
Early Medieval Northern Indian Copper Plates as a Source of History: An Economic Perspective

Manjeet Singh

Research Scholar, Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract

It is very important to evaluate the contents of the copper-plates to understand its significance as regards the economic transformations in early medieval northern India. A detailed analysis of the contents of these copper-plates would stand us in a position to comment about the role of land grants in the economic developments of early medieval northern India. Thus, it becomes our prime objective to examine and analyze the certain copper-plates bearing land-grants from the economic perspective. There are hundreds of copper-plates reflecting the economic conditions of the people of early medieval northern India.

Key Words: *copper-plates, land-grants, deva-deya, brahma-deya, agarhara, tamra-sasana, monks, deities.*

The word *Tāmra-Śāsana* refers to 'royal charter engraved on a copper-plate'. Ancient Indian kings donated revenue-free lands in favour of persons, deities or religious establishments, and is usually endowed with a deed engraved on a durable *Tāmra-paṭṭa*, e.g., a copper-plate. The copper-plates had records of various kinds of rent-free land donation to deities *Brāhmaṇas* usually called *deyā-deyā* or *devā-dayā* and *brāhma-deyā* or *brāhmadeyā*. In South Indian copper-plates, the word *agrāhara* was more popular in the sense of a rent-free village in favour of *Brāhmaṇas*.²

The *Tāmra-Śāsanas* are classified into three heads, viz. *dāna-Śāsana* recording gifts, *prasana-Śāsana* recording various kinds of favour, and *jaya-paṭṭa* declaring the victory of one of the parties in a dispute. Most of the records of ancient Indian rulers so far discovered, however, belong to the first category.

However, ancient Indian literary traditions, such as works of a few of the *Yajñavalkya Smṛti*,³ *Harṣacarita*⁴ and *Kādambari*,⁵ give some idea about the *Rāja-Śāsanas* or land charters land donation to *Brāhmaṇas* and religious establishments. It is further depicted that full information about land donation is given on copper-plates with the impression of the seal and signature of the donors.

Interestingly, early Indian literary traditions depict that the donors of land grants were required to records every informations regarding the donation of land to the donees on copper-plates, and also furnish the names and regional year of the donors. Literary traditions provide insight into the law of lands governing such donations and transfer of land rights thus it becomes apparent that; after making a grant of land, the donor prepared a document which acted as the guiding principle of the donees; the information regarding the land donation was engraved on copper-plates; the land charter contained a description of

the king and three of his immediate predecessors and of the land granted together with its boundaries and measurement, with king's seal, date, and signature. There is no explicit statement regarding the donee in literary sources though it is supposed that the donee's name should be engraved in the land charter. A high official was entrusted with the drafting of a document.

Thus, it becomes our prime objective to examine and analyze the following copper-plates bearing land-grants from social and economic perspective. There are hundreds of these copper-plates and considering each one of them for my thesis is not feasible. Therefore some much-selected copper-plates were chosen to discuss here as we deemed these the most suitable for our research.

It is since then that the study economics that shaped the economic and social formation of early Indian societies, has been employing the deliberations of esteemed scholars and historians world around. Delicacies of the economic thought were handled well by Kautilya in *Arthaśāstra*. We intend to study the economic formation as reflected in various land grant charters of early medieval northern India. The land grant charters provide us with the most valuable piece of information that since long has been used to decipher history and still is being looked into from a fresh point of view to explore more narrative and dimensions of history embedded in them. These are spread in wider geographical expanse and are inscribed over the material ranging from metal, stone to the perishable materials like a piece of a cloth. It was observed that in early period, only the religious grants had more significance and they were inscribed on either a metal plate or on the stone in contrast to it, the secular grants besides being sparse in its number were not much in vogue hence less stress was laid to give them a permanent sanction and hence approved on a piece of cloth or so; besides there might be every possibility that secular grants in the beginning of this trend were not bestowed with so many exemptions and privileges as were the religious grant. This is for the reason that we cannot clearly say if there was traditions of secular donations as well as the sources of information, the evidence of these grants was washed ashore with the passage of time.

It is likely that such grants might have been governed by some tenure or assignment like characteristics. But this is true only for the initial periods whereas in later periods, like in the case of Pālas of Bengal, every effort was made by the secular donees to get their grants engraved on either a stone slab or a piece of metal, more commonly known as a copper-plate. The reason behind this was to get the perpetuity of grant endorsed by the rulers so that they could further enjoy it for generations even if the ruler who had granted it had long passed away. There is multiple reasoning behind the land grants as a part of long set traditions but in this paper, I study only the economic aspects of land grants heaving its bearing upon the lives of masses of early medieval northern India.

There is no denying the fact that a system of the land grant was the major reason behind the impoverishment of state finances but its consequences on the common man, mainly peasants was even worse. It is tough to trace out any sort of uniformity in either extent or the pattern of exploitation as India then was not a united state under a singular leadership. It can be noticed further in the paper where various economically relevant grants shall be discussed.

The peasantry was exploited to the hilt, so much so that in the later stages, peasants passively accepted the all invasion in the hope of a better tomorrow, only to be deceived.

As it becomes evident from the epigraphical traditions that a transition in economic organization of early medieval India was brought about by the system of land grant which grew considerably in number towards the end of Gupta Empire, proliferating vigorously throughout the country, the argument is well supported by the contemporary literary sources which at certain instances appear to recommend a donation of land to a state official in lieu of cash salary, which by no means appears to be religious grant but more of a remuneration ; in such grants the rights of the donee might have been limited to the collection of the revenue and not other resources nor the power of administration. It must be kept in mind that epigraphical sources for non-religious grants or secular grants point to much later period, ninth to tenth centuries.

Villages in early India had a specialized economic design reflecting the basic values of Indian civilization but by the early medieval period had set in this design begin to be diluted with various contaminants. Land grant of course was viewed by the ruling elite as sure bet against all sins, a means of earning religious merit *punya* and a way of enhancing the royal vigour apart from bringing under cultivation vast far-flung barren territories but the interests of the masses who were the roots of the system were completely ignored this is for the reason that soon after the whole system tumbled down and yet another, much narrow in its descent, a closed economic system was born which is why Om Prakash⁶ would not hesitate to appoint it as a key role player in the socioeconomic history of early medieval India. This was the time of transformation, rather a metamorphosis of a preexisting system of economic transactions.

This was the time many changes were introduced into Indian society and economy. The economy crystallized into smaller functional units, which were naturally the villages. A special role was assigned to one and all based on the narrow division of labour. There were limits beyond which people could not interchange their economic roles in the village. Member of specialist groups might become agriculturists, but not vice versa. It was not for just anyone in the village to become a priest, a barber, a washerman, or a carpenter, or a potter. To some extent, this was true also of the differentiated role within agriculture. *Brāhmaṇ* no matter how poor could not till the land themselves on the contrary low caste, no matter how enterprising, could not become substantial landlord or priest, and it would be quite misleading to view all their members as peasants. Clear cut demarcations were lost in the mid-century of the first millennium under the dark shadows of perplexity brought about by the feudal trend. Beneficiaries of the land grant donations were the new local economic functionaries and this role was assigned to them by their overlords along with administrative and judicial rights other than rights of extracting forced labour, right over all natural resources like trees, shrubs and pastures; even mines included which were earlier indispensable for the state treasury. In later stages, land grants charters gave exclusive rights to extract exorbitant rent from the peasant to the donees. The tax base was erratic and exploitative in nature for the new overlord was neither the sovereign protector nor ruler nor were they impressed by the idea of a welfare state. All they could vision was the economic gain and that too at any cost. They enhanced the tax base as well as rate would be clear

while we discuss the various land grant charters. Wider howsoever the tax base be, it was the prerogative of feudal agencies alone and meant the major revenue loss for the state, nutritious howsoever this sap might be, it empowered the feudal lords alone and weaken the central ruling authority. But some historians argue on the contrary too, Om Prakash being one of them. He points out that the evidence of land grant is taken at its face value and these are given blanket characteristics of being tax-free gifts bestowed upon the donees by the state authority, private individuals and the subordinate rulers bringing nothing in return to the state⁷ Such a view has been challenged by Om Prakash who thinks that such a presumption about is totally out of place. He cites examples where taxes itself are imposed on the land grants; *trnodaka*, *nikāra*, *aruwana*, *agrāhara-pradeyamsa*, *pandā-dāna*⁸ are some forms of the taxes considered by him to have been imposed over the land grants. Moreover, in support of his argument, he cites examples of land grants which were tenure based and mean only the take away of revenue from the assigned grant and not the land and its resources.

However R.S. Sharma makes a clear cut statement about the economic conditions about early medieval India which he thinks to have been accompanied by the unequal distribution of land rights as well as agricultural produce. Sharma points out that a large number of feudal overlords which was the result of elaborate land grant tradition were not in any way directly involved in cultivation and survived upon the taxes and rents they appropriated from the cultivators.⁹ The relation between donee and the peasants, an economic dependence of sort, was totally different from the one that existed between the peasants and the state. State, after all, considered the public to be its responsibility and governance was paid at least little heed if not more. We are enlightened by many inscriptions from the early period which suggest the various public works being taken up for the public welfare; we hear of the repair of Sudarshan lake at the instance of the ruler without charging a penny from the public or overburdening them with the taxation clearly from *Junagarh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman*. But for the later period, we hardly have any references where a feudal lord might have provided an exemption to the peasants or either has taken up some public work without harassing the masses. Rather peasantry further resorted to a beast of burden when rights of forced labour were also lost to the beneficiaries of land donations with other donations. The transition of economic powers from the one party to another was to cost most to the peasantry as it suffered most at the hands of new overlord for whom economic gain was much more important than any practice of humanity.

The beginning of feudal tendencies in our period of study can be traced from not one but multiple points like beginning of land grants to state officials in lieu of the cash salaries, which has been recorded by the travellers like Hieun-Tsang as well, and the assumption of a superior authority once the area under the control of such officials swelled considerably and subsequently the throwing away the yoke of state control by the so-called new class of feudal lords. It can also be observed from the various new titles of which the sources of history up till now were silent like *sāmanta*, *mahāsāmata*, *mahāmaḍlesvara* and the like. The trend in the shift of official titles is also evident more so because in the later period these titles did not merely imply a position or assumption of an office of profit by a person rather a feudal assumption much superior to the presumed one. The complex hierarchy grew even

more complicated with the more titles being introduced exhibiting mere the virtual greatness. An epigraphic corroboration of feudal tendency is evident from three inscriptions of Soro in Orissa. In these grants of villages, the titles used for donees such as *mahāpratihāramahārāj* and *mahābaladhikrantarandasandhivigrahika* clearly point towards the pre-mentioned set up.¹⁰ We learn from the *Si-Su-Ki*¹¹ and the *Harṣacarita*¹² of Bana that during the seventh century C.E. the state officials were mostly paid in the form of land grants for their service to the state. The term 'Sāmanta' itself is one of the major evidence that proves the presence of feudal elements but our purpose to include this in our scrutiny is to find the economic implication of such changes as having been brought about by the introduction of new leadership to the prevalent economic setup. The term itself has undergone various stages of transformations until the later period when it suited to the feudal agencies aptly. It occurs in *Arthaśāstra* even in the context of a noble which is not entirely different conceptually from the feudal lord of early medieval India.¹³ Eventually, the scope of the term *sāmanta* grew wider so did his economic role grew in extent and responsibilities. Later Inscriptions point towards the self-reliance of *sāmanta* in terms of power and finances. It is for this reason, that *sāmanta* wielded a great sovereign authority that they started giving their own grants especially to enhance their royal status and more to assert their political independence. *Inscription of Dhruvosena I* of Maitraka dynasty provides us with one such example.¹⁴ The term was further elevated to *mahāsāmanta* and *mahāsāmantarājā* in the later period which was to be used in a new sense. Lallaji Gopal has concluded in one of his historical essays that *sāmanta* was a ruler distinct alike from a sovereign king and a governor and his emblems and other paraphernalia indicates this dual position of superiority over the appointed governor and subordination to Emperor. G.C. Chauhan has also highlighted the economic significance of the *sāmanta*; that they exercised some sort of economic freedom and it was conspicuous from the fact that they made some of the religious grants without the consent of their overlord. *Vappaghosavata grant of Jayanaga* is the proposed example of Chauhan as per which the *sāmanta* Induraja granted a village to *Brāhamaṇa* in Madhya Pradesh without referring to the overlord.¹⁵

G.C. Chauhan has come with a distinguished paper on how the concept of *viṣṭi* of ancient India slowly transformed into forced labour and how it formed the mode of production in early medieval India.¹⁶ He quotes that 'Land Grant' generated a landed aristocracy and brought about the transformation of political power, reduced the peasantry to bondage and subjection, degraded the artisans and ultimately paved the way for the conquest and subjecting of early medieval northern India by many foreign elements.¹⁷

It is very important to keep a vigilant eye on the historic events of the post-Gupta period, especially after the demise of Harṣavardhana in order to determine the economic dimensions of 'land grant' in early medieval Northern India. We must trace the trail of events leading to the fall of Harṣa and revival of Maukharis to the previous glory. In the eighth century the Varman king of Kanauj, Yasovarman probably representing the line of the Maukharis, again got the upper hand, and he conquered far and wide regions and conquered many of the contemporary chiefs. In the same period, the Muslims occupied Sind and Multan and from there launched raids in the South and the West bringing to the fore new forces of defense latent among the people.¹⁸

The economic conditions of the masses in the early medieval period are vividly reflected in the numerous land grant charters ranging from the sixth century to the twelfth century C.E. Though the references of land grants in the later Vedic period,¹⁹ and *Dharmaśūtra*²⁰ are a few, the basis of the donations made in form of land was totally religious. Land-grants were made as a *dāna* (pious gifts) and donors wanted punya out of the *Bhūdāna* (Land-grant) therefore it is quite certain that the beneficiaries were mostly the *Brāhmaṇas*; the grant, therefore, could be comprehended as a religious. Contrary to this Manu in his work seems to recommend that the land-grants should be given to the *adhipati*²¹ of the villages. If such a practice was in vogue, which apparently seems less probable, it reflected that the secular grants, possibly on the line of revenue assignment started much before the sixth century C.E. Kautilya also suggests that land-grants should be sanctioned to the *Brāhmaṇ* and to other state officers and gives the proper reasoning for it.²² Kautilya aims to bring the vast tracts of land under cultivation for producing the surplus to satiate the ever-increasing demand. To encourage such a pursuit there was nothing better off than to give revenue free grant. But then Kautilya is silent on the everlasting rights of the donee; making it clear that the concept of the perpetual grant had still not been conceived. Such lands were exempted from the revenue demand for a fixed tenure after which the agro-ready land was the much-treasured possession of the state. It enriched the state treasury and granary equally. Moreover, such areas served as a new abode for the peasants and the settlers are evident from one verse of *Arthaśāstra*. So it is clear that the provisions of the grants corresponding to early periods of Indian history noticeably different. Perhaps fourth century B.C.E., was the time in the making of a complex system of land and economy whereas by the times of Gupta saturation had been certainly achieved. It is clear from the land grant charters that we have taken up for the study.

First of all we shall analyse The New Copper Plate Grant of Harṣavardhana from the Punjab²³ (C.E. 614-15), which refers to the donation of a village named Pannarangaka in the Darikkani *visaya* of Jayarata Bhūkti as an *agrāhara*, along with all taxes and dues to a *Rgvedic Brāhmaṇ* Bhatta Ulukhasvamin of Bhargava *gōtra* for the augmentation of the merit and fame of his parents and elder brother by Harṣavardhana. The grant was executed on the orders of the office of *mahāksapatalikadūtakasāmantamahārājā* Krsnagupta (614-15 C.E.), apparently of the Harṣa Era on the third day of the bright fortnight of a certain month whose name is not legible. The land grant charters of Harṣa are the very important source of historical information. This grant was a revenue free grant and donee had no obligation of paying any kind of tribute and dues to the state and he could enjoy the grant for as long as the sun and moon shone.

The Banskhera copper-plate inscription of Harṣa, (628 C.E.),²⁴ records the donation of the land to two *Brāhmaṇas* belonging to Bharadvaja *gōtra*, Rigvedi Balachandra and Samvedi Bhadravamin. They were exempted from paying all dues from hereon to the state. It was the village of Markatasagara in the western Pathaka belonging to the *Angadiya-visaya* within the *Ahichchhatra-bhūkti* that was donated. There are numerous officials mentioned in the grant who were required to take the note of an order of the king as *Mahāsāmanta*, *Mahārāj*, *Dauhsadhasadhanika*, *Pramātāra*, *Rajasthāniya*, *Kūmaramatyā*, *Uparika*, *Viayapati*, *bhaṭa* and *çaṭa* and *sevaka*. The various kinds of taxes that were lost to the donees were *tulyā-*

meyā, bhāga-bhōga-kāra-hiraṇya and other *pratyayas* (incomes). The economic implication of this grant seems obvious that grant which was primarily a religious grant to *Brāhmaṇas* was to incur losses on the state treasury. That grants were also made to augment the glory of the ruler is also clear from a verse in the charter that this grant was made by Harṣa for the merit of his parents and his elder brother who had passed away.²⁵ There is another recently discovered *Kuruksheṭra-Varanasi Grant of Harṣa*²⁶ which was issued in about 629 C.E. and thus belonging to the same group as the earlier ones of Harṣa. The name of a scribe, in this case, is missing, although in other copper-plates their names are clearly mentioned.

Madhuban copper-plate inscription of Harṣa 631 C.E.,²⁷ records another important grant of Harṣa which refers to the grant of the village Somakundaka to Samavedi Bhatta, Vatsasvamin of Savarni *gōtra* and *Rgvedi* Bhatta Sivadevasvamin of the Vishnuvrdha *gōtra*. It was a strange stance when a piece of land was forcibly taken away from the Vamarathya who had been enjoying it on the strength of a forged document. The village with all its income was granted to the donees sanctioning the perpetuity of the grant ensuring it to be enjoyed by the progeny of the donees and in accordance with *bhūmicchidranyāya* which implied the type of land which was not deemed fit for cultivation. Though this type of land grant would certainly point towards the expansion of agrarian economy but the system of making it perpetual and that of losing all the revenue to the donees without any sort of obligation, whether in material or kind, would suggest ultimately the revenue loss of the state. The purpose of making grant was same as mentioned in *Banskhera copper-plate inscription*; One thing other than this to which the plate points is the forgery of documents to encroach the virgin lands suggesting the increasing obsession of having land in possession for personal economic gains. As a customary, the villagers were asked to be obedient to the donees and to pay them the all dues (*Pratyaya*) including *tulyā, meyābbāga, bhōga, Kāra, hiraṇya, etc.*

Vadner copper-plate inscription, 608 C.E.,²⁸ was issued by Buddharaja of Kalachuri dynasty who was a worshipper of Mahesvara. This plate records the grant of the village of Koniyanam in the Vatanagara-*bhōga* (subdivision) in the neighborhood of Bhattaurika to Bodhasvamin, a *Brāhmaṇ* of *kasyapa gōtra*, for the maintenance of *bāli, cāru, vaisvadeva, agnihōtra* and other rites. The gift village was made free from all *dityas* (dues), forced labour and *pratibhedika* and from the entry of the *caṭas* and *bhaṭas* and donees were allowed to enjoy *udraṅga, uparikāra* and all other receipts. These were the generally listed privileges in most of the grants pertaining to this period. Revenue collection was the primary right which was later decorated with other privileges.

The Nirmand copper-plate inscription of sāmanta and Mahārāja Samudrasena, 612-13 C.E.,²⁹ records that the village of Sulisagrama was granted by Samudrasena to a body of *Brāhmaṇas* who studied the *Atharvaveda* at the *agrāhara* of Nirmanda near the bank of the river Satluj in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, in the service of God Tripurantaks of Siva. This was considered necessary for the establishment of *bāli, cāru, seṭters* etc. and to facilitate the regular supply of materials required for the daily worship of the deity. This inscription also suggests that the grant was made to the donees along with plain and forestlands and to the inhabitants (*Sā-prajā*) with the *udraṅga* (land), which included the village boundaries together with grass, timber, and springs. This shows that the donees were given the right to

collect taxes and other dues from the peasants. The term *Sā-prajā* should not be taken lightly, for one; the inhabitants differ from the commodity or property which can be possessed and the other the one who exercised such authority can be identified as the charioteer of feudalism in early medieval northern India. In this period howsoever, where peasants and other inhabitants of villages are being considered as a commodity, there are definite evidence of the existence of not only feudalism as a structural setup but also as the feudal mind. Where such a term point to their subjection and subordination by a king, we become sure about their economic exploitation when the primary source of their livelihood is also taken away most heartlessly by the rulers asserting their authority over it.

From *Dubi copper-plate inscription of Bhaskaravarman* 600-50 C.E.³⁰; we stand to learn that Bhaskaravarman occupied the throne only after the demise of his brother. Dubi falls in Kamrup district of Assam. He accepted the royal fortune after a ceremony of purification and renewed an old charter granted by his ancestor Mahabhutavarman. The original donees were Bhattamahattara Priyankaraghoshasvamin and Avasarika-Bhatta Devaghoshasvamin belonging to a Ghosha family. In renewing the charter, the grant was made in favour of the persons (*amsapatis*) who were entitled to the shares of the property granted to the original donees - Narayanavarman and Sthiravarman. *Midnapore copper-plate inscription* of the time of Sasanka (c. 600-25 C.E.)³¹ states that, when king Sasanka was ruling over the whole earth, and his *sāmanta* (feudatory) *Mahārāja* Somadatta was governing Dandabhukti with Utkala-Desa (i.e. the Midnapore-Balasore region), Somadatta's *Amātya* (administrator) Prakirnadasa informed the Karaṇa at Tavira that soma had granted the locality called *Mahā-Kūmbhā-Rapadraka* in favour of the *Brāhmaṇa* Bhattesvara or Bhatta Isvara of the Kasyapa-gōtra. The use of certain phrases like, the rule over the whole earth, seem more than reality an exaggeration which was aimed at bragging the political paramount of the ruler. The term whole earth was not even meant for literal delineation rather it was comprehended by the rulers that the earth for the native inhabitants meant the area or the farthest horizons they could think of which were certainly not beyond the physical boundaries of the state. Also it was intended to accentuate the political glory of the sovereign king. This is why the trend is picked up by not the one but many rulers who were contemporary to one another. Again this phrase occurs; while Sasanka was ruling the earth (i.e. was the king-emperor), *Mahāpratihāra* Subhakirti was governing Dandabhukti (district around Danton in Mahapore). The Karana (Adhikarana, the office of local administration) of Tavira informed its present and future Adhis (Adhikaranikas, administrative officers) that Subhakirti had purchased from it. 20 *dronas* (*dronavapas*) of ordinary land and one *dronavapa* of homestead land at *Kūmbhārapadraka* situated in the uddela (administrative unit) of Kechakapadraka and granted the land in favour of the Madhyandina *Brāhmaṇa* dhamyasvamin of the Bharadvaja-gōtra for the religious merit of his parents.

Kailan copper-plate inscription of Sridharanarata, (665-75 C.E.)³² records the donation made by *Samatatesvara Praptapanchamahasabda* Sridharanarata; an order as regards the grant of 25 patakas of land made by the king was transmitted to the *Viṣayapatis* of the two *Viṣayas* called Guptinatana and Patalayika and to their *Adhikarana* (office) by the *Kumaramatyās* stationed at Devaparvata capital of *sāmanta* and situated on the southern end of the Mainamati hill near Comilla and by their *Adhikarana*. The grant was made at the request of the

Mahasandhivigrahika Jayanatha and the gift land was dedicated to the Bhagavat Tathagataratna (Buddha) or Ratnatraya (Buddhist trinity) for the worship of the Buddha, the reading and writing of Buddhist religious texts and the provision of food, clothing and other necessities for the Arya-Sangha as well as to a number of *Brāhmaṇas* for the performance of their *pañcha-mahāyajna*. It becomes evident from the grant that the purpose to donate land to the religious institution was either guided by the devotion of the ruler to the principal deity of the religious institution or with a view to maintaining the institution. In both the cases, a religious institution was being introduced to the new dimension of the state economy. This plate, for example, dedicates the grant to Lord Buddha, which makes it apparent that the institution was being empowered as a new feudal institution which could now employ the labour of peasants, could assess the dues from the land as did any sovereign king and could as well maintain a force for the purpose of protection. The role of such institutions further widened as the intensity of grants grew any further. They even functioned as the wealth houses and there are examples to be cited from the literature as well as epigraphy where such institutions functioned as a banking institution. But we observe the trend that most powerful of these were the temples and monasteries which were adorned with big land grants. Their pride swelled million times and soon they started functioning as independent administrative units. More so because the administrative and financial rights alienation was the part of the creed of this tradition of land grants.

*Ashrafpur copper-plate inscription of Devakhadga*³³670-85 C.E., records the grant of several plots of land, measuring 9 *patakas* and 10 *dronas*, by king Devakhadga, in favour of the Buddhist monastery built by the monk Sanghamitra, for the long life of prince *Rājārājabhata*. One of the plots of land is stated to have been in the *jāgir* held by the queen Prabhavati and another in that of the *sāmanta* Vantiyoka. It was written by a Buddhist named Puradasa at the victorious royal camp at Karmanta which N.K. Bhattasali identified with modern Bad-Kanta near Comilla. It can be delineated from this copper-plate that for a significant giveaway sometimes land under the previous occupant could have been revived to state control first and then transferred with its other rights to the beneficiary. Also, it depicts the possession of land by the officials and dignitaries of royal families. It is therefore crystal clear that the economic freedom that came to a donee after the culmination of this process was not even enjoyed by the royal beneficiaries. The perpetuity was the prerogative of later donees alone and mostly the religious grants were sanctioned with this privilege.

We are enlightened by *Talesvar copper-plate inscription of Dyutivarman*,³⁴ on the grant of a village to the deity of the temple of Viranesvara in the presence of officials such as *Danḍa* (*Danḍanāyaka*), *Uparika*, *Pramatara*, *Pratihara*, *Kumaramātya*, *Pilupati*, *Aṣvapati*, *Jayanapati*, *Ganjapati*, *Supakarapati*, *Tagarapati* (*Nagarapati*), *Viṣayapati*, *Bhōgika*, *Bhāgika*, *danḍapasika*, *Katūka*, *Viṣayapradhāna*, *Kuṭumbin*, for the maintenance of *bāli*, *cāru*, for bathing the deity with curd, milk and ghee, for worshipping the god with perfumes, incense, lamps and flowers, of sweeping and cleansing the temple compound and ploughing the temple fields and of repairs to the temple of Viranesvarasvamin. It was pointed out that the documents written on copper-plates, cloth-sheets, and Vrishatapa (a mixture of copper with alloy) plates recording grants of land, hamlets, villages and barns made by the ruling king's ancestors

were burnt by fire. The king was, therefore, requested to issue a duplicate grant mentioning specifically the areas and names of the lands that were being enjoyed by the temple. The request was complied with and a charter on *Vrishatapa-plates* was granted. There is a long list of localities which were included in the rent-free prolong list of localities which were included in the rent-free property of the Viranesvara temple. The boundaries and areas of none of them are, however, mentioned in the charter. The temples emerged as the independent economic agents and representatives of the early medieval Indian economy. They got the previous grants re-sanctioned with the fresh privileges and the benefits. The temples slowly acquired the area surrounding it by virtue of a grant and then expanded it to an extent which could qualify the institution or the head of the institution for the profile of feudal agent. The landed aristocracy was hence the result of this process. It was but natural that when land was not to be donated to a temple neither the deity nor the priest specialized the agricultural operations, the basis of production. It was the peasants who tilled the soil under the subordination of a new landlord with new vague economic compulsions coming into force.

Alina copper-plate inscription of Siladitya-VI Dhruvata,³⁵ record a gift of the village of Mahilabali for the maintenance of the *bāli*, *cāru*, *vaisvadeva agnihōtra*, *atithi* and other ceremonies. The grant was made together with *udranga*, *uparikāra* (tax on temporary tenants), the right to forced labour, *bhūta-vata*, and fines from culprits committing the 'ten offences', *adeyas* including *bhōga*, *bhāga*, *kāra*, and *hiranya*. The fit village was not to be even pointed at with the hand by any royal servant. This copperplate seems to depart from the prevalent tradition of land grants. The term *bhūta-vata* is notable in the copperplate which in simple delineation could be describes as income from storm. But, quite interestingly the storms bring havoc and calamities, in what respect it could have been used for economic benefits is tough to infer. But term somewhere else has been connoted as excise and octroi duties and also the income from the elemental or natural changes as change of the course of river, earthquakes, and storms. It seems as in cases of such calamities, the extra burden was put on peasantry under the subtitle of *bhūta-vata* or *bhūta-vata pratyāya*. Wherefore till now, the rights of the judiciary were maintained by the state, a new trend was set in where the right to punish and fine ten offences were transferred to the donees with other rights of collection of revenue from the land. We learn about the tax on the temporary tenants which means there were certain tenants whose association was not even fixed still they were imposed the oppressive tax by the new elites. Once again the right to extract the forced labour was also adorned pointing towards, one the excessive oppression and exploitation of the peasants for the want of agrarian surplus and second the signs of *dāsa-viṣṭi* mode of production coming into force. Taken for the production of the resources, this mode was a force to reckon with just that they could not stand against the oppression of the rulers. It is clearly the departure from the traditional economy where production was based on a voluntary service and not necessarily the forced labour though we have stray references of forced labour but not in the sense it came into force after sixth century C.E.

Khalimpur Copper – plate Inscription of Dharmapala 775-812 C.E.,³⁶ informs us that the Paramasaugata *Paraméśvara Paramabhāṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Dharmapala* granted, at the request of *Mahāsāmantādhipati Narayanavarman*, the village of Goppali in the

Amrashandika-*Maṇḍala* belonging to the *Sthalikkata-Viṣaya* and the villages of Kraunchasvabhra, Madhasalmali and *Palitaka* in the *Mahantaprakasaviṣaya* belonging to the *Vyaghratati-Maṇḍala* within the *Pundravardhana-Bhūkti*, to the god *Nanna-Nārāyaṇa*'s temple built by *Narayanavarman* at *Subhasthali* – The grant was made together with *haṭṭika* (market place) and *talapāṭaka* (adjacent land for maintenance), all localities and fines realizable from culprits for committing the ten offences. It was not to be interfered with and the donees were not to be molested. The officials mentioned in the land grant charter were; *Rājans, Rājanakas, Rājaputras, Rājamātyas, Senapatis Viṣayapatis, Bhōgapatis, Shashthadhikritas, Daṇḍasaktis, Chaurodhharanikas, Dauhasadhasadhanikas, Dūtas, Kholas, Gamagamikas, Abhitoaramana*, superintendents of elephants, horses, cows, she-buffaloes, goats and sheep, superintendents of boats, superintendents of the forces, *Tarikas, Saulkikas, Gaulmikas, Taddyuktakas, Viniyuktakas* and other dependants of the king such as *caṭas* and *bhaṭas, Jyeshthakayasthas, Mahāmahāttaras, Mahattaras, Dasagramikas* and other district officers including the *Karaṇas* and also the cultivators who were informed about the issuance of this grant. This time the principal deity of the temple that was adorned with grant was *Nanna-Nārāyaṇ*, probably who could be identified with lord *Viṣṇu*. So we have a new deity forming the part of the legion. *Viṣṇu* was the part of the very influential pantheon of gods in early medieval India and the believers of this sect were called *vaiṣṇava*. The age of *Purāṇa* particularly highlighted the importance of these deities over the *Vedic*-deities who had lost prominence in early medieval India. Construction of temples at large scale was facilitated of which many were dedicated to *Viṣṇu* as a principal deity. These temples, which later developed as religious and economic institutions, needed wealth to sustain and to mobilize this they propounded an ideology of the deity which could bring about certain economic change. Untill now numerous grants had been provided to the Buddha monasteries, Siva and other *Brāhmaṇs* and priests. In this grant, we find the mention of terms *haṭṭikā* and *talapāṭaka* which imply market place and adjacent land for maintenance respectively. It was considered earlier that only a village, a plot of cultivable or noncultivable land was donated by the kings to the donees but this was an exception of a kind where the marketplace was to be brought under the ambit of the land grant. The marketplace, similar to that of a village was also a unit of secondary level commercial production hence could attract a lot of tax. Temple was hereafter to be the new intermediary set between the ruler and the masses. The plate mentions the right to punish as well for committing ten enlisted offenses indicating the shift in the transfer of administrative and judiciary rights slowly to the donees. The revenue from other sources was but obvious. The continuous drainage of the revenue from the state machinery, on the one hand, weakened the state control, on the other hand, it strengthened the hold of the donees soon after who started to assert their freedom. It was the clear sign that economy was headed towards a closed one where state control would apparently be lost.

Two inscriptions were discovered by A. Cunningham in 1846 in the famous temple of Siva – *Vaidhyānath* at *Kiragrama* (*Bajjnath*) in the *Kangra* district of former *Punjab* (now in *Himachal Pradesh*) and he assigned the date of this inscription about 804 C.E.³⁷ We find a reference to land-grant made by a *Brāhmaṇa* named *Ganesvara*, son of *Govinda* and inhabitant of *Kiragrama*.³⁸ He donated half a plough of land to the temple in *Naragrāma*,

where he possessed a field which required four *dronas* of seed corn; we notice in the same *Praśasti* that a rich merchant Jivaka, son of Depika and Mathika, donated his own land in Kiragrama for the countryard in front of the temple. However, it has been mentioned in the *Praśasti* No. II that Rajanaka Laksman Chandra and his mother made a grant of one plough of land from a village on a permanent basis. It is clearly stated in the *Praśasti* that grant of land must be protected as long as this earth exists. We notice in the *Praśasti* No. II³⁹ that two merchants named Manguka and Ahuka donated one plot of land cultivated by four plough along with oil mill and one shop in Kiragrama to the temple for the maintenance of a lamp, it could further be suggested that land belonging to Naragrāma had been donated along with the inhabitants. There is quite some instances when land that was to form the part of some major land grant which was to be given away by its occupants without a fuss. Perhaps the tradition of donation to *Brāhmaṇa* and temple was so dominant that going against it would have been equivalent to the treachery. Baijnath copperplate is again an example of the religious grant to the temple of Siva which was a clear cut sign of feudalisation of the temples in early medieval India. In the mountain state, the feudalisation once catalyzed with such grants and sanctions could have been even more rapid in the later stages. The nature of geographical factors which therefore influenced the economic factors was totally different from other areas of India. Tough terrains of mountains were sparsely populated hence to mobilize some significant works, a strict and productive mechanism was to be put in place. It is therefore presumed that the forced labour was frequented more in hilly regions as compared to other regions to compensate for less manpower.

The Monghyu copper-plate inscription of Devapala, ninth century C.E., refers the grant of a village Mesika situated in the Krmila-*Viṣaya* to a *Brāhmaṇa*.⁴⁰The grant was not as significant as the other ones and few details are attached of which much cannot be made. Just that the grant was *brāhmadeyā* with the basic privileges and exemptions made to the beneficiary. Whether it was a perpetual grant, is not clear but given the corresponding grants of the period, it becomes evident that it could have been sanctioned to be enjoyed by the generations. *Patan (Nesarika) copper-plate inscription of Govinda- III*,⁴¹ 805 C.E., informs us a donation of a village by *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paraméśvara Prabhūtavarsha Srivallabhanarendra Govinda (III)* who was at first appointed *Yuvarāja* and invested with the *kanthika* by his father Dharavarsha. Then, after becoming king, he subdued twelve rulers who had combined against him. The Ganga, Vengi, Malava, Vindhya, Pallava and Gurjara kings surrendered to him. He took away the following insignia of his enemies: the fish from the Pandya king; the bull from the Pallava king; the tiger from the Chola king; the elephant from the Ganga king; the bow from the Kerala king and so on. The donee was allowed to enjoy *udraṅga*, *uparikāra*, *daṇḍadasapradha*, *bhūt-opatta-pratyāya*, *utpadyamana-viṣṭi*, *dhānya* and *hiranya*. The gifted land was made *cāṭa- bhāṭa-pravesya* and *sarva-rājakiyanam*, *ahasta-kṣepaṇiya*. Govinda was a powerful king; it seems from the inscriptional evidence of his copper-plate. Thoroughly subduing the states meant the tributes and booty for the winner side. It is not clear whether subduing was done by war or a consensus was reached at in peace. Whatever be the case this always meant the expansion in basic revenue in the state with augmentation in glory of the king.

Nalanda copper-plate inscription of Devapala (812-50 C.E.)⁴², is a very important land grant charter where Devapala granted Nandivanaka and Manivataka in the Ajapura-Naya belonging to the Rajagriha-*Viṣaya* within the Srinagara-*Bhūkti*, Natika in the Pilipinka-Naya, Hastigrama in the Achala-Naya and Palamaka in the Kumudasutra-Vithi within the Gaya-*Viṣaya*, together with their lands as undivided plots, with their grass and pasture lands, with their grounds, spaces, mango and *Madhuka* trees, with their waters and dry lands, *uparikāra*, *daṣaparādha* and *chauroddhāranā* and with all taxes due to the king's family or court for meeting the expenditure in connection with the blessed Lord Buddha, for offerings, oblations, shelter, garments, alms, beds, requisites for the sick like medicine, etc., of the assembly of the venerable *Bhikṣus*, for writing the *Dharmaratnas* and for the upkeep and repair of the monastery built by the king of *suvarnadvipa* at Nalanda.

This is an example of yet another magnificent grant to the Buddhist monastery made with an elaborate procedure and provisions. The grant was one of its own kind having far penetrating economic implications. It was the type of land grants where the word *sāmasta* could wholly apply as all the possessions of the state irrespective of their inevitability to the state were alienated without a second thought to Buddhist institution. Though it cannot always be inferred that the dedication of grants to particular institution represented the religious orientation of the ruler but of course it could imply that certainly, ruler has some connections to these. The transfer of all rights along with the pastures, fields, shrubs, water ponds etc meant augmenting the feudal mentality in the sense that the communal resources were being brought under the private ownership of the feudatories. It could have provided an impetus to the agrarian and economic growth but such a wealth was to be concentrated and could not be used for the public welfare; certainly, the economy of early medieval northern India did not regard the peasant as the beneficiary in the profit rather a major player in the production. The immunity was provided to such grants is clear from the verse that the entry of the *cāṭas* and *bhāṭas*, which imply some state officials, was prohibited in the gift villages which were to be enjoyed free from all troubles. The residents of these villages were asked to pay the due revenue such as *bhāga-bhōga-kāra* (taxes in the shape of the share of crops and the periodical offerings from subjects), *hiranya* (tax in cash), etc.

*Parbatiya copper-plate inscription of Vanamalavarman*⁴³ 835-60C.E., informs us that Vanamalavarmadeva made a gift of the village called Haposa-*grāma* which was attached to the *Maṇḍala* of Svalpa-Mangoka situated in the Uttarakula (on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra). The gift village was made *cāṭas* and *bhāṭas-pravesa* and *mukt-aparikāra*. The donee was a *Brāhmaṇ* named Chudamani who was the eldest son of Jejjata. Three of Chudamani's brothers also lived with him. The grant served as the religious grant to the Brahman and the purpose of the grant does not seem other than for religious merit. Individual grants provided the chances to a *Brāhmaṇ* to primarily extract the best from the available resources of human and land and eventually assert power for further expansion by illegitimate means and without the sanction of the overlord. These small donees once just the receiver of the grant for the maintenance of personal expenditure had no dearth of finances and resources. They could now challenge the central authority, a distinct feature of feudalism.

*Barah copper-plate inscription of Bhoja I, Barah, Kanpur District, U.P.*⁴⁴, informs that King Bhoja I informed all the officers and residents of the *Valak-agrāhara* belonging to the Udumbara District in the Kalanjara division of the province of Kanyakubja. It must be known that this grant of the said *agrāhara*, which was originally made by Sarvavarman and sanctioned by *Mahārāja* Nagabhata (II) was disturbed for sometime owing to the incapacity of the Vyavaharins (administrative officers) during the reign of Ramabhadra, and that the *agrāhara* was donated together with all its income to the *Brāhmana*s born of the family of Bhatta-Kacharasvamin of the Bharadvaja-gōtra and Vajasaneya-sakha after having withdrawn the obstruction in the enjoyment of the grant. It was a perpetual grant which was under disturbance for some period of time. It was reassigned by the ruler to augment the merit of his parents and all the gifts and the privileges that the donee had enjoyed were again restored. It could be surmised that sometimes the confusion was created as for the ownership of the grant and such chaos could prevail in the times of weak monarchy but once some strong ruler emerged, the grant came to be sanctioned by him to the institution or individual who had previously enjoyed. It is made obligatory for the villagers that from now on they were to carry the enlisted revenues regularly to the new donee. The revenue loss is vividly visible in the grant besides the revival of the feudal agents who for some classified reasons lost the control over it for some time.

In *Pandukesvar Copper-plate Inscription of Lalitasuradeva* 854 C.E.,⁴⁵ tells us that a village named Garudagrama was granted in favour of the god Nārāyaṇa-Bhattaraka. The grant was made to the deity Nārāyaṇa of the temple but apparently to be enjoyed by the priest presiding over. This was the first plate recovered from Pandukesvar and there were two more. Grant was made for the necessary provisions of the temple like incense, flower, bath, lights, offerings, ointments, dancing and singing. The revenue with other resources was to be lost to the temple by the ruler. The donees, more than economic assets were economic liability to the state which drained state of its economic resources and in return did not provide much to the state. Religious merit was an abstract which could hardly bring about economic benefits.

Bhagalpur copper-plate inscription of Narayanapala 855-910 C.E.,⁴⁶ records that Narayanapala King Narayanapala, son of Vighrahapala, addressed to his subordinates beginning with the *Rājans, Rājanakas, Rājaputras*, etc., in respect of his grant of the village of Makutika in the Kakshavishaya of Tika -*Bhūkti* made in favour of the god Siva-Bhattaraka, installed in the sahasr-ayatana temple founded by the king at Kalasapota as well as the congregation of the teachers of the Pasupata sect for the observance of *bāli, cāru*, etc., at the temple and for the maintenance of the Pasupata monks by providing for all the necessities such as beds, seats, medicines, etc. the gift village was made a rent-free property. Certain questions could be raised on the grants where they were given for the purpose of maintenance monks or *Brāhmana*s or for the daily provisions. The assessment was perhaps not considered important as to how much resource would suffice the need of the donee. By giving more than the need was yet another demerit that propagated only the greed and lust for power and prestige. Now the question of existence and sustenance faded away and the competence in terms of luxury and feudal virility came to the fore. Usually, after few years of the grants being adorned, the donees boasted of their possessions indirectly. The plight of

peasantry came as an aftermath of such donations where there was no regard for the peasantry in the least. They were the economic producers being dominated by the economic scavengers. What better example of social cannibalism could be produced than this?

*Sanjan Copperplate Inscription of Amoghavarsha I*⁴⁷ states the king granted the village of Jharivallika from the village-group Twenty-four adjoining Sanjana for the purpose of maintaining their *bāli*, *cāru*, *vaisvadeva*, *agnihōtra* and *atithi-tarpana* sacrifices. The donees were allowed to enjoy trees, *udraṅga* and *uparikāra* (taxes on permanent and temporary tenants), *daṇḍa-daṣaparadha* (fines from culprits committing certain offences), *bhūta-pata-pratyaya* (income resulting from storms, etc.), *utpadyamana-vistika* (free labour) and *dhānya-hiraṇya* (dues payable in crop and cash). The gift village was made *cāta-bhāṭa-pravesya* and *sarva-rājakiyanama-hasta-prakṣepaṇiya*. Taxation was indeed the primary object of any donation. When we get the evidence of innumerable grants, spread all over a vast geographical expanse, it becomes evident that all these grants could sum up to a big revenue loss to the state. Besides, it was also the loss of manpower and resources to the state. The state could no more assert its jurisdiction in the area which has been practically donated to the beneficiaries and therefore virtually detaching it from the state paramount. Any matter of utter significance, be it economic, or any other, was out of the purview of the sovereigns.

The Partabgarh inscription of the time of king Mahandrapala II of Mahodrya, 946 C.E.,⁴⁸ this land charter depicts that a village was donated by *Mahārāja Mahandrapala-II* in vaour of Vata-Yaksnidevi. The second part of inscription records a grant of a village, in favour of Indraditya-deva by Mahādeva, the provincial Government of Ujjain, at the request of Chahamana Indra-rāja, a feudatory chief. Third part of inscription of a field in favour of Inrarajaditya deva by Bhahtripatta, son of Khommana donated in 942 C.E. and the forth part of document refers to the land grant to different deities by different persons, the gift of a field named Chhittullaka, in which 10 *Manis* of seeds could be sown, and which was irrigated by one leather bucket, in favour of Indraditya-deva, the donation of a field was made by Indraraja to the god Tralokyamchana deva. Basically, the inscription is divided into four parts.⁴⁹ *Random inscriptions* sometimes are confusing with their object. In a single inscription sometimes, various grants are mentioned.

In *Paschimbhag copper-plate Inscription of Srichandra* 925-75 C.E.,⁵⁰ refers to the grant of the several plots of land and the gifted land was named the Sri Chandrapura-Brahmapura or *Śāsana* and was bounded by the Mani-nadi, Vetraghati-nadi, Kosiyara-nadi, etc.

The first plot of land covering 120 *Patakas* was granted in favour of a temple of the god Brahman as follows: a teacher of the Chandra grammar. The second plot of land covering 280 *Patakas* was granted to four Desantariya temples and four Vangala temples, each group housing the gods Vaisvanara (*Agni*), Yogesvara, Jaimani and Mahakala. The third plot consisting of the rest of the land was allotted in equal shares to six thousand *Brāhamaṇas* of whom less than forty are mentioned in a list beginning with Vavasa (vasava?) Datta and ending with Garga.

The land was granted together with *tāla*, *uddesa*, *amra*, *panasa*, *guvaka*, *narikelajala*, *sthala*, *gartta*, *ushara*, *dasaparadha* and *chauroddharana* and with the immunity from sarva-pida, from the entry of *cātas*, *bhāṭas* and from all dues (*akinchid-grahya*). The donees were allowed to

enjoy *samastarājabhāga-kāra-hiraṇya-pratyayā* but not the *ratnatraya-bhūmi*. The term *Ratnatraya* signified the exempted land under the possession of the institution. The Chandrapura-*Śāsana* was created through the Mahāmūdradhikrita Subhanga, an immigrant from Salavarendri, who acted as the *dūtaka*, and the charter was issued in the name of Lord Buddha-Bhattaraka according to the *bhūmicchidranyāya*. There is no doubt that *Paschimbhag copper-plate Inscription of Srichandra* was a significant one as regards delineating the economic transformations of early medieval northern India. There is a mention, that grant was provided the exemption from *sarva-pida* which now was the sole prerogative of the donee. The revenue from the territories directly went to the donees and it was yet another contribution to the landed aristocracy of early medieval northern India.

Varanasi copper-plate inscription of Karna 1042 C.E., throws significant light upon the fact that Gangeya Vikramaditya dedicated his kingdom, addressed his subordinates, etc., from his camp at Prayaga (Allahabad) in respect of the grant of *Susi-grāma* in the land of Kasi in favour of Pandita Visvarupa who hailed from Vesalagrama, belonged to the Vajasaneyasakha, the Kausika-gōtra and the three pravaras (Audala, Devarata and Visvamitra) and was the son of Narayana, grandson of Vamana and great-grandson of Maha.

Sungal copper-plate inscription of Vidagdha,⁵¹ informs us that Paramamahēśvara-VI Dagdhadeva donated one *bhū* of land, called Seri, and half a *bhu* of land called Lavala, were granted as an *agrāhara* to Nanduka the son and grandson respectively of Devanna and Dedduka. The grant was made together with *trina*, *goyuthi* (i.e. *go-yuti*), *gocāra*, fruit trees, the water of the water-courses and channels, with ingress and egress, with fallow lands and with the income derived from fines for *dāsaparadha*. The gifted land was made uncultivable, unopposed, free from the entry of the officers called *cāta* and their subordinates called *bhāta*, free from taxes and inalienable. In this plate also there is a long list of the officials being informed on the occasion of land grant giving. The grant was marked as *agrāhara* reflecting the revenue free nature of a grant as religious as well as it was given to a *Brāhmaṇ*. A significant point in the grant is also the income from the ten offences making us believe that donee was assigned the duty of charging the culprits with ten offenses and charging them with fines which hitherto was the privilege of the state. The natural resources like fruits, plants, trees, grass fields were all handed over to the donee that could use it for the economic advantage. The revenue loss of the ruler or that of the state is quite visible. The peasantry might have been exploited by the donee for the economic gain. The grant not only gives away the rights of water resources which are very crucial for the process of agriculture but also names the fallow land to be under the ownership of the donee. This generosity was not any good for the state rather disastrous more so because of the perpetual nature of the grant. Had it been a tenure based, once the tenure was over, the state could have gained dearly in terms of very well developed cultivable land out of the fallow barren plots and well-established system of the peasantry. But on the contrary, it was an economic disaster for the state and economic dawn for the independent economic representatives of new feudal setup.

*Kesari copper-plate inscription of Satrubhanja*⁵² 11th century C.E., records a different type of grant where the donation was made to remunerate the beneficiary. Such types of grants occur rarely and are endowed with fewer privileges as compared to the religious grants. It

assures that feudalism was the result of the creation of the new class of intermediaries especially *Brāhamaṇas* and not merely by the assumption of power by the pre-existing intermediaries. Also, very fewer numbers of references secular grants are found as compared to the religious grants. Grants are partially made to officer, queens, and princes for the maintenance of personal expenditure but it has been before narrated in this paper that at the instance of the ruler, such dignitaries had to give away their rights when such a plot made the part of one major grant to be given to a *Brāhamaṇ* or to some religious institution.

Garra copper-plate inscription of Chandella of Trailokyavarman,⁵³ 1205 C.E., states that *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paraméśvara Madanavarmadeva*, the *Mahāttaras*, etc., were informed that the village of Kadohawas granted together with land and water, movable and immovable as well as overhead and underground objects and all the produce and that the *cāṭas* and others were prohibited from entering the gift village. The donee was allowed to enjoy *bhāga-bhōga*, the temples and walls, exit and entrance roads, sugarcane, *karpasa*, *kusuma*, *sana*, *madhuka*, forests, mines, treasurers, iron, mines, *bahya* and *abhyantaraadayas*, etc. Similar trend, peculiar to the sixth century C.E., is reflected by the plate. The donee was to enjoy the entire income from the village. Be it from the direct taxes named as *bhāga-bhōga* or the indirect such as income from forests, quarries, mines, treasury etc., from now on. This was hence an economic paradox where one's loss was other's definite gain. One thing that seems doubtful is as to why the sovereign rulers of the time departed with the rich state resources like mines, hidden treasures and the produce from a forest. Had it only been for the agricultural produce, the state could have compensated for its economic losses, but the giveaway of entire state resources turned things topsy-turvy.

*Madanpada copper-plate inscription of Suryasena*⁵⁴ 1210-15 C.E., records *Paraméśvara Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Visvarupasena*, made a donation to *Visyarupadeva-Sarman*, son of *Vanamalidevasarman Pinjokashti* or *Pinjothiya* (modern *Pinjari* near *madanpada*) yielding an annual revenue of 627 *Purāṇas* or *Churnis* and situated in the *Vikrapapura-Bhāga* of *Vaṅga* which lay within the *Pundravardhana-Bhūkti*. The major part of the village yielded 500 annually while a portion named after *Padati Sapamarka* and yielding 132 coins and belonging to the *Kandarpasankar-āśrama* (wrongly included in the gift land at first) was now excluded and the donee's loss was compensated by the inclusion of a portion (yielding 127 coins and forming part of the *jāgir* of a dependent of the king) of *Narandapa-grāma* attached to the *Kandarpasankar-āśrama*. The donee was allowed to enjoy land and waters, forests and bushes, or branches, barren land, betel nut and coconut trees and the preserves (*yūti*) of grass. Water in early medieval India was also an important economic resource. Water was indispensable for irrigation as much as it was for sustenance. Water ponds could act is used for breeding fish and in multiple other ways whereas channels could be used even in much more effective ways.

Nagari Copper-plate Inscription of Anangabhima III, 1230-31 C.E.,⁵⁵ acknowledges a grant of a village by *Anangabhima III*, who granted 20 *Vatis* of land at *Pūrana-Grāma* in the *Sailo-viṣaya* to the *Brāhamaṇ Sankarshananandasarman*. Again, he granted to the same *Brāhamaṇa* a township covering thirty *Vatis* twenty of which lay in *Pūrana-Grāma* and the rest, a plot of homestead land, were in *Jayanagara-Grāma*. Both the villages were situated in the *Sailo-*

viṣaya. The inhabitants of the township included a number of merchants such as a perfumer, a worker or dealer in conch-shells, a weaver of silk, a goldsmith, and a brazier. There were sellers of betel, a florist, a maker of (or dealer in) sugar, milkmen, weavers, oilmen, potters, fishermen, a barber, some craftsmen and a washer man. Trade has always been the appraisal of the state. State promoted trade, sometimes even at their own cost as it enhanced the revenue of the state. We have examples from the times of Buddha that powerful merchants were indispensable for the state as they were the backbone of state finances. Other than direct contribution, they sometimes took up public works on the instance of the rulers. So it can be inferred that merchant hence provided the strong backbone to the economy. But under the discouraging over lordship of the donees of the state their condition was certainly next to transformation. In the same year on the occasion of a Lunar Eclipse, he granted 18 *Vatis* of land in *Pūrana-Grāma* to the *Brāhamaṇ* Rudrapanisarman. In the same year, on the occasion of the Makara-Sankranti, the king granted five *Vatis* of land to the *Brāhamaṇ* Somapalasarman. In the same year, on the occasion of the installation of the god Purushottamadeva, the king granted two *Vatis* of land to the *Brāhamaṇ* Chandrakarasarman. On the occasion of a solar eclipse on the *Karkatak-amavasyā*, while the king was on a pilgrimage to Purushottama-*kṣetra*, he granted five *Vatis* of land in *Pūrana-Grāma* to the *Brāhamaṇ* Kapadisarman and some other *Brāhamaṇas*. When the king was standing before the god Purushottamadeva at Abhinava-Varanasi on the occasion of Makaramavasya, he granted four *Vatis* and eight *Manas* of land, covered with barley, wheat, and sugarcane crop and situated in the village called Vilasapura-grāma in the Kuddinda-*viṣaya* to the *Brāhamaṇ* Devadharasarman. The land was made a permanently revenue free gift.

Mehar Copper-plate Inscription of Damodara,⁵⁶ informs us that Ariraja-Chanura-Madhava Damodaradeva granted to twenty *Brāhamaṇas* certain plots of land in the village of Mehara in the khandala of Vayisagrāma which was included in the Paralayi-*viṣaya* of the Samatata-*Maṇḍala* lying within the Pundravardhana-*bhūkti*. It is also clear that grant of land could together be provided to a group of *Brāhamaṇas*. Gangadhara, the leader of the king's elephant force, seems to have been responsible for the creation of the rent-free holding by paying the necessary fees to the state. The donees belonged to the Savarnya, Bharadvaja and Atreya gōtras and some of them hailed from Kantamani, Purvagrama, Sidhalagrama, Dindisaya and Kesarakona, several of the localities being well-known *ganis* of the Radhiya *Brāhamaṇas*. The charter, yielding an annual income of one hundred *Churnis* (i.e. *Purāṇa* or *Dharana*), was received by Kapadi on behalf of the donees. – It appears that the gift village formed part of the *jāgir* of the officer Gangadhara and that previously the *jāgir* had been enjoyed on different occasions by Mahasandhivigrahika Munidasa and Mahakshapatalika Dalaeva. Another copper-plate, *Basahi Copper-plate Inscription of Govindachandra* issued in the reign of Madanapala, informs a grant by Govindachandra issued commands from Asatika on the 5th day of the Bright fortnight of the month of *Pauṣa* in 1104 C.E to the *Mahattaras* and others that the village of Vasabhi in the Jiyavani-*Pattala* was donated to Alheka.

Ratnagiri copper-plate inscription of Karna 1100-10 C.E.,⁵⁷ states that *Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja* Trikalingadhipati Karnadeva, granted the village of Kona, which was situated within *Brāhma* in the Atthavisa-Khanda of Uttara-Tosali to Rani Karpurasri who was the daughter of Mahari (devadasi) Mahunadevi and daughter's daughter of Udayamati.

She hailed from the Mahavihara of Salonapura in Utkala-Desa. Karpurasri, queen of king Karna was thus apparently a dancing girl attached to the Buddhist temple in the monastery at Salonapura (modern Solampur near Jajpur). The donee was allowed to enjoy *hasti-danḍa*, *varabalivarda*, *chittola*, *andharua* (*artharura*), *pratyandharua* (*pratyartharua*), *adatta*, *padatijivya*, *antaravaddi* (*aturavaddi*), *rintakavaddi*, *vasavaki*, *vishayali*, *ahi-danḍa*, *haladanḍa*, *bandha-danḍa*, *vandapaṇa* and *vijaya-vandapaṇa*. The grant seems special in terms of its features. Though the grants to queens and princes had been issued before, the context totally differed from this one. Here the queen herself is associated with the Buddhist temple in a way different from the mainstream. There are innumerable officials who need be informed on this occasion. Revenue loss could rather not be the characteristic of this grant as the queen herself formed an integral part of the state. *Kamauli copper-plate inscription of Govindachandra* 1125 C.E.,⁵⁸ also informs a land donation by Govindachandra granted the village of Mahasonamaua in the Haladoya-Pattala to Mahāpurohita Jagusarman. The taxes due to the donee under this grant were the *bhāgabhōgakāra*, *pravanikara*, and *kūtaka*. The writer of the grant was Kithana, son of the Kāyastha Ulhana of the Vastavya or Srivastavya family. The tax obligation of the tenants from now on was to the donee and not the king. This in a way distanced the king from the peasantry as layer upon layer of the intermediaries were created.

Saheth-Maheth copper-plate inscription of Govindachandra,⁵⁹ 1129 C.E., records that *Paramabhāṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Paramésvara* Paramamahésvara Govindachandra made a grant of the villages of Bihara, Pattana, Upalaunda and Vavvahali in the pattala (district) of Vada-Chaturasiti, Mosadi attached to Meyi and Payasi attached to Pothivara together with water and dry land, mines of iron and salt, repositories of fish and fields of betel vines, pits, and deserts, gardens of *madhuka* and mango trees, parks, bushes, grass and pasture to Buddha-bhataraka and the community (*Samgha*) of Buddhist monks residing in the great convent of Jetavana. Of many grants made to Buddhist monks and monasteries, it is also the significant one. The taxes were specified as due to the donees. The offer of the grant was conveyed to the inhabitants of the said villages as well as to the kings, queens, *Yuvarājas*, ministers, priests, chamberlains, generals, *Bhandāgarikas*, record-keepers, physicians, astrologers, harem-guards, messengers and officers who were in charge of elephants, horses, towns, mines and gokulas. The frequent grant to the Buddhist monks and monasteries reflect the level of influence they had on the governments of contemporary times as well as the devotions of ruler towards any particular religion, be it Buddhist or any other but this is not always the essential criterion to make a grant. Whatever the purpose might be, the end result was unilateral and that right from a religious institution to educational institutions all came under the influence of feudalism. There as well a hierarchy was created not internally but externally as well. Referring an incident from the history, Chinese traveller Hieun-Tsang was not allowed to study scriptures at Nalanda just because he did not have lavish sums of money to pay to the institution and on this stance, they got a grant of 100 villages from a reputed ruler. Hence it can be concluded that there was enough to serve the need of these donees but their greed always kept augmenting.

*Madhainagar copper-plate inscription of Lakshmanasena*⁶⁰ 1179-1206 C.E., refers a donation by king Virachakravartin Sarvabhauma Somavamsapradipa Lakshmanasena, the *Brāhma-Kṣatriya* (mixed *Brāhmaṇ-Kṣatriya*). He seized the kingdom of Gauda, raided Kalinga and

defeated the king of Kasi (i.e. the Gadhavala monarch). – From Dharya-Grāma, the king informed the *Rājans*, *Rājanyakas*, *Rājnis*, *Rānakas*, *Rājaputras*, *Rājamātyas*, *Mahāpūrohita*, *Mahādharmaadhyakṣa*, *Mahāsandhivigrahika*, *Mahāsenapati*, *Mahāmūdradhikrita*, *Antaranga*, *Brihaduparika*, *Mahākṣapatalika*, *Mahāpratihāra*, *Mahābhōgika*, *Mahāpilupati* and *Mahāganastha*, *the dauhsadhikas*, *Churoddharanikas*, officers in charge of the navy, army, elephants, horses, cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, etc., *Gaulmikas*, *Daṇḍapasikas*, *Daṇḍanayakas*, *Viṣayapatis* and others depending on his majesty, the *cātas* and *bhātas*, the provincial people, cultivators, *Brāhamaṇas* and chief of the *Brāhamaṇas* about making the grant of the village of Dapaniya-Pataka comprising 100 *bhūkhadis* and 91 *khadikas* (i.e. 191 *khadis*) of land and yielding an annual income of more than 168 *Kapardaka-pūranas* (silver coins counted in cowries-shells) to the *Santyagarika* (priest in charge of propitiatory rights) *Govindadevasarman*, son of *Kumaradevasarman*, grandson of *Ramadevasarman* and great-grandson of *Damodaradevasarman*. The gift village was situated in *Kantapur-Avriddi* in *Varendri* within the *Paundra-Vardhana-Bhukti*. – The gift was made together with jungles and bushes or branches, land and water, pits and barren tracts, betelnut and coconut trees, preserves (*yūti*) of grass and pasture land, and was exempted from the submission of fines realized from culprits committing ‘the ten sins’ and from all sorts of forced labour. The entries of *cātas* and *bhātas* (*cātas* and *bhātas* i.e. policemen and their leaders) into the gift land were prohibited. We notice the similar tendency in the land grant of early medieval northern India. It seems that all of the land grant charters were cast in one template and further names of donor and donees only changed. For example, every third grant would prohibit the entry of *cātas* and *bhātas* and so would every third grant be based upon the principle of *bhūmicchidranāyā*, the principle of donating a virgin land. Also, the similar trend of alienating administrative rights with financial rights as well as the produce from jungles, mines, and treasures was the characteristic feature of the grants of this period. Similarly, most of the grants were dedicated to *Brāhamaṇ* and *Brāhamaṇical* institutions meaning that *Brāhamaṇ* had a significant role in the economic transformation of early medieval India, though grants were as well made to Buddhist monasteries and secular dignitaries.

*Machhlisahar copper-plate inscription of Harischandra*⁶¹ 1196 C.E., inform us that king *Harsichandra* granted the village of *Pamahai* together with some other hamlets to one *Rahihiyaka*, son of *thakkuraMadanu* of the *Kasyapa-gōtra*.

It has been argued that an inscription of the tenth century from *Gorakhpur* clearly says that the village which the minister granted to the goddess *Durgā* had been received by him through the favour of king *Jayaditya*, most probably a feudatory of the *Gurjara-Pratiharas*. It would appear that sometimes the king pleased with an officer for some valuable service performed by him gave a village over and above the usual remuneration he was receiving.

An inscription which belonged to 973 C.E.. from *Harṣa* (*Jaipur*) indicates that under the *Chauhan* of *Sakambhare* the kinsmen of the king had in their private possession village and hamlets which they had received as an assignment from the king and which they could dispose of at will. Another land charter, 973 C.E.⁶² informs us about the king *Somharaja* who after having bathed at *Puskara tirtha* donated some villages for the purpose of providing material for the worship of god *Harsa* in the temple. The Same land charter further tells us that *Vatsarāja*, younger brother of the king donated a village for the same. King’s sons

Govindaraja and Candraja gave two huts and king's officials also donated one village for the same.⁶³ *The Copper-plates inscription of Chauhan Maharaja Ratnapal 1120 C.E.*⁶⁴ records a donation of a village to a *Brāhmana* for the daily worship of God Siva. We have noticed a secular land-grant from *the Nadol copper-plate of Kirtipal 1160 C.E.*⁶⁵ That Alhanadeva and Kelhandeva were pleased to donate twelve villages to the Rajaputra Kirtipal, whereas the done, in turns, is said to have donated a sum of 2 *drammas* per annum from each of these villages to Jain Mahavira shrine at the village Naddulai. To determine the nature of this land-grant is very difficult. It can be assumed from a sheer enjoyment grant to governorship of the villages donated to him, as rewards for his services. Another copper-plate which can be dated to 1163 C.E.,⁶⁶ from the palaeographical point of view, refers a religious donation of a village in favour of god Tripurusadeva. The land-charter tells us that king Alhana, in fear of the ten sins, went on a pilgrimage while worshipping lord Siva with flowers, etc. He bathed his image with *Pāncamṛta* while holding water in his hand made a donation of Nandana village. Similar land-grant is recorded in Bamnera copper plate of the same year where Ajay Singh donated i.e. Dholika that is any piece of land. However, *the Sanderav Stone Inscription of Kelhanadeva 1164 C.E.*,⁶⁷ informs us about a land donation of one *bāla* of land by queen Analadevi to the God Mahavir and one bala land was donated by a group of rathakaras⁶⁸ to celebrate the Kalyanika.

The Bijholi Rock Inscription of Chauhan Somesvara 1169 C.E.,⁶⁹ tells us about the donation of two villages named as Morajhari and Revana to the temple of Parsvanath by Prithvibhata and Somesvara respectively to get religious merits. This land charter further informs us about certain land-donation to the shrine by certain persons, the inhabitants of different villages such as Guhila-Putra Raval Dadhara and Mahātma Ghanasimha donated a *Kṣetra-dohoi*, lying midway between the village of Kamua and Revana. GaudaSomva and Vasudeva, inhabitants of the village Khadumvara gave one *Kṣetra-dohalika*. Parigrahi Alhana, residing in the village of Vadauva donated one *Kṣetra-dohalika*, Guhila-Putra Raval Vyaharu and Mahatma Mahana associated with the village of Lagher-Vijholi, donated a *Kshetra-dohalika* to the shrine of Parsvanatha.⁷⁰ The Lalrai stone inscription of Kelhanadeva 1176 C.E.,⁷¹ describes Rājputra Lakhanpal and the Rājputra Abhayapala as the proprietors of certain landed estate, but do not get any information regarding how these princes got this estate. It seems that Chauhans land-charter also testify to the apportionment of landed property among the kinsmen of ruling chief, but one land-charter of Chauhan tells us about the queen Sri-Tihunake enjoyed a village as *giras* (for food and clothing). Although queen did not belong to the kin of the family in which she was married, but she was given a personal estate commensurate to her statues. Similar sort of land donation was enjoyed by Dhandhika who he donated to Siva temple, it seems that this police officer had been granted several other villages besides this, but he was not entitled to make are ligious grant without taking prior permission of his master, his was a limited assignment. It seems that king did not assign the absolute right to the donees over the donated villages.⁷² But a literary source of Chauhan times describes Kadambavasa, the mahāmantri of Prithiviraj III, who had the title of Sarvadhikari and *maṇḍaléshvara*, which indicates that he was donated a whole *Maṇḍala* by way of salary or support this dignity.⁷³ Even donors donated a bazaar building or warehouse for storing, goods to be exported and done was asked to pay some money out of

the rent occurring therefrom was to be offered the *pamchamibali*⁷⁴, every year in the temple of god Parsvanath.

Another *Chauhan inscription records* 1347 C.E.⁷⁵ the donation of Dhikuyan (machine well) together with an orchard to the same. Sanchor Stone Inscription of Pratapasimha 1387 C.E.,⁷⁶ also remind us about the donation of a field, and 2 *paials* on every maund of each commodity from the custom house, for daily offering of the god Veyesvera. It is gleaned from the inscriptions of Chauhans that the rulers had several feudatory chiefs under them. These feudatories had their own states or *jāgirs* as the case may be which were duly controlled by them. However, they were not free in external affairs; they actively participated in the battles of Chauhan rulers.⁷⁷

In spite of the presence of feudal sort of relationship between paramount rulers and *sāmantas* during Chauhans times on the one hand and revival of the money economy, urbanization, flourishing trade, and commerce are gleaned from the literary and epigraphically traditions of Chauhans times. A considerable number of towns and towns full of movement are reflected in Chauhan's inscriptions. This is further corroborated by *Tarikh-i-Frishta*,⁷⁸ which tells us about the urban life, the development of towns, torts, courts, and sacred sites, points of strategic and commercial significance. Another literary source of Chauhans informs us that Chauhan dominions were full of *tempo*s, multi-storeyed houses, and steep wells. Tanks and *prapas*, markets and towns full of commodities from various parts of the country.⁷⁹

In fact, the shrinkage of trade or decline in commodity exchange in term of money economy did not mean the complete decline of trade and commerce. It refers to the situation in which they are not the consequential partner of the overall economic patterns. The Chauhan Inscriptions inform us about the flourishing trade in wheat, mudga, resin, oil, betal leaves, Kiradu, spices, rathas, salt, and horses, etc. Horses were imported from *Uttrapatha*. The literary and epigraphic sources of Chauhans further inform us about the traders who went about making money and storing cereals, cotton, salt, wool and buying lac, trading in jaggery, pressing oil, manufacturing charcoal, clothing, cutting down forests, telling lie and cheating their customers by using false weight and measures.⁸⁰ Above detailed description of trading in various goods, suggest that trade and commerce during early medieval times did not disappear.

However, within the Chauhan regions, there seems to be no shortage of coins in the market. The Chauhan inscriptions inform us about the numerous coins, such as *dramas Vimsopakas, rupayka, raukma and draela*, etc., until the tenth century C.E. The Chauhans remained the vassals of the Pratiharas of Kannauj. But for the first time, we learn about Ajayadeva's coins in the *Dhod inscription of Somesvara's* times. Copper and silver coins were also issued by the Chauhans whose regions give an indication of growing rural and urban trade. Billon coins seem to have been issued in good numbers by the Chauhans.⁸¹ Thus, it is abundantly clear from the study of Chauhans land-charters that coins were freely used and further shows that development of trade and urbanization, which are fundamental features of the money economy. It has been argued that early Indian Land-Grants generated landed aristocracy which ultimately transformed money economy into the closed economy.

The feudal economic order set into pace by the system of land grant started a chain reaction of economic events, one leading to another, in early medieval northern India. Land-grants of early medieval northern India were not similar in features and structure to the traditional grants, which were either based on tenure or did not give away the economic privileges to that extent to the donee, rather included permanent abrogation of the rights of the donors in favour of the donees. The system of granting land evolved towards the sixth century C.E. as advanced the religion from the age of sacrifices to the next level where idolization became the prominent feature. Such prominent symbols of religion emerging as economic institutions in early medieval India needed a continuous supply of provisions which could be supplied only by means of land grants which were therefore encouraged to retain and sustain the transformation of economy to another step. The origin of feudalism in India clashes with the intensity of these grants going considerably high and with ever increasing privileges to the donees. Administrative rights over land were given up in *Satavahana* period for the first time which had set in a tradition that would go on for a while. But the economic hold over the land was lost fifth century C.E. onwards when rulers gave up their control over all the sources of revenue accruing from the granted land. Some noticeable amongst these were the control over mines, treasures, and jungles which until now not only formed an integral part of state core revenue but also was important as the symbol of state's authority. Its alienation virtually cut the territories from the state whereas leading to the assumption of authority by the donee better manifested in the word feudalism which we do not deny in Indian context even if the war on the application of the term in Indian context still goes on. Isn't it visible that such developments would have impacted the revenue loss of the state in long run? But there was more to come. Not only religious institutions but also the *Brāhmana*s and the secular donee as officials of the state were the next available participants in this system of land grants. Where individual grants led to the formation of institution of *vassalage*, institutional grants led to the feudalization of religions institutions which later emerged as dominant economic agents of the early medieval Indian economy. The privileges of donee in our period of study included not only the administrative rights over the land but also the judicial and financial rights. Taxation and maintenance of law and order were the two vital elements of the state and their abandonment was fatal which compromised the political and economic integrity of the state. Grants of *Pāla* period bear testimony to such phenomenon which disintegrated the economy and polity which henceforth could not be returned to previous glory. Feudalization of administration was an important economic event when resounding titles started to be assumed by the class of newly created intermediaries. These feudal titles expressed the whole story in short describing how the power came to be exercised by the new feudatories. This meant enhance in royal recognition of the new feudal lords but might have been a saving grace for the sovereigns slowly losing their hold on land. It is evident that religious institution developed as the major economic player, much in the tune of Manor of the Europe but not to be confused them. An independent economy was developed for examples by the temples which by now had controlled vast tracts of land and derived considerable income from it. It attached the labourers to the land much like the state appropriated collection of the revenue and other incomes. Temples also acted as educational and banking institutions. In later

period art and architecture developed that was centred around the activities of the temples and monasteries mainly.

But this system of the land grant had some disguised benefits too. We notice that these donations have been made in accordance with the principle of *bhūmicchidranyāya* with liberations of water as a permanent gift lasting as long as the moon, sun and earth would exist, with certain privileges, together with all the income enjoyed by the state in the shape of taxes in kind and cash. This particular term was used as a guiding principle wherefore the grant of barren land was to be effected. The cultivators and the peasants of the countryside are directed to be submissive to the donee and to pay him the proper dues. The *bhōgapatis* (landlords, governors) of the future are also directed to approve that grant and protect it. In early medieval northern India, generally, two kinds of land were donated in lieu of cash salary for their services to the state, e.g. pasture on barren and land lying in the outlying regions of the state. The purpose of these land-grants may be many. The king might have sincerely desired to bring uncultivable land under cultivation, secondly by granting the land in the far-flung areas where the royal authority was little left by the presence of central authority. Thus the king could exert its influence in such areas where the people were oblivious of central authority prior to the grant was effected. It is argued that the land grants are noticed in such places where the circulation of coins were either minimal or absent. This argument although had relevance but we cannot say emphatically that it was because of the absence of coins that land was granted. It might be owing to the desire of the king to bring more and more land under cultivation through donees.

We learn from the study of various land charters (copper plates) that once a land grant was made the state officials could not inflict any harassment either on the donee or the peasants of the donated village. At least they were protected against extra-harassment of the state officials under this lease. It has been observed that overlords did not make any serious efforts to stop exaction of feudal chiefs. As the central authority in the early medieval period had declined considerably and had to depend on the levies sent by the feudal chiefs, it could not afford to interfere with their high-handed exploitation.

But the subjection and subjugation of the peasants by the donees was obvious in the absence of a mechanism of checks and balances. The land charters record that the cultivators should attend on the donees and pay them all type of taxes and revenues in cash *hiranya* and kind (*meyā*). This custom shows that state in early medieval times faced economic losses in both the way whether donee is required to collect revenues from the peasants or donees were donated land or village in lieu of salary for their services to the state, in both ways the state stand to lose. It is clear from the study of various land charters that the ownership of land-grant was transferred from the donors to the donees and the peasant, tilling it, was reduced to the position of a semi-serf. Certain kinds of land had been donated to different people religious as well as secular people as remuneration for their services to the state or king. No doubt, the fashion of making land-grants in Indian history was as old as *Brāhamaṇ* and Buddhist literature, but it has been used in different perspectives in different periods. The early medieval traditions indicate significant changes in the relation of the donors and donees and consequently its impact on the early medieval Indian economy, since 8th century onwards, whereupon officials of the state were remunerated through land-grants.

From in-depth study of above copper plate traditions of early medieval northern India, we are able to deduce that the grant of lands and villages with inhabitants, house-sites, cultivates, an uncultivated fields, gunders, etc. to the *Brāhamans*, monks, religious as well as educational institutions, such as, *Vihāras*, temples, mathas as the servants, and officers of the state or kings for various state services, had been donated as tax-free, donation by the king, and private individual, subordinate rulers and sometimes state officials in lieu of cash salary. It is noticed that in the seventh century C.E., onwards the state officers were mostly paid in the form of land-grants and this would appear to have been the common practice in our period as well.⁸² D.C. Sircar inclined to accept the free land donation to donees.⁸³ On the other hand, he admits that there are a few charters recording grants of land to people of the warrior and other classes for service rendered to the king. He also admits that early Indian rulers often granted *jāgir* for the maintenance of their officers and dependents. He too, qualifies his argument by adding that they were not under feudal obligations; he, however, fails to explain the nature of the obligation. His argument seems to be theoretical in nature. He states that Indian society was class and clan-ridden and left no scope for the development of feudal tendencies,⁸⁴ a suggesting which is more conjectural than factual. Om Parkash is of the view that besides that absolutely tax-free nature, the land-grants, has also been taken for granted for their entirely charitable character, bringing nothing in return to the state. He further argues that the study of the land-grants is incorrect and there are a number of instances of fixing a special tax in the land-grants themselves. The special tax has been variously termed as *trnodaka*, *nikara*, *aruvanaagrāhara- pradeyamsa*, *panda-dāna* etc.⁸⁵ Om Parkash argues that the several grants do not only had the right to all taxes and other sources of income, announcing further, the ban on ingress and egress of the regular and irregular troops in the donated villages or land, nowhere mentioned that the donee will be paying nothing to the state or government.⁸⁶ His rejection of the concept of feudal land-grant is blunt but primarily based on whatever argument he could put forward in favour of his thesis. But he should keep in mind that it has not been recorded in any land charters that the donee will pay something to the state. We recorded large number of landgrants which depict various exemptions; and different sources of state income were transferred to the donees, like, grassland and pasture land of the village, the surface of the ground (*tāla*), the space above the ground (*uddesa*) the dug land and water of the village (*Jala-sthāla*) and the pits and barren spots (*gant-osara*), salt pits, (*levana*), market places and landing station (*Battaghatta*). Records of some of the rulers of the Himalayan areas mention besides boundaries and pasture lands, trees, orchards, springs, and waterfall, etc.,⁸⁷ were the sources of revenue to the state which had been transferred to the donee and finally state suffered huge amount of revenue. Om Parkash states that early Indian land-grants were not a drain on the state economy, he further argues that religious grants were also converted into sources of state revenue by granting only partial exemptions implying thereby that the unremunerated taxes were to be realized from the donee.⁸⁸ But he refers only partially privileged grant but ignores full exempted estates or/and land grants⁸⁹. It is clear that peasants could not leave cultivation and escape to another village, some villages were transferred to the donees along with artisans, herdsman, and cultivators, tied down to the soil. Perhaps the practice was rendered necessary by the scarcity of working population for running the rural economy.⁹⁰ Since the fundamental function of the peasant is to cultivate the

soil, there is no other way out except cultivating the land, and about the movement of the peasants from donated village to another village seem to be that generally, people are emotionally and sentimentally attached to the soil, they would like to stick to their respective place under any circumstances? Om Parkash, however, argues that the state somehow left helps under the pressure of immemorial tradition of the non-taxability of the *Brāhman* to abolish their honored prerogatives,⁹¹ but we did not get any idea regarding the helplessness of state which compels the state to grant land to *Brāhman* and religious establishment with all type of exemption. He himself admits that there was the feudal formation and hierarchy of officials was paid in terms of land assignments.

Revenue loss of the state was one predicted economic implication of the land grants but there were other even more harsh consequences of this phenomenon. A class of intermediaries developed which assumed the authority and separated the economic functions of their territories from the central state. Peasants were subjected to suppression and maximum exploitations and at times reduced to bonded labourers. They lost their land rights along with right to humane treatment as good governance was not the guiding principle of the new overlords. It was the effect of the motivation for religious gain in merit that gave rise to such a situation. Fragmentation of state led to weakening the central hold. Finally small economic units emerged which were economically self sustaining. Their self dependence was disastrous for trade and commerce which was hence discouraged. Whether economic independence led to the paucity of coins which in return discouraged the trade or vice versa, is tough to infer but it can be said that all these events were inter-related. The paucity of coins has been attested by the inscriptional sources. Or it can be inferred that want of currency in early medieval India might have inspired rulers to grant lands in lieu of cash salaries. It is tough to interpret social and economical phenomenon which are quite complex in nature. Also trade needed coins to operate and in economic self sufficiency, the barter system was preferred mode of production which ultimately transformed the economic situations in India.

Thus, after long survey and examination of above mentioned copper-plates we can deduce that the copper -plates deal with the donor, the donee, the state officials, the fiscal dues, the donated land or village, the occasions for the land grants and the purpose of the donation. There is detailed information provided about the genealogy of the king, and about the officials of the state and the recipients of the grants. Towards the end of the content of copper-plate, the most of the land grants provide imprecations, and many mention the name of the executors and engravers. The information about the donor includes his ancestry for several generations, usually five or six, and in many cases his lineage is traced back to the solar or the lunar dynasty.

Interestingly, the copper-plates depict the conquests of the king, never depicting his defeats. King or donor carries a good number of epithets, which indicate his political status, religious affiliation and some of his achievement. The donor benefactions in the case of religion are highlighted. The copper-plates also specify the donor's capital from where it is issued. It seems as if the copper-plate was never aimed at bringing the revenue returns to the state. But lack of vision and farsightedness led to the over exploitation of this instrument of accentuating the political authority by the kings and further their prominent vassals. The

economic consequences which we observe in the benefit of hind sight was far from the imagination of the contemporary rulers. Moreover the religious affiliation to such institution was taken for granted and it was thought to enhance the political status of the king and entitle him to all sorts of joys and luxuries not only in this material world but also beyond this. But on the contrary it inflicted misery.

However, the information regarding the predecessor of the beneficiaries is also given in detail and the donees are identified by their *gōtras*. But the family tree of the beneficiaries does not contain as many generations as that of the donors. It seems as if the prominence alone was more of the benefactor at the time of issuing grant and it was obvious to enlist the predecessors of the ruler who indulged in the land donations for earning the merit not only for himself but for his forefathers as well. In this context, it is obvious that the need to list the genealogy of donee was not so significant.

Another significant element in the copper-plate description is the list of officers with both proper names and with designations, who are informed of the land donation. The list of state official is not comprehensive; it usually follows some hierarchical order and enumerates most functionaries irrespective of their ranks. These state officials perform economic, scribal, military and administrative functions. The taxes from the donated village granted exemptions constitute an integral part of the content of copper-plate bearing land-grant.

It is observed that many copper-plates depict the different taxes and powers of administration which are assigned to the beneficiaries. Some of the copperplates specifically record the transfer of peasants and artisans living in a village and also make over cultivators occupying a piece of land; other gives the beneficiary the right practically to evict the existing peasants and induct the new ones. As if the exploitation was not enough, the donees exercised their rights of eviction and practically the peasants were thrown out of the economic set up altogether. Early medieval copper-plates record the transfer of certain agrarian rights such as those to pastures, irrigation facilities, rivers, trees, hills, etc., to the donees.

But the alienation of land hence revenue directly impacted the state treasury and the state finances fell to miserable level and so fell the economic hold of the sovereign rulers. Some copper-plates give us the idea of the transfer of whole villages which entails the transfer of peasants who paid a part of their produce, nowhere specified in copper-plates, to intermediaries. But land donation made by the Chandella king specifies the transfer of peasants, artisans, traders, etc., to the beneficiaries. Such a practice was adopted to compel the artisans and peasants to run the self-sufficient economy of the villages, and give indication towards the serfdom. The copper-plate records the name of the donated village and the description of its physical boundaries which indicates the type of land such as a virgin, semi-virgin, wet/dry land and settled area. In addition to this these copper-plates record the social relationship of the donated villages.

However, occasions for donation of village are recorded in copper-plates. These may be the *Brāhminical* sacrifices performed by *Kṣatriyas* princes to legitimize their position. It is observed that visits to places of pilgrimage which had become a fashion in early medieval

India, were celebrated by the kings through land donations. The religion as reflected in the early medieval Indian land grant charters had direct bearing upon the society, polity and economy of the state.

Nothing can be said precisely about the motive and purposes of land donation by the donors. It seems as if the donor might have donated land to donee to get religious merits, the popular religious agenda of the period under study, out of the *Bhūmi dāna* or for his ancestors' spiritual welfare.

Most of the land grants were made to, Monks or temples and monasteries in lieu of cash payment for performing certain religious services to the state or kings or donor. But this tradition also transformed with the passage of time when *Brāhmaṇas* were granted land making their association with some religious institution and making him the agent of god, who on behalf of god could relish the rewards of these religious grants. It is observed from the study of copper-plates of early medieval India that the *agrāharas* and *brāhmadeyās* grants provided subsistence to *Brāhmaṇas*. The donations made to temples, *maṭhas*, and Buddhist monasteries were meant to enable them to perform religious, educational and charitable function. Copper-plate charter clearly point out that education was the monopoly of such religious institutions and even the knowledge of secular subjects was imparted by these institution. We have examples of Nalanda and Taxila which we find in copper-plate inscription. The educational institutions were not organises and rights of education were limited. Most of the times study of religious scriptures was patronised but lower classes were kept away from this privilege for a considerable period of time. The copper-plate land donations, which are more numerous in Orissa than in Bengal, Bihar during the same period, show that a considerable class of religious beneficiaries and secular assignees was imposed upon the common cultivators. The secular assignees comprised vassals and officials. Records of direct land grant in favour of vassals are few, but nearly a dozen terms mentioned in the copper-plates seem to stand for landed vassals.

We can specify the different categories of vassals' landholders in early medieval India such as *Bhūpati*, *bhupala*, *bhōgi*, *bhōgirupa mahābhōgi*, *sāmanta*, *mahāsāmanta*, *mahāsāmantadhipati rānaka*, *rājaputra* and *rājavallabha*. Most of them seem to have been given military obligations and to have lived on the revenue assigned to them and quite a few villages were held by the officials, who were allotted land revenue as remuneration for their services. The copper-plates depict that successor princes are threatened with all sorts of calamities if they resume the grants and some of the land charters asked the donees to shun treason or sedition against the king.

At last it can be concluded that no other source of history provided as much insight into the pattern of historic change from which we inferred history as we know it today as a discipline of study. Land Grant charters are the oceans of knowledge and information about the past and I will have to confess that I could do little justice to this, for, we can interpret as much as one compete thesis from a single land grant charter. The vast interpretation and descriptions could not be accommodated in the thesis where the obligation concluding things in brief persists. It seems that very less has been known even now and extensive

study into the land grant charters should be made objectively which would certainly clear the picture about our ancient past, and early medieval India in particular.

REFERENCES

- ¹IE, p. 103.
In ancient India, the deeds of land-donation were known as *dāṇa-patra*, *tamra-patra*, or *sāsana-paṭṭa/patra*. The word *patra* suggest that the records were written on *bhurja-patra* (birch-bark sheet) or *tala-patra* (Palmyra leaves) and few of them were later engraved on copper-plates.
- ²IE, p. 104.
Even our early Indian literary traditions, such as *Harṣacarita*, *Kādambri* and *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti*, used the term *rāja-śāsana*s or charters to refer to donation of land, property, etc., made by the kings to the benefesisheries
- ³Yajñavalkyasmṛti, I. XXXIII. 318-319, p. 143.
- ⁴ E.B.Cowall and F.W.Thomas, Trans. *Harṣacarita of Banabhatta*, London,1897, p.203
- ⁵ Kale, M.R.. Edt., *Kādambari of Banabhatta*, Mumbai,1928, p. 99.
- ⁶ EILGSE, p. 1.
- ⁷EILGSE, p.2
- ⁸EILGSE, p. 2.
- ⁹Peasant Protest, p. 3.
- ¹⁰L. Gopal, "On Some Problems of Feudalism in Ancient India," in *ABORI*, Vol. 44, no. 1,p. 8
- ¹¹ Waters, T., *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, (629-45)*, Delhi, 1973, p. 176.(*On Yuan Chwang's*)
- ¹² *Harṣacarita* of Bana, trans., E.B. Cowell and F.W. Thomas, London, 1897, p. 93.
- ¹³Gopal,L., "Sāmanta: Its Varying Significance in Ancient India" in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1963, p. 23. (hereinafter cited as *Sāmanta*)
- ¹⁴*Sāmanta*, p. 25.
- ¹⁵Chauhan, G.C., "Samanta As A Feudal Lord in Early India from Mauryas to 650 A.D.", in the *JOI*, Vol. 39, 1989, p.113.
- ¹⁶EIFSAIC, pp. 33-44.
- ¹⁷ *Agrarian Economy*, p. 106
- ¹⁸ B. Parkash, "The Genesis and Charter of Landed Aristocracy in Ancient India", in *JESHO*, Vol. XIV, 1971.pp. 201-202
- ¹⁹*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VIII, 21; *Śat. Br.*, XIII, 7.1.15, vii,1.18.1,73.4.; *Chānd. Up.*,IV. 2,4-5.
- ²⁰*Āpastamba*. 11, 10.26, *Gautama Dharmasutra*, v.19, xix, 16, *Jātaka Stories*, 1.97-98, II, 42, III 104, 223, iv 473.
- ²¹*Manu*, VII, 115-117
- ²² AŚ, II.1, II.35; *Origion and Growth*, pp. 80-81.
- ²³ Agrawal Ashvini, "A New Copper-Plate Grant of Harṣavardhana from the Punjab, Year 8", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol.66, No. 2 (2003), pp. 220-228
- ²⁴*EI*, Vol. IV, pp. 208-211; *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 221-223.
- ²⁵INLGPYK, p. 180

26. ²⁶ Shankar Goyal, "The Recently Discovered Kurukshetra-Varanasi Grant of Harsa: Year 23", *East and West*, Vol. 57, No. 1/4 (December 2007), pp. 193-203
27. ²⁷*EI*, Vol. I, pp.67-75
28. ²⁸*EI*, Vol. VI, p. 204.
29. ²⁹Fleet, J.F., *CII*, Vol. III. P. 286; *INLGPYK*, pp. 182-183.
30. ³⁰*EI*, Vol. XXX, p. 287.
31. ³¹*Select Inscriptions*, pp. 24-25
32. ³²*Select Inscriptions*, pp. 36-37.
33. ³³*Select Inscriptions*, pp. 41-43.
34. ³⁴*EI*, Vol. XIII, p. 109.
35. ³⁵Fleet, J.F., *CII*, Vol. III, p. 173; *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VII, p. 79.
36. ³⁶*EI*, Vol. IV, p. 243
37. ³⁷*EI*, Vol. I, pp. 97-118
38. ³⁸*EI*, Vol. I, p. 107.
39. ³⁹*EI*, Vol. I, p. 107.
40. ⁴⁰*Sahai, Bhagwant, The Inscriptions of Bihar*, Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, Delhi, 1983, p.75.(hereafter cited as *Inscriptions of Bihar*)
41. ⁴¹*EI*, Vol. XXXIV, p.123.
42. ⁴²*EI*, Vol. XVII, p.318.
43. ⁴³*EI*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 145-159.
44. ⁴⁴*EI*, Vol. XIX, pp. 17-18.
45. ⁴⁵*EI*, Vol. XXXI, p.277
46. ⁴⁶*IA*, Vol. XV, p. 30; *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 80-85.
47. ⁴⁷*EI*, Vol. XVIII, p. 243.
48. ⁴⁸*EI*, Vol. XVIII, p. 243.
49. ⁴⁹*EI*, Vol. XIV. pp. 176-188.
50. ⁵⁰*EI*, Vol. XXXVII, p. 289; *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 92-93.
51. ⁵¹*Antiquities, Pt. I*, p. 166
52. ⁵²*EI*, Vol. XXV, p. 161
53. ⁵³*EI*, Vol. XVI, p. 274
54. ⁵⁴*EI*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 315.
55. ⁵⁵*EI*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 235.
56. ⁵⁶*EI*, Vol. XXVII, p. 182.
57. ⁵⁷*EI*, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 263-268.
58. ⁵⁸*EI*, Vol. IV, pp. 100-101.
59. ⁵⁹*EI*, Vol. XI, p. 22
60. ⁶⁰ *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 124-125.
61. ⁶¹*EI*, Vol. X, p. 95.
62. ⁶²*EI*, Vol. II, pp. 116-129; Anita Sudan, *A Study of Chauhana Inscriptions of Rajasthan*, Research Publishers, Jodhpur, 1989, pp. 236-237.(hereafter cited as *Chauhana Inscriptions*)

63. ⁶³EI, Vol. II, pp. 128-129
64. ⁶⁴EI, Vol. XI, p. 308
65. ⁶⁵EI, Vol. IX, pp. 66-70.
66. ⁶⁶Chauhana Inscriptions, pp. 237-38; *Agrarian Economy*, p. 132.
67. ⁶⁷EI, Vol. XI, pp. 46-48.
68. ⁶⁸EI, Vol. XI, p. 47.
69. ⁶⁹EI, Vol. XXVI, pp. 84-98.
70. ⁷⁰EI, Vol. XXVI, pp. 105-112.
71. ⁷¹EI, Vol. XI, p. 49.
72. ⁷²EI, Vol. II, p. 62
73. ⁷³ *Kharatargachchha-pattavali of Jinepada*, Singhi Jiina Granthmala, Bombay, 1950, pp. 25-33; R.V. Somani, *Prithviraj Chauhan and His Times*, Jaipur, 1981, pp. 87-88.
74. ⁷⁴EI, Vol. XI, p. 60-62.
75. ⁷⁵ EI, Vol. XI, pp. 62-63.
76. ⁷⁶EI, Vol. XI, XXIII, pp. 225-29.
77. ⁷⁷EI, Vol. XXXV, pp. 239-42.
78. ⁷⁸ J. Briggs trans. *Tarikh-i- Firishta*, Calcutta, 1911, p. 177.
79. ⁷⁹ *Prithvirajavijaya, Mahākāvya* of Jayanka, Verses, 119-90.
80. ⁸⁰EI, Vol. XI, p. 28, 43-58.
81. ⁸¹ Deyell, John S., *Living Without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, pp. 144-80; *EI*, Vol. XI, p. 41.
82. ⁸² K.K. Gopal, in *LSRSEI*, p. 118.
83. ⁸³ *Landlordism*, p. 33
84. ⁸⁴ *EHEMNI*, pp. 76-78.
85. ⁸⁵ *EILGSE*, p.2
86. ⁸⁶*EILGSE*, p. 3.
87. ⁸⁷ *Landlordism*, p. 49; *EI*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 281, 288, 296.
88. ⁸⁸*EILGSE*, p. 282.
89. ⁸⁹ J.F. Fleet, *CII*, Vol. III, NO. 80, p. 286.
90. ⁹⁰ *IF*, pp. 218-219.
91. ⁹¹ *EILGSE*, p. 283.