Guptas. The cessation of fiscal and administrative rights from the central authority to the local beneficiaries snapped off the economic and political ties between the two and resulted into many smaller fiscal and administrative units. These economic units further got reduced in size due to the sub-infeudation which created conditions for the development of a kind of social hierarchy with unequal distribution of land or land revenue as the case may be.<sup>49</sup>

48 Cf. Niyatakatakanda, p.252, vide Yadav, B.N.S., Ibid., fn.66, p.79.

49 Sharma, R.S., "Social Change in Early Medieval India (C.A.D.500-1200)", p.6. The first D.R. Chanana Memorial Lecture, 1969, New Delhi, 1981.

The period under study is marked by the existence of innumerable castes and subcastes. The conventional division of the Caturvarnya or the four varnas, viz. the Brāhmanas, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras had come to be confined in theory only. The numerous castes mentioned in the Smrtis undoubtedly existed in society and the differences in their enumerations in various Smrtis are more in keeping with the actual conditions which varied in different localities and different periods.<sup>50</sup> Concerned with the preservation of the Caturvarnya system of the vedas, the Smrtikaras endeavoured to bring the actual state of society of their times within the purview of the Caturvarnya system and hence they enunciated the theory of varnasankara which held that the numerous castes actually arose from the unions of males with females belonging to different varnas.<sup>51</sup> Although this theory originally applied to the four primitive varnas, it had to be extended to the subsidiary or mixed castes to account for the fast proliferating castes and sub-castes.

The other justification of the proliferation was the Vrātya theory which explained the origin of numerous castes from the sons of twice born who became Vrātyas (fallen from their castes) for not fulfilling the sacred duties.<sup>52</sup>

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50 Majumdar, R.C., ed., The History of Bengal, vol.1, pp.555-56.

51 Kane, P.V., H.D., vol.II, Chap.II, p.58.

52 Manu, X.p.20ff, vide R.C.M. op.cit., p.566, fn.1.

But this process of justification could not be stretched too long and hence the smrtikaras gave up in despair the task of deriving them, even though immediately from the primary varnas.<sup>53</sup>

Though lacking historical value, the saṅkara and vr̥tya theories of castes were without doubt generally believed in and greatly influenced the determination of the status of the different castes and sub-castes in the society.

The names and numbers of the castes and sub-castes varied according to time and localities. The composition of a smṛti in a particular local condition and time influenced greatly its enumeration of the lists of such castes and sub-castes. The authors did take into consideration the changes occurring in a particular place and time. Moreover, since the preservation and perpetuation of the varna system was the chief aim of the Brāhmaṇa smrtikaras and other law givers, any change occurring in the social structure either due to the assimilation of the <sup>indigenous elements or the</sup> foreigners into the varna structure was taken care of.

### III

As of the Brāhmaṇas the Dharmasāstras speak of six-fold duties<sup>54</sup> viz. study of vedas, teaching, sacrificing, officiating as priests at sacrifices to help others perform

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53 Kane, P.V., op.cit.

54 Kane, P.V., HD, vol.II, Pt.I.

sacrifices, acceptance of gifts from a worthy person of the three higher varnas, and making gifts. Of these the second, the fourth and the fifth constituted their well recognised means of livelihood. However, the Parāsāra smṛti<sup>55</sup> recommends that a Brāhmana could take up agriculture also, apart from his six-fold duties. Laksmidhara also supports this view but maintains that it could be taken up only in times of distress. This may suggest a departure from the earlier practices, though in actual practice the Brahmanas followed many vocations.<sup>56</sup> But this suggests a modification in the normative social theory and the prevalent factors necessitating it.<sup>57</sup>

Mādhavācārya<sup>58</sup> commenting on Parāsāra, holds that the Brāhmanas should practice agriculture with the help of the sūdras. This injunction was more in keeping with the needs of the Brahmanas land owning class - a result of the growing practice of land grants, as revealed by numerous inscriptions of our period under study.

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55 Satkarmasaki to Viprah Krsikarma ca Karayet-parasara - Madhavab, A Cara Kanda 2.2, vide B.N.S. Yadav, op.cit., fn.98, p.80. Kane places the smṛti between 600 and 900 AD vide chronological table in HD, vol.V, Pt.II.

56 Kane, P.V., op.cit., vol.II, Pt.I, p.130.

57 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.101, p.80.

58 Madhavacarya on Parasara - A Carakanda, 2.2, vide, Yadav, op.cit., fn.105.

The Dharmaśāstras are not unanimous about the Brāhmanas taking up Kṣatriya occupation in distress. Lakṣmidhara quotes the contradictory views of Bandhayana and Gautama, while the former holds that a Brāhmana, having failed to maintain his family by the three rightful occupations, could live by Kṣatriya occupation, the latter strictly enjoined that even in fun a Brāhmana must not take up arms.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Lakṣmidhara opines that a Brāhmana in distress must not ordinarily skip over the occupation of an intervening varna, but a Brahmana may follow the occupation of a vaiśya, in preference to taking up the Kṣatriya profession<sup>60</sup> and that the period of distress being over the Brāhmana who has degraded himself by following the occupation of a lower varna must purify himself and revert to his usual occupations and duties.<sup>61</sup>

A Brāhmana was also allowed to take to trade<sup>62</sup> or money-lending, but this appears to be a tolerated course. However, a Brahmana could not trade in cooked food, poison, arms, lac, indigo, silk and woolen goods, salt, meat, liquor, hides, money, cow, some of these could be bartered by a Brāhmana, for

59 Cf. Lakṣmidhara-Kṛtya Kalpataru - Garjahastha Kanda, P. 187.

60 Ibid., p.72.

61 Ibid., p.188.

62 Svayani Va Karsanani Kurya d vanijyani va Kusidakani - Kurma Purana quoted by Madhavacarya on Parasara - A Carakanda 2.2, vide Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.105, p.80.



others of the same species.<sup>63</sup> Majority of the Dharmasāstras viewed money lending as a degrading occupation but Brhaspati prescribed it as a means of livelihood for the higher varnas in distress and praised it as the best,<sup>64</sup> according to Laksmidhara.

A Brahmana is forbidden to take to Sūdra-vṛtti (Sūdra occupation) even in distress except when in danger of life (prāna sarisaya). Since it involves one's own self and also those whom one maintains according to Laksmidhara,<sup>65</sup> who quotes Gautama. Interestingly, Gautama does not allow a Brāhmana to touch arms except when he has a danger to life.<sup>66</sup> The same has been spoken of the vaiśyas who can take up arms to protect Brāhmanas and cows and to prevent intermixture of castes.<sup>67</sup>

Thus Laksmidhara appears to have reckoned with the changes in the social and economic position of the Brāhmanas and though advocating the pursuance of traditional occupations of the Brāhmanas, he makes room for the Brahmanas to follow

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63 Laksmidhara, *Kṛtya Kalpataru*, Geryahastha Kanda, p.210.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 221.

65 *Ibid.*, p.224.

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Ibid.*, p.188.

any honest profession of any other caste. The same idea is also reflected in the Padmapurāna.<sup>68</sup>

The Dharmasāstras enjoined the teaching of the vedas, officiating at sacrifices and receiving gifts, as the privileges of the Brāhmanas who were traditionally held as the highest among the four varnas because of their mastery of the vedas, vedangas and other branches of learning. Hence they were called the 'Brotriya' and Acaryas and held as the most worthy for giving gifts. A large number of Gāhadavāla land-grants<sup>69</sup>, made mostly to the Brāhmanas upheld the privilege of the Brāhmanas as the donees par excellence.

According to the inscriptions, some of the donees were masters of two vedas or Dvivedin<sup>70</sup> and some were caturvedin (catur-veda-vidyā-vijita), while some others were students of different vedic Sakhas and Pathas (Charidogya-Sakhin triptathin<sup>71</sup>). The Matrīya Purāna makes for the presence of Caturvedin Brāhmanas as priests in the performance of

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68 Karayetkrsi vanijyani viprakarma na ca tyajit-padmapurana - V.45.91, Cf. Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.98, p.80.

69 E.I., vol.IV, 1896-97, no.11 - Twentyone copper plates of the kings of Kansuj to either the royal purohita Jagusarman or his sons and other Brahmanas.

70 Ibid. Copper plate of Jayacandra of V.S. 1231, p.115.

71 Ibid., p.208.

Tula-purusa-mahādāya<sup>72</sup> which was performed by Candraśeva many times and the inscription recording one such occasion mentions Brahmanas who were catur vedens, the Dvivedins and tripathins.

The various land grants of the middle Gangetic basin of the period refer to numerous gotras and pravaras of the Brahmanas who received gifts. In the candravati inscription of Candraśeva<sup>73</sup> (V.S. 1150) more than forty gotras of 500 Brahmana donees have been mentioned, viz. Agasti, Atreya, Bharadvaja, Bhargava candratraya Daksa, etc. Among the gotras there are Kāśyapa, Kātyāyana, Bharadvaja, Bandhula, Gobhila, Vatsā, Vasistha Paravasa, Sarkaraksa, Sāndilya Gautama, Krisnatreya, Sanikritya Kausika, Kabisthala, Kaundinya Upamanyu, pārāsara, Bhārgava ivantvāyana, Garga, Gārgya Dhaumya, Sausravasa, Sāvarna Kutsa, Gālava, Sarkara, Candrātreyā, latukarna, Gaunya pippalāda, Maunya, Hārīta, maudgalva, Darbha, Kanva, Agasti Atreya, etc.<sup>74</sup>

The Pravaras are enumerated as: Bandhula, Aghamarsana, viśvāmitra, Gobhila, Angirasa, Ambarisa, Bhārgava, Cyāvana.

72 Indian Antiquary, vol.XIV, p.208.

73 EI, vol.XIV, no.15, pp.202-09; other inscriptions are ibid., VII, p.99; ibid., V, p.118, 212-13; ibid., XIX, pp.18-19; ibid., IV, pp.101, 132, 133; ibid., VIII, p.154; ibid., XVIII, pp.12,222.

74 E.I., VII, p.99; ibid., V, pp.118, 212-13; ibid., XIX, pp.18-19; ibid., IV, pp.101, 132, 133; ibid., VIII, p.154; ibid., XVIII, p.12, 222; ibid., XIV, pp.202-09.

Apnavana Aurva, īamadaṅga, Maṅḍalya Bharmvāsya, Kāsyapa,  
Avatsara Naidhruva, Bharadvāja, Barhaspatya Kṛṣṇikavyana,  
Kausika, Dhaumya, Audalya, Devarāta, Gautama, Aitatha  
Aṅgītatha, etc.<sup>75</sup>

Sri, Thakkura and Rāuta were the most common among the honorifics and appellations during the period under study. These were applied to the Brāhmanas apart from others, e.g. Rāuta Rājadhara varman Ksatriya and Rāuta Jātis arman Brāhmana.<sup>76</sup> The Brāhmanas had special honorifics like Bhatta and Misra. Other important appellations were - Pandita, maha Pandita, Avasthika, Diksita or maha-diksita, Dviveda or Dvivedin caturvedin, Tripathin, Acārya, Prānacārya.<sup>77</sup> Titles like Diksita tended to be hereditary which may suggest <sup>that</sup> they transformed into sub-castes which became common in later times.<sup>78</sup>

Though fairly large in number, as gleaned from the inscriptions, this priestly class was heterogeneous which comprised family priests of kings and feudatories and the

75 E.I., IV, p.101; Ibid., p.112; Ibid., pp.130-133; Ibid., VII, pp.99-100; Ibid., XVIII, pp.12, 13, 17, 19, 222, 224; Indian Antiquary, XIV, p.103, etc.

76 E.I., IV, pp.111-112; I.A., XVIII, pp.134ff.

77 According to Kielhorn those who or whose ancestors had performed a great sacrifice like the Jyotistoma were called Diksita and the honorific Prānacārya was used by the royal physician. Cf. Ibid., no.11. Copper Plates of V.S. 1182, 1190, 1224, 1226, 1232.

78 Ibid. The title Diksita is found to have been used for at least three generations in the Gahadavala inscription of V.S. 1182 and V.S. 1200.

temple priests both receiving land grants and other gifts. The latter though not given a high status in the Brahmanas community gained in influence with the emergence of the temples as wealthy landed magnates due to the land grants.

By the early medieval period the Brahmanas came to be divided in five sections on territorial basis as gleaned from a Rāstrakūta inscription<sup>79</sup> of Govinda III (926 A.D.), viz. the Sarasvata (of the region of the river Saraswati), Kānyakubja (of Kanauj region), Utkala (of Orissa), Maithila (of north Bihar) and Gauṇḍa (generally believed as of Bengal region).

The Brahmanas during our period of study enjoyed various social, economic, political, legal and religious privileges.<sup>80</sup> Almost all the inscriptions of our period found in the middle-Gangetic Basin mention immunity from taxation, full right to treasure-trove and sole eligibility to receive certain gifts as the economic privilege of the Brahmanas. They were appointed on high posts of priests, judges and ministers.<sup>81</sup> Medhātithi spoke of the four-fold privileges of the Brahmanas

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79 E.I., XXXII, no.4, 11.29f.

80 Kane, P.V., op.cit., vol.II, Pt.I, Chap.III.

81 Lakṣmidhara, the author of Kṛtyakalpataṛu was the Mahasandhivigrahaika and Mantrisvara of Govindacandra Gahadavala. Cf. Brahmacarikanda of Kṛtya, p.2, v.8, pp.41-42, vide Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.281, p.90.

viz. religious instructions, receiving honour in spite of lack of learning and character, full right to treasure-trove and receiving gifts irrespective of their merit. Again they have immunity of property and from censure and punishment for malolent rites on proper occasions.<sup>82</sup>

Traditionally the Ksatriyas held the second highest rank after the Brahmanas in the Caturvarnya system.

The study of the vedas, offering sacrifices and giving gifts - these three were enjoined on the first three varnas by the Dharmasastras.<sup>83</sup> The Brāhmanas had three privileges - teaching the vedas, officiating at sacrifices and receiving gifts; Ksatriyas had the privilege of the profession of arms and protection of the people and the vaisyas had the peculiar privileges of agriculture, Cattle-rearing, trade and money-lending.<sup>84</sup>

The Ksatriyas appear to have been divided into two classes; viz - the sat-ksatriyas and the Ksatriyas. The sat-Ksatriya is mentioned in the Kirātārjunīya<sup>85</sup> of Vatsarāja (12th century A.D.). This may also be gleaned from the accounts

82 Ghoshal, U.N., A History of Indian Political Ideas, p.433.

83 Kane, P.V., op.cit., p.105.

84 Dvijati namadhyana mijya danani. Brahman asyadhi Kali pravacanaya jana pratigratah. Purvesu ni yamastu Rajvi Yodhikani raksanani sarva bhu tanani. Baudha Dh.Sutra I.10; Manu I.88-90; X.75-79, Yajna.I.118-119, V. as sya-Syadhikani Krsi vanik pasupalya Kusikani. Cf. Gautam, X.1-3, 7150; Ap. Dh.S.II.5.10, 5-8.

85 Rupa Kasatkani of vatsraje vide Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.389, p.94.

of the Arab traveller Ibn-Khurda Dba<sup>86</sup> of 10th century A.D. who talked of the sab-Kufriya and Katariya - which Altekar<sup>87</sup> translates as Sat-Ksatriya and Ksatriya, respectively. C.V. Vaidya<sup>88</sup> holds the former to be the ruling Ksatriyas and the latter to be the agriculturists.

This division coincided with the emergence of a ruling landed aristocracy of the Ksatriyas claiming superior status within the caste and also the ruling aristocracy's sense of clean superiority and maintenance of its segregation.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps this may explain the exclusion of the Gāhadavālas and Senas from the list of pure clans of Ksatriyas.<sup>90</sup>

The Gāhadavālas claimed a ksatra lineage.<sup>91</sup> Quite likely some of the feudatory families also were Ksatriyas.

The Aitgareya Brahmana allows a ksatriya to use the pravara of his purohita and some later works allow the use of

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86 Elliot E. Dowson, The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians, vol.1, pp.16-17.

87 Altekar, A.S., Rastra Kulas and Their Times, pp.318-319.

88 Vaidya, C.V., History of Medieval Hindu India, vol.III, p.374.

89 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.35.

90 Ibid. (Cf.fn.395), p.36.

91 E.I., IX, pp.319-28.

both the Gotra and pravara of the purohita by a Ksatriya - at the time of marriage.<sup>92</sup> The gotra of Rauta Rajyadhara-varman Ksatriya<sup>93</sup> is said to be vatsa which has five pravaras, viz - Bhargava, Cyavana, Apnavan, Aurva, Jamadejneya. The gotra of the feudatory chief of the Singara dynasty<sup>94</sup> has been mentioned as sandilya.

R.N. Nandi<sup>95</sup> suggests that adoption of traditional Brahmanic gotras by non-Brahmana group was to gain social prestige and the gotra had become a useful tool of social mobility. But this application might have been ornamental also.<sup>96</sup> Probably because of the wider prevalence of clan exogamy among the Indian aboriginal population, the non-Brahmana communities were also divided into a variety of exogamous units - which are mentioned as Gotras or lanika Gotras in texts.<sup>97</sup> Thus Gotras and Pravaras served to accommodate newly formed castes with new kin-groups and clans.

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92 Kane, P.V., op.cit., pp.492-3.

93 E.I., IV, pp.111-112.

94 Ibid., pp.130-132.

95 Nandi, R.N., "Gotra and Social Mobility in the Deccan", PIHC, 22nd session, Jabalpur, 1970, pp.118-24.

96 Risley, H.H., The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, vol.I, Calcutta, 1819, pp.1-Lxxi.

97 Agrawala, V.S., India as Known to Panini, p.77.



The common honorifics of the Ksatriyas are Thakkura and Rāuta which were also used by the Brahmanas and Kāyasthas.<sup>98</sup> The Dharmasāstras enjoined on a ruling Ksatriya the chief occupation of protecting cows, Brāhmanas and others, on a Ksatriya who was not a king, worship of gods and serve the Brāhmanas. Gautama prescribes for an ordinary Ksatriya service to the king as a soldier and in times of distress he could take to the vaiśya vṛtti.<sup>99</sup>

No substantial change appears to have occurred in the duty and position of the Ksatriyas. Yet the emergence of the Rājaputrās or Rajputs during this period is significant - who began to emerge from 7th/8th centuries A.D.<sup>100</sup> and by the 12th century proliferated into thirtysix clans. Though literally it means 'son-of the king', the term Rājaputrā came to be applied to warrior clans and petty chiefs holding village who largely constituted the ruling landed aristocracy.<sup>101</sup> The appearance and rise of the Rājaputrās in the Indian scene synchronised with the feudalistic tendencies announcing their importance.<sup>102</sup>

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98 Ibid., p.106.

99 Cf. Gautama quoted in Kṛtya; Gāryahastha Kānda, pp.254-55.

100 Vaidya, C.V., Medieval Hindu India, vol.II, p.3.

101 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.32.

102 Vaidya, C.V., op.cit., Chap.3.

We do not find direct references to the conditions and positions of the vaiśyas and śūdras from epigraphic sources of our period and region. Hence the reliance is more on the contemporary literary sources.

The early medieval period witnessed a change in the relative positions of the vaiśyas and the śūdras. The general occupation of the vaiśyas was agriculture, trade and money lending. But the vaiśyas were not allowed to trade in certain articles including salt, wine, curd, clarified butter, milk, lac, hide, flesh, nidigo, poison, arms and idols.<sup>103</sup> Since the Brahmanas were also barred<sup>104</sup> from trading in the above mentioned articles even in times of distress, this left only the śūdras to trade in these articles. What appears from all these injunctions is that even in times of distress the lower varnas could not take up the occupation of the upper varnas.<sup>105</sup>

The distinction between the vaiśyas and the śūdras got blurred in the post-Gupta times as the śūdras no longer appear mainly as slaves, artisans and agricultural labourers; they took the place of vaiśyas as cultivators.<sup>106</sup> This is amply

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103 Cf. Kṛtya, Garyahastha Kanda, pp.254-55.

104 Ibid., p.210.

105 Ibid., p.257.

106 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.17.

corroborated by the accounts of Hsuan-Tsang,<sup>107</sup> and Alberuni.<sup>108</sup>

The sūdras were by no accounts a homogeneous caste. Their heterogeneity derived from different sections of the lowest rung of the society like the agricultural labourers and petty peasants; artisans and craftsmen, vendors, manual workers, servants and those following low occupations. This tended to divide them into several caste groups<sup>109</sup> as revealed by the contemporary sources - which relate to other regions but may help us in the face of paucity of contemporary sources relating to our region.

The inscriptions of the early medieval period mention sub-sections of the sūdra like the artisans, craftsmen, musicians, etc.

The sūdras were divided into sat-sūdras and Asat-sūdras on the basis of the purity and impurity of their profession and conduct.<sup>110</sup> Another division was into Bhojyāna (a sūdra whose prepared food could be partaken by Brahmanas) and Abhojyāna.<sup>111</sup> Then there were Nir-vā-sita sūdras e.g. the cāṇḍālas who lived outside the limits of a settlement.<sup>112</sup>

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107 T. Walters, On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, ed. T. Rhys Davids & Bushell, London, 1904-5, vol.I, p.168.

108 Sachan, op.cit., vol.I, p.101.

109 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.38.

110 Kane, P.V., op.cit., vol.II, Pt.I, p.122.

111 Ibid., p.121.

112 Ibid.

The Dharmasāstras speak of Arityajas.<sup>113</sup> This is corroborated by Alberuni<sup>114</sup> who spoke of Arityajas as next to the sudras. These Antyajas who performed many services, were considered as members of certain craft or profession - but not among the castes. Then there were Doma (Domba) and cāndāla who were not reckoned among any caste or guild and performed menial jobs and were considered to be illegitimate mixed castes degraded as out-castes.<sup>115</sup>

The Dharmasastra list of the Arityajas was sometimes expanded as gleaned from the law digests<sup>116</sup> of our period - the above list of Arityajas was distinguished from the Antyavasayins.<sup>117</sup> The latter held as inferior to the former.

The practice of untouchability gained in strength during our period. Untouchability derived from low birth, menial jobs, sinful acts, adherence to heretical religion as sects

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113 Ibid., p.70. Rajaka (washerman) carmakara (worker in hides), Nata (dancer), Buruda (worker in bamboo), Kaivarta (fishermen), Meda and Bhilla, are the seven Arityajas mentioned by Atri, 199; Yama, 33.

114 Sachan, op.cit., vol.I, p.101.

115 Ibid., pp.101-102.

116 Kane, P.V., op.cit., p.70.

117 Ibid. Aritya Vasayins are - Candila, Svapace (eater of dog's flesh), Ksatri, Srita, Vaidehika, Magadha, and Ayogava (Mitaksara on Yajnavalkya-III.260).

and certain physical impurities.<sup>118</sup> The early medieval period witnessed increase in the number of untouchables. The Arityajas and Cāndālas continued to be regarded as untouchables as before.<sup>119</sup> The Dombas and the Carmakāras became untouchables by the 12th century A.D.<sup>120</sup> The practice of untouchability was extended to the sūdras in general and various means of Prāyascita (purification) were prescribed by the law givers like Apararka and vijñanesvara.<sup>121</sup>

Yājñavalkya<sup>122</sup> (c.A.D.100-300) refers to the term Kayastha and the Gupta records<sup>123</sup> mention the Prathama Kayastha as assisting the provincial governors and district administration. Usanes mentions the Kayasthas as a caste and Vedavvāsa smṛti places them with the sūdras.<sup>124</sup> Upto 8th century A.D. the term Kayastha indicated official designation as gleaned from

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118 Kane, P.V., op.cit., Chap.IV.

119 Ibid.

120 Sharma, R.S., Sudras in Ancient India, pp.262ff.

121 Apararka (on Yaj.p.275), Vijnunesvara cited in Kane, op.cit., p.174.

122 Yajna.I, 336, cited in Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.554,p.100.

123 Sircar, D.C., Select Inscriptions, pp.283ff-324ff.

124 Kane, P.V., op.cit., p.76. D.C. Sircar (Bhartiya Vidya, vol.X, 1949, pp.280ff) saw this crystallisation into caste as due to the fusion of the class of serebes into ~~eastexasxatuxxta~~ with the tribal group known as Karanas, probably a mixed caste. But this fusion was not the cause but only a stage in the formation of the Kayastha caste, holds B.N.S. Yadav, op.cit., fn.557, p.100.

the epigraphic evidences but then onwards, we hear of Kāyastha families like Valabha, Gauda, Māthura, Kataria, Vāstavya or Srivastavya, Negama,<sup>125</sup> etc. which gradually came to connote jati with character of caste groups. Thus by early medieval period the Kāyasthas had emerged as a caste group. However, Lakṣmidhara did not recognise the Kāyasthas as forming a separate caste and held them as royal officials.<sup>126</sup>

The Gāhāḍavāla inscriptions are not clear about the term Kāyastha whether it denotes a caste or a official designation only. The Gāhāḍavāla inscriptions mention some of the scribes as Kāyasthas<sup>127</sup> while others have been termed as Karnikas<sup>128</sup> and still others have been termed simply Thakkuras.<sup>129</sup> Sometimes the scribes bear the title

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125 Cf. Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., fn.559, p.100.

126 Kritya, Rajadharmakanda, p.83.

127 E.I., vol.IV, pp.103-104 (Name of the scribe is Srivastava Kayastha Thakkura Sri Jalhana).

128 Ibid., pp.114-116ff. (Copper plates of V.S. 1174; V.S. 1175, which mention the scribes as Karnika, Sri Vasudeva and Karnika Thakkura Sri-Sahadeva, respectively).

129 Ibid., pp.107-108ff.

Maha Ksapatalika.<sup>130</sup> Though the Kayasthas are mentioned as scribes, yet they appear to have held high posts as the term Maha Ksapatalika may also suggest that the Kayasthas emerged as the rivals of the older social aristocracy.<sup>131</sup>

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130 Ibid., pp.115, 128-30.

131 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.53.

## CHAPTER III

### POLITICAL STRUCTURE

#### I

In the recent years the early medieval Indian political structure has caught the attention of many historians, who have discussed this problem through various angles and perspectives. The characterisation of this period of Indian history as a 'dark period' by the conventional historians which according to them was characterised by the 'absence' of vast territorial kingdoms after the decline of the Guptas, has been questioned very effectively. Now, there is no doubt that the erstwhile 'dark period' was undergoing significant changes in the various aspects of society.<sup>1</sup> Historians have come up with different models to explain these changes. At present there exist at least three important structural models for early medieval Indian polity. These are: (i) "Indian Feudalism model", (ii) "segmentary state model", (iii) "integrative polity model".

First of all we <sup>will</sup> try to conceptualise the theoretical framework of these models in brief and then would examine the validity of these generalisations on the basis of our own study of political and social structure of middle Gangetic basin during the early medieval period. We will also try to find out some regional variants in the process of social fragmentations, if possible.

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1 Sharma, R.S., "Social Changes in Early Medieval India (c.AD 500-1200)", The First Devraj Chanana Memorial Lecture, 1969.



The concept of Indian feudalism envisages a gradual breakdown of the centralised bureaucratic state system, a process which led to the emergence of diverse centres of power in the form of local kingdoms and principalities at the cost of the former. The genesis of the feudal polity has been sought in the ever-increasing land grants to religious as well as secular authorities with administrative and judicial rights corroding the authority of the state and leading to the "parcellisation" of its sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> This weakening of centralised authority through feudalisation of state apparatus led to the creation of a class of landed intermediaries which alienated land and people from the central dynasty. This process of political fragmentation and decentralisation of political authority was further aggravated on account of the decline of interregional trade and urban centres, which further weakened the economic structure of the state as is reflected in the paucity of coins during this period.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, however, the 'Indian feudalism school' itself has undergone a process of refining the conceptual framework by conceding the limitations of the explanation of feudal developments in terms of foreign trade, the

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2 Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism, 1980, Chap.1.

3 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.54ff.

decline of which depended largely on factors external to the Indian situation.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of feudal tendencies, thus, are sought to be explained in terms of prevalence of sharp class antagonism as reflected in the concept of Kaliyuga. Thus the emergence of 'feudal polity' is viewed in terms of inherent contradictions in the society. It would not be out of point here to note that such a fundamental crisis in ancient and medieval Indian society has been questioned and a kind of 'equilibrium' is believed to have existed on account of high fertility of land and low subsistence level of the peasants, which factors <sup>led to</sup> a high quantum of surplus available to the state. But, the above criticism does not give due attention to the evidence which indicates that a sharp internal crisis characterised the society of this period. This conclusion is based on a far-fetched notion that the 'peasants had control over the means of production from the economic viewpoint at least. But this point has been well refuted by Prof. R.S. Sharma in one of his recent articles.<sup>5</sup>

A group of American historians, Burton Stein<sup>6</sup> being most prominent among them, have put forward another theory,

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4 Jha, D.N., "Early Indian Feudalism : A Historiographical Critique", Presidential Address, Section Ancient India, Indian History Congress, XL Session, Waltair, December 1979.

5 Sharma, R.S., "How Feudal was Indian Feudalism", Social Scientist, XII, no.2, 1984, pp.20ff.

6 Stein Burton, Peasant, State and Society in Medieval India, 1980.

namely of the segmentary state. The theoretical framework of this concept has been derived from the studies of the Allur society in Eastern Africa by A.W. Southhall, an anthropologist. The concept of 'segmentary state' seeks to place the cola and Pallava polity on the 'continuum of governance' between the 'stateless' tribal form of government and the unitary state. This theory conceives of a multcentred political structure formed of various "nuclear areas of corporate institutions" which were basically self-governing independent and economically autonomous units of agrarian organisation.<sup>7</sup> Though Stein concedes that the authority and political control was absolute at the centre, as we go towards the periphery where 'several levels of subordinate foei' organised pyramidally existed, the form of the control of the centre over these segments turns into mere 'ritual sovereignty'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in other words, the 'segmentary state' model characterises the south Indian polity during the early medieval period as pyramidally organised segments with a strong centralised political control at its top, the authority of which tends to recede in proportion of the distance of various segments from the core and turns into mere 'ritual sovereignty' at the extreme periphery of the political structure.

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7 Ibid., p.8.

8 Ibid., p.274.

But this model is not without criticism. Examining the concept of segmentary state and its applicability in South Indian early medieval society, D.N. Jha in his recent brilliant article<sup>9</sup> has not only questioned the interpretation of various terms i.e., nādu, nattār, etc. but also pointed out the application of inadequacies of this concept derived from the study of the political techniques adopted by immigrant groups of the Allur of East Africa to the Pallava-cola kingdoms who are believed to be indigenous people.<sup>10</sup> He further shows that the communities which the colas encountered were not 'chiefless' and nadus consisted of different groups in hierarchical order, contrary to the Allur society, and thus nādu could not have been social and administrative cohesive segments of power. Apart from these criticisms based on empirical study, H.Kulke has raised an interesting question on the theoretical framework of the segmentary state by pointing out the relationship between 'ritual sovereignty' and direct political control.<sup>11</sup> He maintains that with regard to traditional Indian society, 'ritual sovereignty' seems

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9     Validity of the Brahmana-peasant alliance and the 'segmentary state in early medieval South India', Social Science Probingns, vol.I, no.2, June 1984, pp.270-296.

10    Ibid., p.284.

11    "Fragmentation and Segmentation Versus Integration" in Studies in History, vol.IV, no.2, December 1982.

to be an integral part and sometimes even pace-maker of political power.<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of the study of the process of state formation in Orissa, Kulke presents an alternative model called 'integrative polity' for this period. He points out that the period of north Indian decentralisation after the decline of the Guptas witnesses a very intensive process of state formation on the local, sub-regional and regional level resulting in the emergence of various indigenous states in different parts of India. He explains the emergence of indigenous states as a result of the process of integration at various levels, i.e. territorial, cultural, etc. The regional traditions, according to Kulke, with their vertically and horizontally integrating functions "bridge the gulf between the 'high' and the 'low', thus modifying the function of 'ritual sovereignty' to 'ritual polity'.<sup>13</sup> B.D. Chattopadhyaya<sup>14</sup> draws attention towards the process of integration in political and economic realms. He suggests to view the differential levels of foci of powers as components of state structure which were sought

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12 Ibid., p.254.

13 Ibid., p.262.

14 "Political Processes and Structure of Polity in Early Medieval India : Problems and Perspective", Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 44th Session, December 1983.

to be integrated. The Samanta system according to Prof. Chattopadhyaya represented these diffused foci of "quasi-autonomous" power. He maintains that the dominant mode in the formation of the structure was represented in the expansion of a lineage into supra-local power through pulling military resources and other supports from other lineages, which, in turn, required a system of ranking which reflected in the formation of ranks in the Samanta system.

## II

The disintegration and decline of the imperial Guptas had produced a power vacuum in the northern India. The Gurjara-Pratiharas had succeeded in establishing their seat of power at Kanauj after the death of Harsa and controlled a substantial portion of Bihar. The palas had entrenched themselves in Bengal and dominated a good portion of the eastern Bihar. Perhaps they had no fixed capital since most of their inscriptions were issued from Jayaskandhā vāras, viz. Pātaliputra, Mudgagiri,<sup>15</sup> Vataparvatāka (modern Vatesvara-parvatā near Patharghata in Bhagalpur district), Rāmavati<sup>16</sup> (near modern Gaura in the Malda district),

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15 I.A., XLVII, p.304ff, lines - 27-81.

16 JBAS, LXIX, Plate I., p.66ff. line-30.

Vilasapura or Haradhama<sup>17</sup>, Sahasaganda,<sup>18</sup> Kancanapura<sup>19</sup> and Kapilavastu.<sup>20</sup> Their location on the Ganga was a great unifying factor in the Pala dominion. At the same time, these various Skandhavaras may reflect constant shift in the seats of power as a disintegrating factor and administrative decentralisation typical of a feudal polity.<sup>21</sup>

The Rashtrakutas had their capital at Manyakheta or Malkhed, but they too issued landgrants from Jayaskandhavaras.<sup>22</sup> But these Skandhavaras might have been strategically situated to suppress refractory vassals.<sup>23</sup>

The early medieval period is marked by the constant tripartite struggle among the Pala, Pratihara and the Rashtrakutas for the control of Kanauj which had emerged as the most important seat of power in the northern India after the disintegration and decline of the imperial Guptas. Thus the middle Gangetic basin hardly had any political stability during the early medieval period.

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17 IA, XIV, 166-8; XXI-97-101; EI, 23 line 28, etc.

18 EI, XXIX, 1,6, line 26.

19 Ibid., 7, line 24.

20 Ibid., XXXIII, 47, line 2.

21 Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism (Delhi, 1980), p.87.

22 EI, VII, line 32, p.13; Ibid., XI, line 37, p.159.

23 Sharma, R.S., op.cit.

The Gāhadavālas emerged as sovereign power in Kanauj after the decline of the Pratihāras in 1089 A.D. The Pala power was also on the verge of disintegration, specially in north Bihar where the Karnātas emerged as an independent power in Mithila by A.D. 1097. Thus the middle of Gangetic basin presented a scene of fragmented political authorities dispersed and constantly fighting for extension of their dominion and status.

Although the scene was one of fragmented political authorities, the general political structure derived its roots from the classical Hindū political ideas as represented by the Arthasastra and the earlier Dharmasāstras. Though the early medieval period witnessed some remarkable changes in the actual political institutions, the law-givers of this period voiced the same old political ideas and hardly made any original contribution.<sup>24</sup>

#### King:

A centralised hereditary monarchy based on the law of primogeniture and attached with divinity as enunciated by the Dharmasāstras was the normal feature of Indian polity after the later vedic period. This feature continued even during the early medieval period. The various political powers manifested such features in the middle Gangetic basin during the period under study.

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24 Yedav, B.N.S., Society and Culture in Northern India, p.114.



The Pāla kings used high sounding titles like Paramesvara Paramabhattachāraka, Mahārājā-dhirāja. The Pratihāra kings also assumed similar titles.<sup>25</sup> From 10th century onwards more and more grandiloquent titles were used by the king. The most classic example may be that of the Gahadavala king Govindacandra and his successors who held titles like Paramabhattachāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramesvara Asvapati, Gajapati, Narapati, Rajatrayādhipati, Vividha-Vidyā-Vicāra-Vascaṣpati.<sup>26</sup>

This group of titles was assumed by Visvarupa Sena and Surya Sena probably after Lakṣman Sena's success against the Gāhadavālas.<sup>27</sup> These titles may suggest that the kings had unlimited powers at least theoretically and that the king was supreme over the lords, chiefs and princes owing allegiance to him. Thus the idea of paramountcy together with the enhanced dignity and pretensions of monarchs under feudal conditions is inherent in the assumption of such titles.<sup>28</sup>

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25 EI, XIV, p.11.

26 JASB, LVI, p.108 (C.P. of Govindacandra of V.S. 1180). Three titles, Asvapati, Gajapati and Narapati, have invited controversies. Some scholars (Ibid., XLII, Pt.1 (1873), p.327) hold that Gajapati and Narapati were used by the Telingana-Karnata and Orrisa rulers respectively. R.S. Tripathy (History of Kanauj, p.303) suggests that these three expressions denote three different classes of feudatories who had accepted the Gahadavala sovereignty. Interestingly the Gahadavala feudatories used three different designations - Mahanayaka, Ranaka and Maharaja. The Kalacuris also used similar titles in the 11th century A.D. But more significant is the fact that the Gahadavalas used these titles exactly as the Kalacuris only after the Govindacandra's victory over the Kalacuris.

27 Niyogi, Roma, History of the Gahadavala Dynasty, Calcutta, 1959.

28 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.114.

Yuvarāja:

Under a hereditary monarchy based on the law of primogeniture with the eldest son to succeed the father, Yuvarāja or heir-apparent played an important role during this period, although his precise functions and activities are not gleaned from the inscriptions.

The heir-apparent or the Yuvarāja have been mentioned as the Dūtakas or the messengers of the land-grants during the Pāla period.<sup>29</sup> A Yuvarāja appointed to a high administrative post was called Kumāra.<sup>30</sup> The Kumāras also gave counsel to the kings in connection with war; for example Rāmapāla is said to have consulted his son Rajyapāla in connection with the Kaivarta revolt.<sup>31</sup> The Kumāra had his own Amatyas called Kumārāmātyas, distinguished from the Kumārāmātyas were to be attached only to those princes assigned with gubernatorial tasks or to other princes without any such task.<sup>33</sup>

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- 29 IA, XXI (1892), p.253ff; EI, IV, p.243. Yuvaraja Rajyapala and Yuvaraja Tribhuvan Pala had been entrusted with the duties of Dulakas, the above two inscriptions respectively.
- 30 Sen, B.C., Some Historical Aspects of the Inscription of Bengal (Calcutta, 1942), pp.529-30.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 EI, VIII, pp.155-56; IA, XV, pp.7-13.

The mention of the Yuvarajas during the reign of the Pala kings may suggest that the heir-apparent was chosen during the life time of the king itself. This was in keeping with the orthodox smṛti <sup>injuncti~~ons~~</sup> ~~enjoinments~~.

Under the Gāhāḍavālas also the heir-apparent was often selected during the lifetime of the king and vested with all the royal prerogatives as is reflected from the inscriptions. Sometimes a prince, though not proclaimed Yuvarāja, was vested with all royal prerogatives and could grant lands during his father's lifetime as is the case with Mahārāja Putra Rajyapāladeva, a son of Govindacandra.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the grants made by the princes were announced in their names only and not in the king's name as was the case with the grants of queens.<sup>35</sup> Mahārājaputra Jayacandra though not actually proclaimed a Yuvarāja exercised special powers in administration unlike other Gāhāḍavāla princes and granted lands.<sup>36</sup>

The Gāhāḍavāla princes had their separate insignia or *Lauchana* on their seals which was different from the king's seal.<sup>37</sup> Prince Asphoṭcandraḍeva and Rajyapāladeva

34 EI, XIII, pp.216-20; Ibid., VIII, pp.156-58.

35 EI, IV, pp.101ff; Ibid., V, pp.116ff.

36 IA, XIV, pp.101-104; EI, II, pp.358-61.

37 EI, VIII, pp.155-56. The royal seal comprised a figure of a Garuda above and a couch-shell below with the name of the king across the centre and the Prince's *Lauchana* consisted of a couch-shell above and an arrow below with the name of the Yuvaraja across the centre.

used this type of insignia in their inscriptions.<sup>38</sup> This may suggest that separate seals for princes had not<sup>been</sup> evolved during the reign of Madanapāla-deva. But there is evidence of the existence of separate Lauchana for the princes by the couch-shell and arrow drawn vertically in the proper right margin of the Basāhi<sup>39</sup> and Kamauli<sup>40</sup> grants of Mahārājaputra Govindacandra bearing his name and not of his father.

#### Queen:

The Pala inscriptions do not mention the queen as an important personage in the polity which appears to be the case with the Gāhadavāla polity. The only mention of the term Rājñī is found in the Ramganj copper plate of Isvaraghosa<sup>41</sup>, quite likely a pāla feudatory. The real significance of the term cannot be assessed.

The queen appears to be an important personage in the Gahadavala polity. The Arthasāstra<sup>42</sup> placed the queen in the category of king's mother, commander-in-chief, Purohita,

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38 Ibid.

39 IA, XIV, pp.101-4.

40 EI, II, pp.358-61.

41 Inscriptions of Bengal, ed., N.G. Majumdar, vol.III, 149 (Rajshahi, 1929).

42 Arthasastra, pp.cit., v.3.

Yuvarāja and ministers, all of whom could draw a salary of 48,000 panas per annum. The Gāhadavāla inscriptions endowed the chief-queen or patta-mahādevī with all royal prerogatives (Samasta-rāja-prakriy-opeta) who granted tax-free lands with the consent of the king.<sup>43</sup> The queen could also give consent to land-grants made by the princes.<sup>44</sup> Some of the Gāhadavāla queens had their own treasury or Bhāṇḍāgāra which comprised the marriage gifts, bath and toilet money from the father and income from the property settled at the time of marriage by the husband and such other funds, with a Bhāṇḍāgarika or treasurer.<sup>45</sup>

#### Purohita:

This important official is conspicuous by his absence in the Pāla grants. Quite likely the Buddhist faith of the Palas motivated them to dispense with this official, while in the Gāhadavāla polity he is an important personage. Lakṣmidhara speaks of a Brāhmana of good family well versed in the vedas and who has done tenance, to be made a purohita.<sup>46</sup>

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43 EI, IV, pp.101ff; Ibid., V, pp.196ff.

44 EI, II, pp.358-61.

45 ASR, I, pp.95-96.

46 Kṛtya, Rajadharmakanda, pp.164ff.

The duties of a Purohita are mainly religious ones. The post of Purohita appears to have been hereditary under the Gāhadavālas as gleaned from the inscriptions.<sup>47</sup>

Mantri:

Probably the Mantri had a highly developed status under the Pālas.<sup>48</sup> The post appears to have been hereditary. Partly the adoption of hereditary principles in the appointment of ministers and partly their weakness may explain the predominance of the Prime Minister during the reigns of Vīgrahapāla and Nārāyanpāla.<sup>49</sup> This may suggest that able and ambitious ministers could put an effective check to the arbitrariness of the kings, although such influence of the ministers was rather personal than constitutional. One such important minister under Govindacandra Gāhadavāla was Lakṣmidhara who claimed to have given wonderful counsel to the former. Lakṣmidhara describes himself as Mantriśvara (Chief Minister) and Mahasāndhivīgrahika. His father Bhaṭṭa Hṛdayadhara is

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47 EI, IV, Copper Plates of V.S. 1182, 1200, 1221, etc.

48 The Mantrin or Minister is spoken of as an important wheel in the administrative machinery by the ancient Indian political thinkers. We have instances of many ministers of 10 to 12th centuries who claimed to have practically framed and directed the king's policy and were respected and obeyed by the kings. EI, II, p.160; IA, XVIII, pp.62-64ff.

49 T. Majumdar, R.C., History of Ancient Bengal (Calcutta, 1971), p.306.

also described as a Mahāsāndhivigrahika.<sup>50</sup> Though Laksmīdhara places the Mantri at the top of the list of the Amātyas, yet strangely the name Mantri does not appear in the Gāhaḍavāla charter's list of officials.

Several later Pala grants mention a 'Mantri' as Dūtaka.<sup>51</sup>

#### Amātyas or Rājapurusas:

Under the Pālas the Amātyas appear to have formed a cadre of high officials. They are not mentioned alone but are mentioned as the Rājamātyas or the Mahā Kumārāmātyas. As mentioned in the case of the Yuvarājas, the Kumārāmātyas are said to have been officials under the Kumāras or the Yuvarājas. The Rājamātyas appear to have been officials under the king, since both Rājamātyas and Mahākumārāmātyas have been mentioned separately in the Bhagalpur grant<sup>52</sup> of Narāyana-Pāladeva.

The Rājapurusas appear to be a distinct class of officials. This can be inferred from a Kalacuri inscription,<sup>53</sup>

50 Kṛtya, Danakanda, pp.48,89. In the Rajadharmakanda Laksmīdhara, following ancient law givers, enumerates the qualification of a Minister as of high birth, learned in sastras, rites and mantra, of heroic personality and cool-headed. He gives preference to Brahmanas and Mantas or hereditary officers (Pitr-Paitamahan). Ibid., Rajadharmakanda, pp.22-24.

51 IA, XV, p.304; EI, XIV, p.324.

52 IA, XV, p.304ff.

53 EI, VIII, pp.155-56. This inscription of Kaladeva Sodhadeva (V.S.1134) refers to two distinct classes of officers, royal and others. The royal officials (Rajapurusas) were certainly appointed by the king from the gentry and the others appear to have been selected or elected by the village-people. (Cf.Niyogi,

which is quite similar to the Gāhaḍavāla inscriptions in technique and style. The inscriptions of the Kalacuris and other dynasties of this period generally referred to the village headman as Mahattara or Mahattama, but the village headman, the Janapada and village community are conspicuous by their absence in the Gāhaḍavāla inscriptions. Perhaps under the Gāhaḍavālas, the Rājapurūṣas were more directly concerned with the formalities and technicalities of a grant.<sup>54</sup>

The Rājan, Rājñī and Yuvarāja occurring in the Gāhaḍavāla inscriptions have been taken to mean either feudatory chiefs and their families, <sup>many</sup> of whom lived in the royal court of provincial governors and their families.<sup>55</sup> But the occupations of the frontier regions by the Gāhaḍavāla chiefs or feudatories does not indicate their continued stay at the imperial court and they could not have been concerned with land grants outside their jurisdiction.<sup>56</sup> At the same time quite likely it might have been a convention to refer all grants to the three highest personalities in the central administration.<sup>57</sup>

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54 Niyogi, Roma, op.cit.

55 Sen, B.C., op.cit., p.542.

56 Niyogi, Roma, op.cit.

57 Ibid.



Senapati:

Both Palas and Gahadavalas had their own standing army, as is evident from their inscription. The term Mahāsenapati occurs in almost all the Pāla records among the list of officials who are made known of the said grants.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps Mahāsenapati was the head of the military department, some special officers like Kotapala in charge of forts and Prāritapāla, the warden of the marches.<sup>59</sup> There were separate officers under him incharge of infantry, cavalry elephants, camels and ships which formed the divisions of the army.<sup>60</sup> The term caṭas and Bhaṭas perhaps denote 'regular' and 'irregular' troops.<sup>61</sup>

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58 IA, XV, p.304ff; Ibid., XXI, 253ff; EI, IV, 243, etc.

59 Ibid.

60 EI, IV, p.243. (Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapaladeva has the compound Hasty - asva-go-mahisya-aj-avik-adhyaksa and bala dhyaksa and Nankadhyaksa); Ibid., XXII, p.290ff. (Nalanda Plate of Dharmapaladeva) has 'hasty-asva-ostra-balavyaprtaka and Kisora-vadava-go-mahisya-adhikrta) IA, XXI, p.253ff. has hasty-asva-ostra-bala-vyaprtaka and Kisora-badava-go-inihisya-aj-avik-adhya-Ksa. Thus two types of officials are reflected. viz. Vyaprtaka and either 'adhikrta' or 'adhyaksa'. Adhyaksa is perhaps a superintendent in civil administration. Cf. R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, fn.47, p.330.

61 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.316.

Mahasandhivigrahika:<sup>62</sup> R.C. Majumdar thinks that this important official was the chief officer or the Head of the Department of the War and Peace,<sup>63</sup> under the Palas. Strangely, Mahasandhivigrahika does not appear in the list of officials of the Gahadavalas but Laksmidhara, who was a minister of Govindacandra calls himself the Mahasandhivigrahika.<sup>64</sup> Laksmidhara appears to have been an influential minister of Govindacandra Gahadavala. Hence the office of the Mahasandhivigrahika must have been an important one, though its absence from the regular list of officials is inexplicable. However, R.S. Sharma,<sup>65</sup> holds that Mahasandhivigrahika was the designation of an official who had been brought into the line of feudal vassals like Maha-samanta and Maharaja; as the prefix Maha (great or chief) would suggest. Further, he associates this official with the procedure of land grant. However, this official had assumed feudal status and sometimes gave consent to land grants in the absence of king.

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62 JASB, LXIX, 68; IA, XV, p.304ff. In the former inscription Mahasandhivigrahika is mentioned as the Dulaka, while in the latter one he is mentioned in the regular list of officials.

63 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.313.

64 Krtiya, Brahmacarikanda, p.2; V.8, p.279.

65 Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism, pp.77, 178f.

Mahāksapatalika and Jvestha Kayastha

The former was the in-charge of the Accounts and Records Department and the latter assisted the former.<sup>66</sup> Under the Gahadavalas too Mahāksapatalika had similar functions to carry out. Lakṣmīdhara prescribes to qualities to be possessed by the one who is to be chosen as Aksapatalika, viz knowledge of income and expenditure, ability to read people's character and full information about the produce of the land.<sup>67</sup> Aksapatalika appears to have taken over from the Karaṇikas and Kāyasthas, the task of writing grants<sup>68</sup> from the reign of Candradeva. However, Prof. R. S. Sharma<sup>69</sup> thinks that he had been brought into the line of feudal vassals like the Mahā-sādhivigrahika and was largely associated with the procedure of land grant.

The major officials discussed above generally occur in almost all grants of the major ruling dynasties of the early medieval period in the middle-Gangetic basin. We will now discuss rest of the officials as occurring in the inscriptions of the two major dynasties in the Pālas and the Gāhadavālas separately. We will, first of all,

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66 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.315.

67 Krtya, Rajadharmakanda, p.26.

68 EI, IV, p.115 (Grant of V.S. 1226, 1231, etc.).

69 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.178.

discuss the officials mentioned in the pāla inscriptions<sup>70</sup> which are as follows:

Rajarajanaka: All charters begin with Raj-rajanaka. They may denote feudal chiefs who probably stayed at the court.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes Rajanaka has been equated with Ranaka<sup>73</sup> but the occurrence of these two designations together in one record defies this suggestion. Quite likely Rajanaka is a corrupt form of Rajanyaka.<sup>73</sup>

Rajaputra: Indicates probably a younger prince who was assigned some regular duties or functions.<sup>74</sup>

Mahakartakrtika: Meaning not yet established.

Mahadanhsadhasadhaneka : Meaning obscure.

Mahadandanayaka : Incharge of the judicial department. He was also called Dharmadhikara. He could act as the chief judge, general or magistrate.<sup>75</sup>

Rajasthaneya : Regent or Viceroy.<sup>76</sup>

Uparika : He was a provincial governor. In the list Uparika is generally preceded by the Rajasthaneya and the two together

70 EI, IV, p.249; IA, XV, p.304ff; Ibid., p.253ff; EI, XVII, p.310ff, etc.

71 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.312.

72 IA, XXI, Line 31, p.254.

73 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit.

74 Ibid., p.313.

75 Ibid., p.325.

76 Ibid.

probably mean a viceroy and a governor.<sup>77</sup>

Dasaparādhika : An officer assigned the duty to collect fines for ten specified kinds of criminal offences.<sup>78</sup>

Cauroddharaneka : Probably related to the Revenue Department and was responsible for the collection of tax payable by the villagers for protection against thieves and robbers.<sup>79</sup>

Dāndika, Dāndepāsika or Dandasakti : Related to the police department. But their precise duty cannot be defined.<sup>80</sup>

Gaulmeka : Precise significance and meaning remain highly conjectural. It may denote an officer in-charge of a military squadron called Gulma. But Gulma also means a wood, fort and a police station.<sup>81</sup> Following the latter meaning Fleet translates Gaulmika as Superintendent of Woods and Forests.<sup>82</sup> U.N. Ghoshal following Gulmadeya used in the Arthasāstra in the sense of dues paid at the military or police stations has explained Gaulmika as 'collector' of customs duties.<sup>83</sup>

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77 Ibid., p.326.

78 Ibid., p.324.

79 Ibid., p.314.

80 Ibid., p.315.

81 Ibid., p.318.

82 CII, III, p.246, fn.4.

83 Ghoshal, U.N., Contribution to the History of the Hindu Revenue System, pp.246, 292, Calcutta, 1929.

Saulkika : He was the collector of toll and custom dues.<sup>84</sup>

Ksetrapa: He was probably an officer in-charge of land under cultivation.<sup>85</sup>

Prāntapāla : Warden of the marches.<sup>86</sup>

Kottapala : Officer in charge of forts.<sup>87</sup>

Khandarakṣa : He was probably an officer of the public works department, specially charged with the construction and repairs of buildings.<sup>88</sup> According to Ghoshal he was a military official.<sup>89</sup>

Duta-Praṣṅika : Belonged to the foreign department. Its literal meaning is one who sends out a messenger. But it appeared to have two separate words, Duta and Praṣṅika, the former meaning something like a modern ambassador and the latter meaning a messenger or a special envoy sent to a foreign court with a specific or special message.<sup>90</sup>

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84 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.326.

85 Ibid., p.325.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p.318.

89 Ghoshal, U.N., I.H.Q., XIV, p.839.

90 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.313.

Gamāgamik<sup>91</sup> : Meaning obscure.

Abhētvaramāna : Meaning obscure.

Visayapati : District Officer.<sup>92</sup>

Bhogapati : According to Kielhorn<sup>93</sup>, it means chief of the 'Bhogas' where Bhoga is perhaps equivalent to Bhukti.

Sasthādihikṛta : It apparently means a superintendent or comptroller of the Sasthānisa or Sadbhāga i.e. the sixth part of the produce due to the king.<sup>94</sup>

Khola : Though his exact function cannot be determined but according to Ardha-Magadhi Dictionary, on the authority of Bhadrabāhu Khola meant a spy.<sup>95</sup> Kielhorn suggests that its place was taken by Presanika (messenger).<sup>96</sup>

Balādhyakṣa : Appears to have been the incharge of infantry.<sup>97</sup>

Tārika : He was probably the overseer of ferries, tolls and forests.<sup>98</sup>

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91 I.A., XV, p.304ff.

92 Ibid., p.326.

93 EI, IV, p.253, fn.6.

94 Ibid., fn.7. Cf, Mahasmṛti, Chap. VII, V.131.

95 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.314.

96 EI, IV, p.253, fn.8.

97 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.324.

98 EI, op.cit.

Tadayuktaka - Viniyuktaka : These two might be classes of officials called Ayuktaka.<sup>99</sup>

Dasagramika : Head of ten villages.<sup>100</sup>

Viṣaya-Vyavaharin : Probably an official or agent of the Viṣaya.<sup>101</sup>

Pramatr : Probably an officer in charge of land survey<sup>102</sup> though some take him to be a judicial officer.

Sarabhanga : Meaning obscure.

Officials enlisted the Gahadavala charters:

Bhandagarika : He was the superintendent of royal store and as such responsible for the proper storage and distribution of necessary articles.<sup>103</sup> This official may have been significant in view of the revenue from the rural areas coming in kind at that time.

Bhisag : Laksmidhara calls this official as Pranacarya. He happened to be the court physician. At the same time he was also the incharge of public health department.<sup>104</sup>

Naimittika : The royal astrologer whose duty was to calculate and announce auspicious moments for undertaking expeditions, etc.<sup>105</sup>

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99 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit.

100 Ibid.

101 Ghoshal, op.cit., p.205.

102 Majumdar, op.cit., p.325.

103 Tripathi, R.C., op.cit., p.342.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.



Antahpurika : Superintendent of the seraglio who looked after the needs of the royal household.<sup>106</sup>

Duta : The envoys who formed a diplomatic corps responsible for proper relations with foreign powers.<sup>107</sup>

Karituraga-Pattan-akara-Sthana-Gokuladhikar-Purusah : These were officials in-charge of the elephants, horses, towns, mines, police stations and cattle stations.<sup>108</sup>

Kayastha or Karenika : He was the scribe of the records or legal documents.<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned officials we have Rajasthaniya, Uparika, Cata, Bhata, Dandoddharanika (either a judicial officer as inferred from the prefix Danda or a police officer derived from Danda in the sense of rod of chastisement), Ayuktaka, Niyuktaka and Pattalika<sup>110</sup> (Stein Konow translates it as the head of a pattala<sup>111</sup>). Again we find Astavargika, Mahatthasasanika, Daivaganika, Daivajna and Sankhadhari, etc.<sup>112</sup> Probably the last were religious officials<sup>113</sup> while others cannot be explained. Roma Niyogi thinks that Dharmadhikarana was the head of judiciary.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., pp.342-343.

109 Ibid.

110 EI, IX, pp.325-327, v.22.

111 Ibid., p.320, note 2.

112 Ibid., VII, p.97.

113 Tripathi, R.S., op.cit., p.344.

Provincial Administration:

The provincial administration in the middle Gangetic basin during the early medieval period was more of a continuity of the earlier structure followed by the Guptas and post-Gupta kings in the northern India as a whole. The Gupta empire was divided into a series of well defined administrative units such as bhukti, visaya, mandala, vithi Grāma and other minor subdivisions each of which generally had a number of next following units. The Bhukti and Visaya were somewhat equivalent to the division and district of the modern period. With Uparika and Kumāramātya corresponding to modern commissioner and collector at the head of the two respectively,<sup>114</sup> village was the lowest administrative unit and mandalas and vithis were the intermediate units. Probably each of these units had an Adhikarana or office of its own.

Under the Guptas the emperor himself appointed Uparika Mahārāja (Divisional Commissioners). The latter appointed the Kumaramatya or Viṣayapati or Ayuktaka (District Officers)<sup>11</sup> although sometimes the king also appears to have appointed the Kumāramātya as the Viṣayapati,<sup>116</sup> on the advice of the

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114 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., pp.288-289.

115 EI, XV, pp.130-133, 138, 142.

116 Ibid., p.135.

recommendation of the Governor of the Bhukti. Thus, we can infer that the province was divided into one or more Bhuktis and each Bhukti into a number of Visayas.

Bhukti and Visaya as well as Visaya and Mandala were sometimes used as synonymous - what is more is that a visaya sometimes <sup>was</sup> included in a Mandala and sometimes itself included it, e.g. Dandabhukti has been mentioned as a mandala of the Vardhamana bhukti.<sup>117</sup> The literal meaning of the term Bhukti is 'something intended for enjoyment.'<sup>117</sup> Hence as a territorial unit Bhukti was probably meant for the enjoyment of its governors.<sup>118</sup>

Though Vithis had no clear connotation under the Guptas but later it came to denote a sub-division of a Bhukti or of a mandala.<sup>119</sup>

The records reveal other sub-divisions of mandalas as Khandala, avrtti and bhāga. Avrtti was further sub-divided into Chaturakes and latter into Patakas, although some grants refer to Chaturka as a sub-division of a mandala and the Pataka of a bhaga. The Pataka was probably the lowest administrative unit, defined by Hemacandra as one-half of a village.<sup>120</sup>

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117 Sircar, D.C., Select Inscriptions, p.394.

118 Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism, p.14.

119 Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.294.

120 Ibid.

The Viṣayapati had officials like Pustapala under him who kept the records of the sale or purchases of land in the district.

The aforementioned administrative structure continued during the later and post-Gupta period. Even under the Palas, the same structure continued. Bhukti remained a large administrative unit, directly ruled by Pāla kings. The mandala denoted the territory of a samanta or vassal chief enjoying territorial autonomy.<sup>121</sup> As regards the Pāla administrative divisions, the exact connotations of the two divisions, viz. visaya and mandala create confusion, for sometimes the former comprised the latter while sometimes it was vice versa. The Nālanda copper plate grant<sup>122</sup> of Devapāla appears to indicate that mandala was a larger unit than the visaya, since the donee is described as the mandaladhipati and seems to be powerful. Hiranand Sastri suggests<sup>123</sup> that the mandala here has been used in the sense of Deśa of which Viṣaya was a sub-division. However, in most cases the Pāla records refer to mandala<sup>124</sup> as a division of visaya.

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121 EI, XVII (1923-24), p.311.

122 Ibid., p.316.

123 Ibid.

124 Mandala appears to be meant for the enjoyment of district officials placed over them (Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism, p.14). B.N.S. Yadav thinks that in many cases Mandala meant more of a feudatory circle headed by a feudal superior paying allegiance to the king or emperors and less of an administrative unit of the central government (Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.162.)

The term vithi<sup>125</sup> which generally signifies a market road-way or the like, used to be sub-divisions of the visaya or mandala. Similarly, the term 'Naya' seems to imply a like division. The pala records reveal other smaller units like Khandala Avrtti and Bhaga, which were units during the Guptas. Hence no change appears to have occurred in the division of the provincial administration of the palas from the Guptas.

So far as the provincial and local governments under the Palas are concerned, as enumerated in the list elsewhere, we find Rajasthaniya, Uperike, Kumaramatya, Visayapati and gramapati associated with the Bhukti, visaya, mandala and grama. Some new features were introduced, e.g. the Das gramika (head of ten villages) which may suggest some sort of reorganisation apparently for the revenue purposes.

The long list of the officials in the Pala grants may suggest that the administration was highly bureaucratized. Though many of the official designations appear to be feudal ranks rather than officials as such, yet their association with the royal administrative machinery indicates a high

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125 Ibid. (It is noteworthy that this charter employs the term Naya in the case of Rajagraha Visaya and vithisu the case of Gaya visaya which would indicate that in these two so contiguous visayas different sub-divisions were made apparently for revenue purpose. Cf. Hiranand Sastri, Ibid.).

degree of bureaucratisation. Though the feudal lords had their own spheres of influence and were autonomous to greater extent, yet the king's control had not become so lax during the early pala period which might characterise the later pala period especially in North Bihar region where the Karnatas of Mithila carried out independent kingdom.

The Gahadavala inscriptions do not reveal much about the provincial or local administration. But the usual division of the empire continued and was more or less like the other administrative divisions of the contemporary neighbouring kingdoms. The head-quarters of the visayas were called Adhishthana or Pattana. The next administrative unit of Pattala and village, as usual, constituted the lowest and the most stable unit of administration.

The Gahadavala inscriptions refer to an official called visaya-adhkari Puruṣa<sup>126</sup> who appears to have been the administrative officer in-charge of the Visaya or province in the Gahadavala domain. He may have been directly responsible to the king.

The Gahadavala inscriptions do not mention the officer in-charge of the Pathakas. The term Pattalika<sup>127</sup> has been taken to mean as the head of a Pattala and as such a junior administrative officer.

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126 E<sup>1</sup>, X<sup>1v</sup>, pp.193ff.

127 Ibid., IX, pp.319-28.

The administration of the town was probably under the Pattan-ādhikari-Puruṣa who appears in the list of officials in the Gahadavala grants. His precise functions are not known. The specific and separate mention of the municipal officer from the Viṣaya-ādhikari puruṣa may suggest that probably the Gāhāḍavāla towns were separate administrative units and not under the provincial and district administrative officers. Village administration was probably carried out by a Mahattama who may have been the village headman. But the Gahadavala grants refer to Mahattaka who may have been connected with village administration.

Compared to the Pāla administration, that of the Gahadavalas, appears to be simpler in that the Gāhāḍavāla list of the officials is not as exhaustive as that of the Pālas.

### III

The Sāmanta system is a distinct feature of the early medieval political structure in northern India. Its genesis is generally traced from the Śaka-Kuṣāna polity as can be inferred from the śāhī and śāhanuśāhī.<sup>128</sup> The Arthasāstra<sup>129</sup> refers to Sāmanta as a neighbouring prince, but during the

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128 Sten Konow, C.I.I., vol.II, Pt.I, p.xxvii.

129 Kangle, R.P., The Kautilya Arthasastra, Pt.III, p.250.

Kusana period the term came to connote vassal<sup>130</sup> - and the latter meaning characterised the application of the term from the post-Gupta period onwards. It denoted the conquered feudatories during the 6th century A.D.<sup>131</sup> Gradually the application of *Sāmanta* was extended from defeated chiefs to royal officials<sup>132</sup> and titles of great imperial officers.<sup>133</sup>

The *sāmantas* had chiefly three obligations - to pay annual tributes, to pay homage to the emperor in person and render military services.<sup>134</sup>

Three kinds of obligations were imposed on the defeated kings, who were apparently reduced to the position of the *sāmanta* - to become personal attendant of the king holding chowries, to serve as door-keeper in the court and reciting of auspicious words uttering success (*jaya*).<sup>135</sup>

Another obligation of the defeated *sāmanta* was to present daughters to the emperor. We do not know from our sources anything about the administrative or judicial functions of the *sāmantas*. Perhaps certain social obligations had to be

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130 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.136.

131 Sircar, D.C., Select Inscriptions, Verse-5, p.394.

132 Sharma, R.S., Indian Feudalism, p.20, CII, IV, p.cxli).

133 EI, I.

134 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.21.

135 Sharma, R.S., Ibid, pp.121-22; Cf. Harscarita, p.194.



performed by the sāmantas staying in the court, like participating in gambling, dice-playing, flute playing, etc.<sup>136</sup>

The samanta system had fairly been consolidated by the 7th century A.D. as can be inferred from the types of the samantas, enumerated by Bana<sup>137</sup> viz - Sāmanta, Mahā-sāmanta, Anurakta-sāmanta, śatru-sāmanta, Āpta-sāmanta, Pradhāna-sāmanta, Prati-sāmanta and Karādikṛtī-sāmanta. This enumeration was apparently based on the relationship of the sāmanta vis-a-vis the king.

Āpta-sāmanta referred to those who willingly accepted the vassalage of the over-lord. The most trust-worthy vassals were the Pradhāna-Sāmantas. But the meaning of the Prati-Sāmanta is not clear.<sup>138</sup> Anurakta-sāmantas were those who were especially attached to their overlord.

Śatru-sāmantas were vanquished chiefs who rendered various services to the emperor and were held in respect. This category included the princes. Another category of

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136 Agrawala, V.S., Kaṭambari Ek Sanskritik Adhyayan, Varanasi, 1956, pp.127-28.

137 Agrawala, V.S., Harsacarita, Ek Sanskritik Adhyayan, Appendices 2, Patna, 1953.

138 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.23.

the princes - vassals were, Mahipalas, who were forced to submit to the prestige of the emperor and those who were attracted to him out of their admiration and affection (Anuraga) for him.<sup>139</sup>

The use of the term Thakuru or Thakkura, Rauta and Ranas from the 9th century A.D. onwards indicates the growth of feudal tendencies. These terms which indicated chiefs, warriors or lords in general, were used mainly by the class of ruling landed aristocracy. These terms became honorific titles of aristocracy which included, apart from Ksatriya, Brahmanas and Kayasthas also.

Various factors paved the way for the samanta system. The first among them was the foreign invasion and the weakening of the central authority. The invasions of the nomad Ephthalites and the Hunas exposed the weakness of the decaying Gupta power and led to the assertion of independence by ambitious military commanders, and governors in the far-flung areas. Even the aboriginal tribes began to assert their independence.<sup>140</sup> Although Harṣavardhan succeeded in checking such tendencies, but after his death same state of affairs relapsed.<sup>141</sup>

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139      Agrawala, V.S. Harsacarita, p.43.

140      CII, III, no.21, p.92.

141      Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.138.

Thus emerged small states, chiefdoms and a ruling aristocracy immediately connected with land. The period from c.650 A.D. onwards witnessed continuous struggle between powers contending to claim supremacy over the north India. This had two phases - first, between the Palas, Pratiharas and Rastrakutas and the second between the Chahamanas-Candelas and the Gahadavalas. Thus feudal structure was encouraged by the prevalent conditions.

The ancient tradition of Digvijaya apparently influenced by the ideals of Dharmavijaya to reinstate the defeated princes and to acquiesce in the continuance of the laws and customs of the vanquished people by the victor accelerated the Sāmanta system.<sup>142</sup> This appears to have become the main aim of the conquest in course of time.

The improvement in agriculture, the break-up of large families into smaller units, with the latter's inability to employ a large number of slaves and servants and the subsequent emergence of a dependent peasantry, all largely due to fragmentation of land<sup>143</sup>, gave rise to feudal tendencies. The decline of trade and commerce and urban life tended to make the society increasingly agrarian - and thus encouraged

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142 Yadav, B.N.S., Ibid., p.139.

143 Yadav, B.N.S., Ibid., p.140.

localism and a comparatively closed economy. Thus the feudal relations between landed aristocracy and the peasants and again among the ruling aristocracy found conducive environment.<sup>144</sup>

The development of the Samanta system may be traced along the growing practice of land grants to kinsmen, warrior chiefs and officials in the post-Gupta period. This was in practice right since the śakas and śatavahanas. The law-books<sup>145</sup> during the early centuries of the Christian era provided for bestowal of land on the administrative officials. Although by the 8th century A.D. the practice had become fairly common, yet we do not find many evidences of secular land-grants as remuneration to officials and vassals. We have an inscription<sup>146</sup> of the Palas mentioning payment of an official called Dāsagrāmika in land. Again, we have the inscriptions of Mahipāla<sup>147</sup> which speaks of the resumption of land earlier allotted to the Kaivartas. Moreover, the officials enumerated in Pala grants viz - Rājas, Rājputras, rānakas rājarājanaka, mahāsamantas and mahā-mandalādhipati, etc. denote vassals connected with land, some of whom may have<sup>been</sup> vanquished chiefs and others

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144      Coulborn, Feudalism in History, p.8.

145      Manu Smṛti, VII, p.115ff.

146      EI, IV, no.34, 1, p.147.

147      Ibid., VII, 118-119.

might have been granted land for their military service.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, we do not find many secular grants of the Pratihāras except a few.<sup>149</sup>

The practice of sub-infeudation is not clearly evident under the earlier Palas as can be inferred from a Pala inscription<sup>150</sup> where the Mahā-sāmantadhipati Narāyanavarman had to request for grant of four villages to a temple but he himself could not grant land to the temple. The donees could have assigned a part of their revenues or land to sub-vassals for management but it is difficult to establish.<sup>151</sup>

On the other hand, sub-infeudation is evident from the Pratihāra grants.<sup>152</sup> Even their feudatories practised sub-infeudation.<sup>153</sup> The government of the Pratihāras appears to have been in the hands of the vassals who were kept under effective control<sup>154</sup> as the only official referred to in the Pratihāra grants are the Niyuktas.<sup>155</sup> This may also be supported by the fact that the grants of the feudatories refer to mere officials than the grants of the Pratihāra kings. The Gāhadavālas also had the practice of sub-infeudation both by the kings and their feudatories.<sup>156</sup>

148 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.69.

149 CII, IV, 74, v.9; EI, XIV, p.13; lines 14-27.

150 EI, IV, no.34, lines 30-52.

151 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.74.

152 EI, V, p.24.

153 Ibid., IX, I (Plates A&B).

154 Sharma, R.S., op.cit., p.76.

155 IA, XV, 138ff, I, II, p.36.

156 IA, XVIII, 14-19 (grant of V.S. 1166); Ibid., XVII, 61-64 (V.S. 1176); EI, IV, 130-33 (V.S. 1191); Ibid., 310.

The Gāhadavāla inscriptions<sup>157</sup> refer to land grants to a chief on Rājapatti (royal fillet of Tiara) by one of the ancestors of Govindacandra. The secular grants made to warrior chiefs and relatives often became hereditary in later period, especially with the weakening of the central authority. This led to the passing off to a considerable extent the governmental powers and privileges into the hands of the land-holding military aristocracy. All this may indicate the tendency of decentralisation and emergence of petty principalities and to the further growth of samanta system.<sup>158</sup> Further these factors tended to limit the areas directly administered by the central authority.

We find the classification of samantas in the Aparājitaprecha on the basis of the number of villages held by them.<sup>159</sup>

<u>Designation</u>	<u>No. of Villages held</u>
1. Mahamendalesvara	100,000
2. Mandalika	50,000
3. Mahasamanta	20,000
4. Samanta	10,000
5. Laghu-samanta	5,000
6. Caturamsika (Probably petty kings below whom were Rajaputras)	1,000

157 EI, IV, no.12.

158 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.146.

159 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.149.

At the top of this pyramidal structure was the lord sovereign, the Mahārājādhirāja. The bigger feudatories were perhaps like semi-independent kings.<sup>160</sup> Although such hierarchy is not gleaned from the inscriptions, yet this could have existed in some form or the other. The Mahā Sāmantas figure in the list of the Pāla grants.<sup>161</sup> We find variations in these titles in various parts of northern India. Thus literary and epigraphic sources reveal an elaborate hierarchy of ruling landed aristocracy and a sizeable class of landed intermediaries during the early medieval period.

We have another constituent of the samanta system in the Pañca-mahasabha which developed in the post-Gupta period. Its connotation is controversial but it appears to have had more than one meaning. First of all, it might connote five titles like Mahā-Kartākakratika, Mahā-Dandanāyaka, Mahā Pratihāra, Mahā Sāmanta and Mahārāja. According to Rāja-Tarangini<sup>162</sup> it denoted five offices - viz. Mahā Pratihāra, Mahā Sāndhivigrahika, Mahā Svasāla, Mahā Bhandāgāra and Mahā Sādhana - Bhoga. According to another meaning,<sup>163</sup> it

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160 Ibid.

161 IA, XV, p.304ff; EI, XIV, p.324; ASR, III, 124, no.6.

162 Raj, IV, 137, 140, 142-43; Cf. Beni Prasad, "State in Ancient India" p.430.

163 IA, XII, p.96.

stands for five musical instruments, viz - Śṛṅga (horn) - Śarīkha (couch), bheri (drum), jayaghanta (bell of victory), and Tamata (Tambour). Thus, what appears is that these five titles or the privileges to use these five musical instruments in court and professions meant insignia of royalty conferred upon loyal samantas. That the Pañcamahā-sabda was conferred under the Pratihāras is gleaned from inscriptions.<sup>164</sup>

Thus, the sāmanta system marked the substitution of the bureaucratic elements by the feudal one in the administrative structure. The king-sāmanta relation based on loyalty replaced the hierarchy of authority in bureaucratic sense. This also characterised the relationship between sāmantas and their subordinates went down to the level of village chiefs.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, the growing ranks of the samantas tended to minimize the difference between high military officers and the samantas. The bureaucratic officers of the earlier period also administered the Bhukti; viṣaya and mandala gradually gave way to the samantas. This led to the disappearance of the administrative divisions like Bhukti and viṣaya to a large extent by the 12th century A.D. because now they came to mean fiefs of the sāmantas and hardly administrative units of earlier times.

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164 EI, IV, 44; IX, 1.1.3.

165 Yadav, B.N.S., op.cit., p.160.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion which has surveyed the social and political structure as prevailing in the middle Gangetic basin in early medieval period can be summed up as follows:

The early medieval period was characterised by the social and political disturbances. The disintegration of the Gupta empire created chaos and led to the rise of petty principalities hither and thither.

As per the social structure, the basic principle of four varnas (catur varnya) remained unchanged. But at the same time it witnessed expansion and proliferation. The existing varnas split up into numerous castes and the varna system accommodated many new foreign and indigenous elements into its fold.

The Brahmana class expanded tremendously with the mastery of different rituals and schools of learning of vedas which is indicated by the references to titles like Dvivedin, caturvedin, ṛāthaka, Tripāthin and sakhas. Moreover, the new gotras also originated from the original home of the Brahmanas. This was a marked feature in the multiplication of the gotras. But in spite of the proliferation and expansion, the Brahman varna remained a closed class. The law books of the period incessantly advocated the

exclusiveness of the Brāhmana caste and its occupations were not held open as 'Āpadvṛtti' for the other three varnas.

The ever-growing practice of land grants to the Brāhmanas emphasised their importance and supremacy in giving sanction to the temporal authority. Thus the 'Brahma Kṣtra' nexus was strengthened. The practice of land grants led to the emergence of the Brahmins as landed intermediaries and paved the way for their discharging of some secular activities. Since the land grants carried administrative, judicial and fiscal rights of all kinds, the Brahmanas also emerged as feudal chiefs. One such example was that of Mahāpurohita Jāgu Śarman in the kingdom of the Gāhadavālas. He and his successors received many land grants from their patron kings. The influence and power of Jāgu Śarman must have been felt in the regions donated to him and his family members. Thus the position and status of the Brāhmanas as the first among the <sup>varnas</sup> Brāhmanas was re-emphasised. The use of feudal titles like 'Rautā' and 'Thakkura' by the Brahmanas smacks of their feudal status which may indicate complete feudalisation of this class.

The occurrence of Purohita in the list of officials enumerated in the inscriptions of the period underlines the importance of the Brahmanas in the administration.

Unfortunately, the records of our period do not reveal the administrative functions as such of the Brahmanas, apparently due to the lack of space, but for that matter, the inscriptions do not give the details of the functions of other officials as well. Hence the Brāhmanas appear to have been religious functionaries more than administrative functionaries.

The Ksatriyas who come next to the Brahmanas in the varna hierarchy, remained as the sole political authority, although their occupations could have been taken up by the Brahmanas as an 'Āpadvrtti'.

The Ksatriya class also proliferated apparently due to factors like the assimilation of foreign and indigenous elements in its ranks. The use of gotras and pravaras by the Ksatriyas may indicate such assimilation and this gave them a wider social acceptability.

As per the Vaiśyas, they appear to have lost their former position because of several factors. For, instance the period is marked by the decline of trade and commerce and the urban centres which drove them to the rural areas. Here, they took to agriculture which by this time had come to be an occupation of the sūdras as well. Thus they were degraded and some of them came to acquire sudra status.

A new class i.e. of the Kāyasthas arose to the fore and acquired eminence because of its administrative functions.

This can be inferred from the inscriptions of our period referring to Kayasthas as one of the officials. The Kayasthas used feudal titles like 'Thakkura' and 'Rāuta' which were also used by the Brahmanas as well as the Ksatriyas. This may indicate their feudal status as well.

So far as the sūdras are concerned, we see them proliferating tremendously. The law books of our period refer to the sūdras as agriculturists and not only as slaves or servants. At the same time, there was an increasing notion of untouchability. The proliferation of the sudras resulted into numerous sub-castes based on the kind of occupations they followed. Thus, the division of labour played a vital role in the formation of numerous sub-castes.

Untouchability emerged as an exclusive feature during this period. More and more social and economic disabilities were imposed on the sūdras and the law-givers of the period endeavoured to maintain caste exclusiveness. Thus, inter-caste marriage was as ever abhorred, the offsprings of which unions were held as untouchables among the sūdras. Commensality and connubium were severely restricted. Thus, though the position of the sūdras somewhat improved by their joining the peasantry, the practice of untouchability certainly reflects their worsening condition. Thus, the society presents a picture of a fully stratified one.

The political structure in the middle Gangetic basin in early medieval period presents a picture of fragmented political authority. The ever-increasing practice of land-grants to the Brahmanas and secular donees infused feudal elements in the polity. The relatives of the king and the officials invariably carved out their sphere of influence even during the reign of their patrons, if the latter were weak and specially during the disintegration of the central authority. This was inherent in the practice of land grants. The feudal chiefs tended to snap off relations with the central authority and declare themselves independent. This may explain the emergence of petty kingdoms in the post-Gupta period. Moreover, the situation of such feudal lords in far flung areas of the empire left them practically autonomous powers in their respective regions. Thus the middle Gangetic basin was practically ruled by such vassal kings owing allegiance to different sovereign powers, viz. the Pālas and the Gāhadavālas. Such tendencies could not be checked because the seats of various central authorities were always at the periphery of the middle Gangetic basin like the Gāhadavālas at Kannauj and the Palas somewhere in Bengal. Probably the latter had no fixed capital but their activities were more confined in the Bengal region than in the middle Gangetic basin. Moreover, the inscriptions of the Pālas occurring in Bihar were issued from the 'Skandhāvāra' ('camps of victory) which may suggest that the Pālas used to

but a careful analysis of the distribution of land-grants and the position of the samantas in respect to the areas given to them clearly shows that in many cases the samantas are not the indigenous or local chiefs rather they have been imposed over those areas by the central authority through the parcellisation of the administrative and judicial rights of the central authority over the respective areas. This amply suggests a case of political fragmentation.

Thus, what is evident from the practice of land grants is the clear-cut fragmentation of political authority through the process of feudalisation where a lord-vassal relationship is established. Though we do not find any explicit mention of the conditions imposed on the samantas regarding their duties towards the central authority, their presence at the Skandhavaras at the occasion of the grant may suggest implicit duties of rendering military services to the central authority in their respective capacities. Thus, on the whole, it appears that while the socio-political structure during this period in the region under review does not conform to the models of segmentary or integrative polity, it represents a feudal structure which, in the case of social structure, reflects subordination of a lower social rank to its immediate higher social rank, thus constituting a hierarchical social order, while in the case of political structure, it represents a lord-vassal nexus which is the characteristic of a feudal polity.

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take up expeditions in this region to protect their dominion. This may also suggest that they could have stayed for long in this region and retreated after giving the governance of the territories in the hands of some vassal chiefs. Similar was the case with the Gahadavalas. Thus, the middle Gangetic basin during the early medieval period appears to have been ruled mainly by vassal-chiefs owing allegiance to the above mentioned two major powers.

Thus, the existing scenario conformed to a feudal polity in which the lord-vassal nexus is an important factor. The concept of 'segmentary state' as given by Burton Stein cannot be applied to analyse the situation of the middle-Gangetic basin during the period under review because, first of all, the segmentary state model has been applied basically to a situation where the ruling elite was an emigrant (the Allur society), while in our context the ruling elite appears to have been indigenous.

Secondly, the concept of segmentary state seeks to place the polity on the 'continuum of governance' between the 'stateless tribal form of government' and the 'unitary state'. Here in our area the society had already attained the state character and was divided into various classes. Contrary to the Allur society, in our case the communities which the central authorities like the Palas and Gahadavalas encounter, were

composed of different groups in hierarchical order. Thirdly, in our case, there is no evidence of self-governing independent and economically autonomous units of 'nuclear areas of corporate institutions' as compared to the Allur society. The samant system has been suggested to represent the "diffused foci of quasi-autonomous powers". In a segmentary state there is an imitation of the political structure of the central authority at the differential loci of powers. Even we accept the samanta system to represent a diffused loci of quasi-autonomous powers, the study of the political structure at this level does not conform to a pyramidal structure. Lastly, so far as the concept of ritual hegemony is concerned Hermann Kulke has pointed out the relationship between 'ritual hegemony' and 'direct political control'. The segmentary state model takes the ritual sovereignty or hegemony as distinct from the actual political control. The difference between the segmentary and 'integrative state models' lies mainly in the implication of the concept of ritual sovereignty as to whether it denotes ritual sovereignty as such or a direct political control through a royal cult. In our context we do not find instance of any royal cult of that sort.

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