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Changing Structure of Political Economy in Early Medieval India

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Abstract: *The economy of any place depends largely on its natural resources and on the technological skill of the people inhabiting it on one side and socio-political organization at the other. The early medieval India was a period of proliferation and fragmentation. The existing varnas were split up into many castes and numerous new tribes and castes were annexed to and incorporated within them. In this period 'Kanauj' was the center of Political hierarchy in northern India. The tripartite struggle between Pratihāras, Pālas and Rāśtrakutas resulted in the emergence of many small principalities in 7th century. The Rāśtrakutas ascendancy constitutes such a brilliant chapter in the economy of southern India. The background to socio-political changes in early medieval India is provided by certain economic developments. The most significant change in the economy of the period is the large-scale transfers of land revenues and land to both secular and religious elements by princes and their vassals. There was a vigorous growth of city-life, while the villages remained the backbone of the Indian economy. The increasing role of the industrial & commercial guilds, or temples in the politico-economy of early medieval India established economic system with a sense of strong localism and closed economy. In order to understand the role of feudalism in political economy of this period, one must keep in mind the general process of the evolution of this institution in India. Feudal institutions are apt to be evolving in a state which lacks an efficient system of centralized government, and also wants infelicities for transport and communication. The increase of religious intermediaries in land, the payment of vassals and officials by land grants, the feudalization of the titles of kings and official, the shifting of capitals, the imposition of clan chiefs on old village, all these factors may be taken as feudal elements in the early mediaeval political economy of India.*

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Introduction: The early medieval India was a period of proliferation and fragmentation. The existing *varnas* were split up into many castes and numerous new tribes and castes were annexed to and incorporated within them. The background to social changes in early medieval India is provided by certain economic developments. By the consequences of political change in early mediaeval period feudal system was strengthening frequently with the tendency of holding land by means of military tenure and hence it involves a kind of military service, but in many case no military obligations. The most significant change in the economy of the period is the large-scale transfers of land revenues and land to both secular and religious elements by the princes and their vassals. The process is attested by a large number of charters generally recorded on copper-plates which mostly grant villages with fiscal and administrative immunities to priests in the initial stage but also to vassals and officials in the later stage. In the 11th and 12th centuries vassals and officials were granted villages and right on land revenues, especially in the Rājput kingdoms of northern India. In the Deccan and South India, they were assigned villages for military service. Although the country was split into numerous principalities, especially after the fall of the Pālas, Pratihāras and Rāśtrakutas, the process of land grants made royal authority ineffective even in these small kingdoms. Succession of weak kings afforded them a suitable opportunity for extending their power still further.

Aim: In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study such aspects of economy/economic system to which state played a major role or affect

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indirectly, such as foreign trade, land grants, peasantry, feudatories, crafts & professions, fiscal laws, etc. These aspects have been discussed independently in chronological sequence to give a better-connected account of Early Medieval India

Methodology:

- Comparative study with Critical Marxian approach
- Possible inference has been drawn also on the basis of statistical data with their limitation
- As the 7th to 16th century, there was a complete stagnation in literature will have depend on the historian comments base on the inscriptional evidences.

Political status of Early Medieval India: After the break-up of the Imperial Gupta Empire resulted in the cohesive political structure and subsequently India suffered from lack of a strong power and the political scene, which could cheek the growth of independent petty states struggling for suzerainty in an uncertain political atmosphere. The north-western frontiers had become unprotected massive inroads of foreign tribes and worsen the critical political climate. With the rise of Harshavardhana (606-647 A.D), North India emerged from this state of chaos and confusion. Harsha rein not only established peace and order but introduce feudal administration with new tendencies. Immediately after his accession he removed his capital from Thānesar to Kanauj and raised the status of Kanauj. After the death of Harsha, the empire disintegrated and numerous independent kingdoms sprang up. These states were continually remained in war with each other or concluding alliances of short duration. The king of Kāmarupa

Bhāskaravarman, who was the ally of Harshavardhana asserted his independence in 7th century A.D. **(R.S. Tripathi 1937: P.284)** Later on Yaśovarman (c. A.D. 715-745) established his rule on Kanauj in A.D. 730. Subsequently, it had become a symbol of imperial power by this time.

The most outstanding feature of this period was the rise of three powers, namely, the Gurjara-Pratihāras (c. A.D. 550-1018), the Pālas (c. A.D. 750-1175) and the Rāśtrakutas (c. A.D. 650-973) Now the city of Kanauj became a center of contention amongst the above three powers. This tripartite struggle continued for a long period which exhausted all three of them, leaving the field open to their feudatories. On the periphery of the three major dynasties (Pratihāras, Pāla and Rāśtrakutas) a number of small principalities emerged in the 7th century A.D.

The Pratihāras who initiated their rule as a small principality in eastern Rājputana became powerful by the first half of the eighth century. The Pratihāras king Nāgabhata-I gave a crushing defeat to the Arabs. **(R.C. Majumdar 1955: p. 20)** After the decline of Pratihāras a number of small kingdoms emerged in north India. About the end of 11th century, Kanauj was ruled by Gahadavālas (c. A.D. 1050-1200). The region of Bundelkhand (Jejākabhukti) was occupied by the Chandelas (c. A.D. 831-1202). Other dynasties were the Parmāras (established their rule over Mālwā - c. A.D. 820-1315) and the Kalchuri dynasty of Chedi (ruled over the region between Narmadā and Godāvari - c. A.D. 800-1200) and the Chahamānas (occupied eastern and central Rājasthan and part of Gujarāt - c. A.D. 550-1194). At first the Chandelas and Kalchuris were

subordinate to the Pratihāras and asserted their independence in the middle of the 10th century. **(R.C. Majumdar 1955: p. 87)**

In the eighth century A.D. the powerful Pāla dynasty was established in the area of Bihar and Bengal by Gopāla, the famous chieftain. Gopāla's son and successor, Dharmapāla (c. A.D. 780-815) extended his rule from the Bay of Bengal to Punjab. During 10th century the dynasty lost its glory and the realm of Pālas broke up into a number of small territories like Gauda, Rāḍhā, Aṅga and Vaṅga, etc. To rule these new states independently many new dynasties emerged such as Gauda (north-east Bengal) ruled by Kamboja kings, the Vaṅga (a part of east Bengal) became under the independent rule of Kāntideva (king of Chandra dynasty), After the Chandras east Bengal was ruled by Varmanas (c. A.D. 1035-1150). The last ruler of Varman dynasty was overthrown by the Sena King Vijayasena who practically conquered the whole of the Bengal during his long reign of more than 60 years (c. A.D. 1095-1158). **(R.C. Majumdar 1955: p. 238)** After this Bengal was invaded by the Turks who by this time overrun the whole of north India.

In the Deccan the Rāśtrakutas (the first feudatories of the Chālukya of Bādāmi) established 757 A.D. Though, the Rāśtrakutas were the strongest amongst the above mentioned three important dynasties, but had to fight on two broad fronts, one in the north and the other in the south, and ultimately, they were the first to exit from the political scene in A.D. 973 when the last Rāśtrakutas king Kakka-II was overthrown by Tailapa (c. A.D. 973-97, the founder of the later Chālukya dynasty of Kalyāni). **(K. A. Nilakanta 1975: p. 226)** He successfully overpowers the neighboring rule of the Chālukya of

Gujarāt, the Parmāras of Mālwā, the Kalchuri of Chedi and the Cholas of the South. Lastly the rule of Chālukya was overthrow by the Yādavas in 1190 A.D. **(R.S. Tripathi 1992: pp. 426-28)**

The area of Gujarāt was practically divided between the Pratihāras and the Rāśtrakutas. But the Pratihāras power was not as pervasive in the north Gujarāt as was Rāśtrakutas in the south. Consequently, several dynasties such as Saindhavās, Chālukya, Abhiras, Varahās and Chapotkatas emerged in Saurāshtra and north Gujarat between 8th to10th centuries. All these petty principalities were merged into a large kingdom by the Chālukya of Gujarat ruled up to 13th Century. **(A.K. Majumdar 1956: p. 158)** About the end of 10th century A.D. we find the later Kadambas rising as a power after the downfall of the Rāśtrakutas.

After the decline of the rule of three major dynasties (Pratihāras, Pāla and Rāśtrakutas) a number of small principalities emerged. They failed to provide a strong centralized administration which could harness the energies of feudatories to build up a strong resistance to the inroads of the Turks/Afghāns. Outside the main area of conflict in the northern India, there were a number of small kingdom such as *Champaka* (Chamba), *Durgāra* (Jammu), *Trigarta* (Jālandhara), *Kuluta* (Kullu), Kumānou and Garhwāl. All these petty kingdoms and the valley of Kashmir ordinarily remained politically isolated from Indian Political atmosphere. The history of Kashmir valley beings with the Karkota or Nāga dynasty founded by Durlabhavardhana in 7th century A. D. In the twelfth century king Jayasiṁha (c. A.D. 1127-1155) recovered some of the lost prestige of Kashmir during 10th century. **(Kalhana's *Rājtarangini*, Vol. II, p. 121)** He was the patron of the famous historian poet Kalhana.

The southern India geo-politically divided into the plateau kingdoms on the west and the costal kingdom on the east. The conflicts of the political power of these two regions were evidently to control the entire waterway between Godāwari and Krishanā River, known as Vengi. It became frequently the center of contention. After the middle of 6th century A.D. three major kingdoms – Chālukya (c. A.D. 550-750), Pallavas (c. A.D. 575-900) and the Pāndyas (c. A.D. 600-920) – continued for the supremacy. Pallavas established their rule on the east coast in the region between *Pennar* and *Pelar* River. Mahendravarman-I (c. A.D. 609-625), the important king of this dynasty suffered defeats by Pulakesin-II and lost his territory of *Veṅgi*. The hereditary conflict with Chālukya, Pāndyas and Cholas continued till the dynasty was completely overpowered by the Cholas at the close of 9th century A.D. **(K. A. Nilakanta Sastri 1995: pp. 5-7)**

The coastal area of *Utkal* (Orissa) ruled by several dynasties, such as *Sailodhava*, *Karas*, *Bhanjas* and *Gangas* in the period under consideration. Of these dynasties *Karas* (also known as *Bhaumas*) were the most powerful and ruled up to middle of the 12th century A.D. along the eastern part of the country at different phases. **(Binayak Misra 1934: p. 5-6)**

Economic status of early mediaeval India: The coinage was almost conspicuous by its absence. The changing structure of commercialization in this period is clearly indicated by the paucity of coins. Moreover, when some coins were introduced in Indian market, they remained in circulation for centuries and recoveries of such coins have been mentioned in many inscriptions. Although, the Pālas, Gurjara-Pratihāras and Rāśtrakutas ruled continuously for about three

centuries and more, over the whole of the country except Deep South, we cannot confidently attribute any series of coins to them. The absence of gold coins in post-Gupta times is a noteworthy feature, in sharp contrast with their abundance under the Kuśānas and Guptas. Although gold coins were revived under the Kalchuris, Candellas, Gahadavālas, etc., in the 11th-12th centuries it was on a small scale, and at any rate in the period c. A. D. 650-1000. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 19)** It is obvious that the dearth of coins hampered both internal and external trade and left the villages to meet their needs by themselves; either singly or collectively. The existence of too many kingdoms meant payment of customs at numerous check posts which further undermined trade. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* speaks of traders who moved through forests to escape payment of duties *śulka*. **(VI. 3, p.105)** A Gaṅga king of Orissa is known to have rated a *vaisy-agrahāra*, i.e. a free holding in favour of the mercantile class, after receiving 150 silver coins from the donees. **(R.S. Sharma 1965: p. 164)** The references of use of *kapardaka* (cowries) and even lumps of metal prove the self-sufficient status of economy. The cowries could not be of much use in considerable transaction, but they know to have been used in state transactions at least in Bengal and Kashmir. **(B.N. Puri 1957: p. 136)** Even coins belong to different part of the world were accepted as many in early medieval Indian market. The Pratihāras inscription mention several categories of coins such as, *pāda*, *ṿiṃśopaka*, *rūpaka*, *paṇa* and *kākīṇī*. The *gadhaiyā paisā* and *pañcīyaka-dramma* which appeared in Rājasthan from 10th to 12th century attributed with Pratihāras may have been struck and issued by authorized local bodies/panchayat/groups of merchants. **(*JNSI*, Vol. XVII, pp. 70-71)** The issue of coins of local bodies or

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merchants indicates the disintegration of central power and the prevalence of local economic units. The references of use of *dramma* in appreciable quantity in the literature and epigraphic records of Pāla and Pratihāras indicate the inter-regional trade between the two empires during 9th and 10th century. There are about 250 coins of silver and copper identified as *dramma*. **(*JNSI*, Vol. X, p. 28-30, 66, 153)** But these were restricted to towns and not numerous enough to break through the shell of the closed economy prevalent at that time.

Concept of political economy: With the growth of Marxist Approach, a new conception of history developed, and a socio-economic approach to historiography became popular within a section of historians who conceived of the existence of five successive stages through which the history of a country has to pass.

- The primitive community
- The system of slavery.
- The feudal period
- The capitalizes period
- The epoch of socialism.

Although, some historians denied the reality of any politicized economy and exalted the king as the sole source of laws and economy, but the Marxist approach exercised considerable influence on the writings of Ancient India. Consequently, attempts have been made to prove the existence of a feudal period in early Indian history. It is not that different writers of this category interpret the data in the same way. Often, they differ widely in this respect, one finding traces of the system only in one period (early India) and another only in a second

(medieval India). Really, however, the views of all these writers appear to us to be based on misunderstanding and wrong interpretation of the evidence at our disposal as well as on the study only of a part of it. Like the *Zamindāri* system of late medieval India, the early Indian land system may exhibit some superficial resemblance with European feudalism, but none of the essential characteristics of the feudal system can be traced in India. Although, to discover elements of European feudalism in the Rājput states, the word *Damara*, as found in Kalhana's *Rājtarangini*, may be consider as 'a feudal baron of European character. **(Kalhana's *Rājtarangini*, Vol. II, pp. 304, 494-95)** but the *Damaras* of Kashmir were rural landholders and not feudal barons in the European sense. This can be quite cleared from another reference of the same text-

> *"It is said that king Lalitāditya (8th century A.D.) warned his successors not to leave with the cultivators of the land more than what was necessary for their bare sustenance and the cultivation of their fields, because, if they were allowed to keep more wealth, they would become formidable Damaras strong enough to defy the king's command."* ***(IV.347-48)***

The weakness of the central government gave rise to a class of merchants as chiefs (*Damara*) in Kashmir. They were appointed by king in salaried service **(Kalhana's *Rājtarangini*, vol. VIII, p. 1542)**

Frequent change of over lordship was another characteristic feature of this age. In no other period of Indian history did large tracts of country pass so rapidly from one dynasty to another. The period between c. A.D. 1030 and A.D. 1149 witnessed kaleidoscopic changes in the frontiers of kingdoms. So, certainly the

feudal character of socio-politico-economy of India was entirely different in many ways and should be analyzed with its own meanings.

Feudal Localism: The references of immobile Brāhmiṅs in the medieval *Dharmaśāstras* are in keeping with the growth of closed economic units in post-Gupta times. The *kalivarjyas* (things prohibited in the Kali age) limit the movements of the Brāhmiṅs to secure the Vedic structure. But at the same time, it is prescribed to emulate others if they want to rise in status. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 31)** They are not allowed long journeys, as *Ausanasa Sṁŕti* states that those should be fallen from caste and not to be invited to funeral feasts (*sraddhā*) who undertake a voyage. **(P.V. Kane 1973: p. 934)** Albiruni mentioned that the area within which a Brāhmiṅs could live is fixed, and that a Hindu is not generally permitted to enter the land of the Turks or of the Karnātas. The law-books of *Bŕhatparāsara* recommends that no man would give his daughter to one who lives at a great distance. Likewise, the pilgrimages to long distant holy places were prohibited. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 231)** All this makes sense in the context of feudal localism, which ruled out economic and other social interaction between one region to another. There are many references of early Medieval India to indicate the king's governors of different grade viz. the lord of one village, 10 villages, 20 villages, 100 villages and that of 1000 villages, who enjoyed respectively the royal dues collected from the villages. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 47)** It is significant that the earlier texts talk in terms of *deśadharma* or district customs, *grāmadharma* or *grāmyadharma*, *grāmacāra* and *sthānacārā* mentioned in the *Abhidhānacintāmaṅi* of Hemacandra (1088-1172) and some other texts. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 74)** They reflect the growing importance of villages as self-

sufficient economic and administrative units. The Pratihāras and Rāśtrakutas system differed from the Pala in that it provided for subinfeudation, which made grants with the sanction of the king. But some references imply that for religious purpose they could freely dispose of the villages under their possession. **(*EI*, Vol. V, pp. 6-9)** The subinfeudation was practiced not only in the dominions of their feudatories but also in the area directly governed by the Pratihāras; but it was more frequent in the territory held by vassals. **(*IA*, Vol. XII, p. 1195; *EI* Vol. XIV pp. 20-29)** Subject to the payment of tribute the big vassals enjoyed full power over their revenue and taxes. **(*IA*, Vol. XIII, p. 160; *EI*, Vol. XIV, pp. 45-54)**

The state and Land-grants: The land grants which began on a large scale under the Guptas and Harsha was overlaid in early medieval India by the royal grants and assignments of lands for various purposes. Earlier most of grants being endowments made by the feudatories or subordinate chiefs, but in early mediaeval India the grants were generally made by the kings themselves. The vassals bore both civil and military obligations towards their overlord. Their most important civil obligation was regular payment of tribute, which was sometimes personally realized by the overlord. Other obligations of civil nature were compliance with imperial orders; and the attendance at periodical intervals. Under the civil grants, generally made to Brāhmiṅs and vassals, villages were granted with fiscal and administrative immunities. **(A.S. Altekar: 1934 p. 264-65)** The military obligation was more important, and consisted in rendering aid to the overlord in times of war. The process of the transfer of fiscal and administrative rights to the recipients led to the creation of larger or smaller estates comprising number of villages. **(*EI*, Vol. XVIII, p. 304; *EI*, Vol. XXIX, pp.26-44)** Every village

furnished part of their articles. The royal grants and assignments involved as a rule no more than transfer of the king's dues and rights in favour of donees. The epigraphic and literary records clearly mentioned that pious kings generally respected the free holdings created by earlier rulers. But, at the same time, the charters exhibit a persistent fear of the donors that their gifts might be resumed by the future kings. The village in question was regranted/renewed by the king with all the income **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 220)** Sometimes inscriptional evidences revealed that sale of land and fixation of annual revenue also quoted old stanzas praising the gift of land and denouncing its resumption. This refers to the well-known convention that the sale of land should also be represented as a gift. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 15)** Some epigraphic references show that once made the grants became hereditary in practice, and the successor of the original benefactor king were under the obligation of respecting these grants and observe them, even when they were made by feudatories **(*IA*, Vol. XV, pp. 112-13; *CII*, Vol. V, pp. 6-9; A.S. Altekar 1934: p. 98)** Most of the land grants were made to temples and some Buddhist monastery on the prevailing terms **(*EI*, Vol. XVIII, p. 304)** In the Bengal and Bihar Brahmins, Buddhist monasteries and Saiva temples emerged as landed intermediaries, enjoying not only economic privileges at coast of the king and cultivators but also administrative at the expense of the king **(*EI*, Vol. XIV, pp. 26-44)** The practice of religious grants was more widespread in the kingdom of the feudatories of Pratihāras than in the regions of which they governed directly. Thus, the religious grantees emerged as landed intermediaries in charge of police and fiscal administration in village/regional economic unit. The

Rāśtrakutas, however, gave the donees mare coercive administrative powers then Pālas did and this was not in the case of Pratihāras.

The State and Ownership of Land/Land Transfer: In the early historical period land was the property of the king and private person was not entitled to own it. But in the early mediaeval period the theoretical nature of the king's ownership of land under permanent tenants is revealed from the Karkota section of Kalhana's chronicle. Although, some evidences show that some land was attached to the king as his personal *jāgīr* which seems to be called *rājakaṁ kṣetram (asmat-svatvakam)* in a Nasik inscription and *raja saṁbhoga* in the Manahali plate. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 4)** The state land can be divided into the five categories: (1) land attached to the king personally, (2) fiefs allotted to officers, subordinates and members of the royal family (3) land cultivated by State farms, (4) land cultivated by temporary tenants receiving half the share of the produce for their labour, and (5) uncultivated and waste land of various types. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 12)**

Generally, Brāhmiṅs received free holdings but sometimes the persons of non-Brāhmiṅs communities also received free holdings from the king either as a reward for their services or by purchase. **(*EI*, Vol. III, pp. 1.4)** Grants made for the maintenance of the families of warriors of different communal groups, who died fighting on the king's behalf were called *mṛtyuka-vṛtti*, *rakta-mānya*, etc. We find the references of free holding of one *kula* of land, that of five *kulas* of land, the *jāgīr* of one village and that of one township in the records of early medieval India. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: pp. 19, 47)** Late medieval epigraphs speak of a tenure according to which a person enjoyed royal land on condition that he would help

the king with forces whenever required. But such a thing is unknown from the records of earlier ages. The royal charters usually mentioned that land holdings could not be confiscated by the state under the four circumstances: (1) when it was ceremonially granted by the king, (2) when it was in the possession of a family for three generations, (3) when care is taken for it by good tenants, and (4) when it is enjoyed by a tenant by virtue of the charter of an earlier king. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 19)**

The Damoderpur plate refer only to the concession on price of state land for the purpose of creating rent free holding, but that there are some south Indian inscriptions which mention the current price of land. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 8-9)** There are many references of early medieval India to indicate the king's governors of different grade viz. the land of one village, 10 villages, 100 villages and that of 1000 villages, who enjoyed respectively the royal dues collected from the villages. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 47)** The absence or paucity of ancient Indian records for sale of land might also be due to the fact that many of these were written on perishable materials. There was never any dearth of waste land and the state is known to have been eager to dispose of such land with a view to extending the area under cultivation. The 10th century inscription from the Sylhet district of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) referred the donation of a vast area of waste land to six thousand Brahmins. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 6)**

Feudatories and Local Administration: In ancient India the important task of the state authority was the registration of all households in the kingdom in order to determine the tax yield in kind, cash and labour performance of the primary producer. But, from about 6th century onward most of them must have dropped out

of being subjects to state and came under the rule of the emerging class of religious and secular feudal lord/corporate bodies. The vassals and aristocratic elements occupied a fairly important position in local government, which were being gradually monopolized by narrow family circles. Provincial governors were given the status of *māhāsamanta* and often bore the title of *rājā*. Probably, viṣayapatis, *bhogikas*, *bhogapatis*, etc., sometimes possessed feudatory title *sāmanta* by sub-feudatories. **(Altekar: 1934 p. 173)** Supervisors over units of 10 or 12 villages were appointed by the district officers from amongst their relatives. According to Altekar the term *rathika*, *rāṣţriya*, *rāṣţrapati*, and *rāṣţrakūta* were used to denote local chiefs, district officers, and big landlords. Some records mention *viṣayamahattaras* and *rāṣţramahattaras*, who were probably hereditary aristocrats, seems to have been associated with the management of local affairs. Sometime officers were remunerated by salaries paid partly in cash and partly in kinds. **(A.S. Altekar: 1934 p. 26-158, 189)** These type of units of villages found in the inscriptions of Pratihāras, Chālukya, Chamānas and Parmāras **(R.S. Sharma, Land grants to vassals and officials in northern India, in *JESHO*, IV, p. 88)** The feudatories relied for administration on their sub-feudatories. So, neither the Pratihāras kings nor their feudatories could develop any elaborate administrative machinery, and the greater part of the Pratihāras Empire was probably governed by vassals. We find some references of *Parmāra* kings who allow their feudatories to control even the urban economy, Sometime kings levied

Addition taxes on merchants.

The State and Land-Taxes/revenue: The crucial link between the rural economy and the urban superstructure was the land tax. Detailed taxation

documents as they have turned up, generally confirm the high official rates for revenue in terms of produce as given in administrative texts and manuals. The collectors of the king's grain share were designated as *Ṣaṣṭhādhikṛta* (superintendent of the 1/6th share) and *Dhruvādhikāraṇika* (superintendent of the office in charge of fixed). **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 15-16)** This seems to suggest that the, in the said area, Different rates were fixed for different types of fields, crops or tenants. The king's share of the merit was equal to his share of the produce of the tenant's fields. If the State did not get any compensation for the loss of revenue, the merit accruing to the donation would not go to anybody other than the king. The charters of the kings of Sarabhapura and Uccakalpa of 6th century A.D. mention the royal dues as *bhoga-bhāga*, *kara-pratyaya* (income in the shape of *Kara*), *bhāga-bhogakara-pratyaya* (income in the form of *kara* levied as *bhāga* and *bhoga*), *bhāgabhogkara-adi-pratyaya* (income including *bhāgabhogakara*), *hiranya* (tax payable in cash), *śulka-bhāga-bhogakara-hirany-adi-pratyaya* (*śulka* or tolls on commodities is added to the list), and *bhāga-bhogakara-hirany-avatay-adi-pratyaya* (includes *avat-aya* or income resulting from storms). **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 17)** The difference in the extent of the king's favour to the various donees or to special circumstances.

In the earlier, we have referred that the first king who was allotted by the people 1/6 share of the grains, 1/10 share of the articles for sale and a tax in cash. Manu speaks of 1/6, 1/8 and 1/12 of the grains as the king's share. **(*Manusmṛti* 1974: p. 3)** In early mediaeval period 1/6 of the grains seems to be the slandered share of the principal crop of an area which was verified by the reference of official designation *śaśthadhikrita* (the superintendent of the of the 1/6 share) in

the records of the Pālas. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 15)** Rāśtrakutas Empire enjoyed a lot of income from revenue. There were many sources of revenue of their income. A lot of money came in the form of tributes from the feudatories. Subject to the payment of tributary the big vassals enjoyed full power over their revenues. They could assign taxes and grant villages, sometime with and sometime without the permission of the overlord. **(*IA*, Vol. XIII, p.160)** Income also came from mines, forests and waste lands. Land tax known as *uddranga* of *bhogakara* brought in a lot of money. It was one-fourth of the produce. It was collected in kind in two or three installments. The lands given to Brahmins and temples were also taxed although the rate was lower.

Usury: Usury is another important aspect of feudal economic system. From the post Mauryan period the texts indicate the interest was drawn a commodity such as grain, cotton, milk products, salt, sugar, fruits, etc. laid down by the law givers. Manu, the most important law giver of Post-Mauryan, stated that king should compel the Vaisya to practice lending at interest. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 195)** Both Manu and *Nārada* were of the view of that Brāhmiṅs should not take interest even in the time of distress, but should pay some interest to people of mean avocation out of legal necessity. They are not to concede the practice of usury in favour of Brāhmiṅs. Likewise, Alberuni also stated that usury or taking percentage is forbidden. -------- Only the *śudras* were allowed to take percentage not more then 1/5 of principle. **(Edward C. Sachau 1910: Vol. II, p. 150)** In the early mediaeval period situation has changed. the loans in kind were more frequent than those in cash because of less scope for payment in money in cashless feudal economy. *Medhātithi* accepted interest at the rate of 1/80 of the

principal. It is also prescribed that land was given on loan against which eight times the harvest was required to return as interest. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 196)** Sometimes land was given to the peasants on lease at exorbitant rate of payment in kind. Normally 15% yearly rate of interest, but at some place lawgiver of 7th and 8th century raised it to 24 %. Possibly this increased rate of interest applied only to money/gold received. **(P.V. Kane 1974: Vol. III, p. 421)** Important form of interest in early mediaeval times was *kayika* first mentioned in Gautama and Manu and later on explained by early Mediaeval commentators. They indicate that in this case interest must be paid through services rendered either by the debtor himself or by his cows, oxen or slaves/ semi slaves. **(*Dharmakośa*-I, Part-2: p. 607)** In south India temples dominated by priests and Brāhmiṅs allowed to invest their gold as usury and received interest only to maintained rituals of institution. They were not allowed to do this for secular purpose. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 195)**

Changing Status of Peasants and Artisans: The rural economy of early medieval India was concentrated on the communities of peasant-proprietors and artisans, who paid revenues to grantee under various specified heads, but were otherwise, as a rule, left free in the possession of their holdings and professions. Although, they were expected to stay in the village and to pay all dues to the beneficiaries and carry out their orders as inferred from the wording of the land charters. **(L. Gopal 1965: p. 42)** Earlier in the backward and mountainous areas of south sharecroppers and peasants attached to the land are specifically instructed to stick to the soil. But once this practice was considered useful by the landowners it was also introduced into settled and agriculturally advanced areas to remove all ambiguities and to preserve the existing character of village economy in the

relation to the peasants. **(R.S. Sharma 1999: p. 9)** In northern India many land charters clearly transfer the peasants along with the soil to the beneficiaries, and the terms used for the purpose are *dhana jana-sahita*, *Janatā-samṛḍdha*, or *sa-prativāsijana-sameta*. **(*EI*, Vol. XXX, p. 27)** Now the grantees could throw out the old peasants and introduce substitutes, evidently more docile and paying, according to the terms of the charters. The peasants were overburdened with taxes; generally, communal facilities were taken away from them by the beneficiary and consequently sometimes subjected to forced labours, would have been used for non-agricultural pursuits. **(R.S. Sharma 1983: p. 233)** It is remarkable that some grants made by Chālukya vessel were free from royal agents and right to forced labour **(*EI*, Vol. IX, pp. 1-20; *IA*, Vol. XI, pp. 156-59)** The decline of trade and commerce practically stopped the movement of artisans and traders. Artisans had to be tied down to the villages or towns where they lived to serve local clients or master without any break. Artisans sometime got a piece of land also on which they could work independently and earn more from this. It gave rise to greater difference in the economic position of some sections of artisans. In urban centers, the service of artisans and local traders declined and replaced mostly by *skandhāvāras*, military and administrative centers or feudal courts. **(R.S. Sharma 1999: p. 9)** Two forged charters of the 7th century A.D., ascribed to Samudra Gupta, ask tax-paying peasants and artisans not to leave the village and not to settle in tax-free villages. **(*CII*, Vol. III, p. 12-13)** Some artisans were forcibly attached to the temple to cater for the economic need, and labour for make/repair of buildings. Consequently, the building work industry underwent a notable technological transformation. Some Chandelles grants name the various

categories of artisans who are transferred to the beneficiaries along with the villages which they inhabit. **(*EI*, Vol. XX, p. 19)** In the Deccan and South India, we have several instances of artisans being made over to temples and monasteries. In the coastal area of the western Deccan they were also transferred to the guilds of merchants**. (R.S. Sharma 1966: p. 133)** We have no clear case of merchants being transferred to beneficiaries along with the land, but medieval artisans who produced and sold their goods were not much different from merchants. A few charters of the 6th to 8th centuries from the western Deccan do not permit the merchants to congregate in the same market in the city, which eliminates the element of competition and points towards the localization of traders. All the above fact brought the economy sign to stagnation.

Effect on Foreign Trade: Foreign trade of any country in any period depends on a number of factors like political environment, vision of the state, peaceful foreign policy, geographical conditions, economic milieu and temperament of the people. No trade can flourish unless a harmonious relation subsists between the traders and the state. Now a day the whole economic structure is centrally governed by the state. But the situation in the early medieval period (7th to 12th century A.D.) was quite different. To comprehend the foreign trade scenario of this period in a realistic manner, proper perspective of political conditions and statecraft must be taken into consideration. The existence of foreign trade with India could only be proved by the existence of gold coins because gold was then the only medium of exchange in the international trade. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 8)** As already stated above that the coinage in early medieval India was almost absent, although some south Indian inscription of early

medieval period mentioned of gold coins. Some sort of foreign trade depended on the gold or silver coins issued by earlier dynasties, but continued by the early medieval rulers. Secondly, usually kings of emerging numerous states of this period founded their new capitals which assumed the shape of commercial centers in course of time. Consequently, new towns grew up and the older ones went out of existence. Moreover, B.D. Chattopadhyay point out that 'urban centers of early India did not at all necessarily decline; in fact, in many regions, in addition to many urban centers continuing in to early medieval period, there was a continuing process of the emergence of new urban centers' **(B.D. Chattopadhyay 1995: p. 328)**

The heyday of Indian foreign trade lasted for about hundred years or so in the 1st and 2nd centuries when India exported spices, silk, and precious metals to the eastern part of the Roman Empire. The export of Indian silk to the Byzantium continued till the middle of the 6th century A. D. but once the Byzantines had learnt from the Chinese the art of growing silk worms they no longer required silk from China or India. **(R.S. Sharma 1965: p. 67)** The manufacturing of textiles appears to have been carried on with conspicuous success, as we find some prominent contemporary centers, such as *Nagapatam* (Chola country), *Anahillapataka* (Gujrat), *Milasthana* (Multan), *Kalinga* and *Vang* The coastal areas of India perhaps carried on some trade with South-East Asia and with China, though this had little impact on the internal economy of the country but the overall decline of trade weakened the economic links between the coastal towns and towns situated in the interior and same reflection was towns and villages. In early medieval time, the general trade graph of India with China declines on account of

the increasing trade with Arab and Iran. However, the Cholas kingdom had lucrative trade with China. It is notable that after the threatening of *Śrivijaya* kingdom, Rajendra I sent an expedition against it, to trade route to china. **(Adhir Chakravarti 1987: p. 162)** The accumulation of gold in temples and gold images of gods from south India during early medieval period was a sign of prosperity. **(D.C. Sircar 1966: p. 46)** It is why that the foreign trade relations of India were maintained in Deep South

New developments in foreign trade could at least partly be attributed to following causes: -

(i) The considerable immigration of artisans and merchants from the Arab to India, bringing with them their crafts and technique.

(ii) The abundant supply of docile trainable labour, obtained through large scale enslavement

(iii) The third, subsequent but perhaps the most important, factor was the establishment of a system whereby a very large share of agricultural surplus was appropriated for consumption in the towns.

Role of Guilds in the political Economy: The commercial guilds or groups initiated an important part of economy during the period under review. The Land taxes, taxes on peasantry, fiscal control of feudatories, new technology in art & crafts, etc. were the pre-requisite, and this demands a certain amount of social and administrative organization – the bed rock of Marx oriental despotism. **(Karl Marx 1853 The British Rule in India; Karl Marx & Fredric Engels, On Colonialism, p. 33)** With this view**,** we find that large part of administration in

industries and trade was initiated by industrial & commercial guilds in early medieval India. The development of feudal relations between the state and the guilds also characterize the Indian political economy of early mediaeval period. There are many epigraphic references which show that that guilds-maintained soldiers and probably helped their overlords. **(*EI*, Vol. IV, pp. 45-54)** Like feudal vassals, guilds were placed under the obligation of supplying soldiers to their sovereign. In the South especially, the village communities maintained their corporate organization at this period full vigour. Increasing role of the industrial and commercial guilds /temples in politico- economy of early medieval India established Indian economy with a sense of closed economy & localism.

Closed Economy: The economic and political tie between the central government on the one hand and local beneficiaries on the other was disrupted by the grant of fiscal and administrative autonomy of the beneficiaries, which gave rise to so many fiscal and administrative islands existing by themselves. The villages were made over as a perpetual grant together with low land (*talapataka*) and occasional markets (*hāttika*) with all their localities, with the fine for ten offences (covers the offences against family, property and person), and with exemption from royal molestation. **(*EI*, Vol. II, pp. 52-53; *CII*, Vol. III, p.189)** Subinfeudation further reduced the size of these economic units and created conditions for the development of a kind of social hierarchy based on unequal distribution of land or land revenues.

The prevalence of local weights and measures, (termed as *mani*, *tali*, *tula* - particularly in the Pratihāras dominions mentioned in *Siyadoni* inscription) **(B.N. Puri 1957: pp.136-37)** and use of conventional methods for mark & measure land

(land was marked or measured by the adjoining settlements and plots owned by others) are evidenced in epigraphic evidences of 9th and 10th century from eastern and south-eastern part of India. The use of landmarks such as – rivers, tanks, wells, orchards, marshy land, cattle track, cremation ground, temples/*maţhas* for land measurements is another indication of the existence of local economic units. **(B.D. Chattopadhyay 2004: p. 23)**

The religious grantees emerged as landed intermediaries and the temples/monasteries secured self-sufficiency in economic sources by consolidating their holdings in land and ensuring the regular supply of necessary articles from the artisans. We know the examples of oil (*tilakas*), clothing, bedding, food, medicine, grain, etc., from Pratihāras and Pala charters of which a fixed measure made to a temple or religious institution.

Since the peasants, artisans and merchants were attached to their respective habitations; this fostered a closed economy and generated a sense of strong localism. Their master-princes, priests and various kinds of beneficiaries might change, but there would be no change in the position of laborers, artisans, cultivators, etc., who were attached to the soil whoever happened to be its master. Peasants and artisans found it difficult to go independently from one place to another. They stayed on at the same place unless they were compelled by intolerable oppression or removed for the benefit of the grantees under the terms of the grant. The only mobility worth the name in medieval period is that of soldiers for fighting, of priests for acquiring new lands, and of pilgrims for visiting religious shrines. Although it was a period of wars and troop movements yet commercialization could not promote. Part of the provisions meant for feeding

the army was carried by the soldiers themselves, and the remainder was forcibly collected by them from the villages lying on their route, which were also compelled to supply forced labour for transport and other allied purposes. This system therefore did not generate any mobility of merchants, as was the case with the Muslim army whose provisions were supplied by the moving merchants (*banjārās*). Probably priestly donees induced some artisans and peasants to migrate to new settlement, as has been the practice in recent times, but the immigrants remained attached to their masters, and the new settlements assumed the pattern of closed economy prevalent in the original settlements. The migration of priests from one part of the country to another cannot be compared with the migration of discontented nobles and enterprising traders in ancient Greece. In India priests were invited by the princes to inhospitable tracts to string them their power against hostile populations, generally Brāhmiṅs were granted land not more than 100 miles of their original homes and the inhabitants were instructed to carry out the orders of the grantee and pay him all proper dues **(*EI*, Vol. II, pp. 1-2)**

Conclusion: The increase of religious intermediaries in land, the payment of vassals and officials by land grants, the feudalization of the titles of kings and official, the shifting of capitals, the imposition of clan chiefs on old village, all these factors were the general features of political economy in the early mediaeval India. But on the whole, most of them are more typical of the Pratihāras polity than of the Pala. In the Rāśtrakutas polity, however, the number of religious beneficiaries enjoying fiscal and administrative rights was greater; the rights of subinfeudation were widely recognized; the obligations and privileges of the vassals, who sometime deposed their overlord and installed

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another, were fairly defined; and even guilds were treated as vassals. Officials were few and were becoming feudalized. Local administration was mainly manned by the feudalized officials, vassals and their families, who probably maintained some link with the village. We may conclude with the following some essential preliminary remarks information by way of caution:

(i) The early medieval of India was a period of proliferation and fragmentation. The existing *varnas* were split up into many casts, and numerous new tribes and castes were annexed to and incorporated within them.

(ii) The cast-system was dominated the Hindu society. Industrial life was organized on the basis of cast and large corporations/guilds.

(iii) The tripartite struggle for empire between Pratihāras, Pālas and Rāśtrakutas continued for a long period which exhausted all three of them, leaving the field open to their feudatories. The period of Rāśtrakutas ascendancy in the Deccan from about A.D. 753 to 975 constitute such a brilliant chapter in the economy of ancient southern India till rise of the Marathas as an imperial power in the eighteenth century.

(iv) Two types of land-sovereignty are separately mentioned as *svamin* (king) and *rāśtra* (state). The land belonged to the king and the aristocrats enjoyed a position of it by paying a nominal rent to the king and that practically there was no land for the ordinary peasants.

(v) From about 8th century A.D. onward, there was a tendency in the quantitative increase of taxation and in the 11th and 12th centuries it was terrible.

(vi) The foreign trade relation of India during this period was reduced to Arab world and to the land with the Bay of Bengal.

(vii) The royal power was not absolute but limited in a variety of ways. The king was required to help the ascertain their opinions through their assemblies/guilds/vassals. This leads us to what may be called the free or democratic attitude of the ancient Indian polity.

Thus, Expansion or growth in Land taxes, taxes on peasantry, fiscal control of feudatories, socio-economic role of guilds, new technology in art & crafts, etc. and revival of coinage provided the base for initializing the process of political-economy of Mughal India with new tendency.

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