CHAPTER X

ECONOMIC LIFE

Introduction:

The period of these republicans ushers in a significant change in the economic life of North-Eastern India. But we do not have any direct account of the economic life in these republics. The early Buddhist and the Jaina texts, which are our main sources of information, furnish only incidental allusions to this subject. All such evidences are offered largely by fictions and stories which could not be divorced from the actual living surroundings. The Buddhist sources have been largely exploited in the writings of both Dr. T.H. Rhys Davids and Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, dealing with the economic condition of the Northern India in the Sixth Century B.C. The Buddhist India and articles on the subject by Mrs. Rhys Davids in the Economic Journal of September 1901, JRAS. of October 1901 and Chapter VIII of the Cambridge History of India, Volume I, and Dr. Fisk’s Social Organisation in North-East India in the time of the Buddha, have tried to present an account of the economic condition of the period. But it is of a general

1. For details, see R.S. Sharma : Light on Early Indian Society and Economy, p.60.
nature, and therefore an attempt is made here for the first time to write a specific and systematic account of the economic condition prevailing in these republics.

**Rural Economy:**

These republics had their base in rural economy. The bulk of the people (7 - 8 per cent) lived in villages, and agriculture was their main industry. A village might be of two or three houses, or from 30 to 1000 families according to the Jātaka. The family or Kula then made a comprehensive unit including not only father, mother, children and grand-parents, but also wives and children of sons. Around the Gānapar village lay the land which was of three kinds: arable, pasture and wood-land of uncleared jungles. The arable land was known as Khetta, and additions to it were made from fresh clearings from woodland. The individual holdings were separated from one another by channels dug for the purpose of co-operative irrigation. These dividing ditches appeared like the

3. Childers: Pāli Dictionary, SV.
4. CHI., p. 178.
5. ibid.
6. ibid., p. 179.
7. Jat., II. 357; IV. 167.
8. Jat., I. 336, IV. 167, V. 412; Dhammapada, v. 80-145; Theragāthā, 19. See also Mahāvagga (Vinaya) VIII. 12, which speaks of the rice fields being divided into short pieces and in rows, and by outside-boundaries (ridges) and by cross-boundaries (SBK. XVII, 207 f.).
uniform of a Buddhist monk. Generally, these holdings were small which could be managed either single-handed by the owner himself, or with the help of his sons or perhaps hired labour. But existence of large holdings was not unknown. There are references to estates of 1000 karīsas (probably acres) or of more, which were owned and cultivated by the Brāhmaṇas, and also to one such estate which was being managed with the help of five hundred ploughs and hired men (probably bhatikas) to guide the plough and the oxen. It may be noted here that a hired agricultural labour was looked down upon and was ranked below the status of a domestic slave.

It appears that the ideal was the cultivator tilling his own land. Besides these Khettas which were individual or family properties, there existed common pasture ground

11. Jātaka, III.293; IV.276.
12. Jātaka, III.293; II.165; 390; SN., I.17; Suṭṭa-Nipāta, I.4.
13. DN.,I.51; AN., I.145, 206; Milindapañha, 147. 331; SBE., XXVI, p.810 f.n.6.
14. Cf. Jat., I.339. According to it, it was a mark of social decay for peasants to leave their tillage and work for impoverished kings.
and also those belonging to the state. Such lands lay beyond the arable land of the village and woodland which were the sources of fire-wood and litter like the Mahāvāna.

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The agricultural process consisted of ploughing, which was done by coupling a pair of bullocks, turning of soil with spades, sowing of seeds which was done at usual times uniformly, reaping with sickles, threshing, winnowing and storing in a granary. Irrigation was another important element of the agricultural process, which was done with the help of irrigation channels which dotted the entire cultivable land and which was fed with the water drawn either from wells or rivers.

16. ibid., I.240.
17. ibid., I.317; V.103.
18. The Chullavagga (Vinaya), VII.1.2; gives a systematic account of the farming operations of the time (SBK., XX, pp.225-25).
19. Aṭṭhakathā, op.cit.; Jat., II.165, 300.
22. Jātaka, I.336; IV.167; V.422; Dhammapada, V.30, 145; Theragathā, 19.
23. Kunāla Jātaka, Jat. V.412; Preamble (Cowell's), pp. 219 ff. It speaks of the Śākyan and Koliyan workers in the field fighting over the Rohini river's water for their field irrigation.
The crops in the field were guarded against ravages from the intrusive birds and beasts by fences, snares, and field watch-man. No individual was required to fence his own part of the land, for there was the system of common fencing. The irrigation channels were dug by the community, and the supply of water was regulated by certain rules under the supervision of a head-man.

Rice, which was the staple food of the people in these republics, was grown abundantly. The different varieties of rice grown were the sāli, vihi and the

24. CHI., Ch. VIII, p. 180.
27. Jat., II. 110, IV. 277.
29. ibid.
30. SN., I. 340; II. 43, 135, 378; III. 383; IV. 276; Cf. BI., p. 20.
31. Paddy was the chief basis of the economy of the people in the Eastern India. Although recent excavations at Hastināpur take back the existence of paddy to about the 9th century B.C., it was only in the age of the Buddha that it had come to be widely cultivated. It is significant that the tax (in the Buddhist theory of Origin of the State as given in the Dīgha Nikāya) does not refer to any other grain except paddy which appears to be the main crop in the Eastern regions.
tandula etc. Besides rice, the other crops grown were yava (barley), millet, grama, beans, seven kinds of grains, sugar-cane, pepper, mustard, ginger, garlic, oil-seeds like caster, fibre-crops like cotton, fruits, vegetables and flowers etc. Certain crops were raised twice a year.

Husbandry:

It was another important source of livelihood of these people. Beyond the gāma-khetta lay the common pastures where herds of cattle and goats grazed. The common people used to entrust their flocks of cattle and other animals to a communal herder whose duty was to pen the flocks at night or to return them to the respective owners by counting heads. He was called Gopālaka or protector of the flocks. The pastures was changed from day to day. Among the tended animals,

32. Jat., II.110.
33. MN., I.57.
34. ibid., I.339.
37. HI., p.20.
39. Jat., III.149; IV.325.
40. Jat., III.401.
41. Jat., I.194; III.149; See also AN., I.205.
42. AN., V.350; Cf. CHI., p.180.
43. AN., I.205.
cattle were held in the highest esteem as the source of wealth. Dairy farming was in an advanced stage, and there was plentiful supply of milk, butter and ghee and other such milk products. Sheep were reared mainly for the purpose of wool and also other necessities.

Hunting:

It was another important economic pursuit. The area of the republics was full of big forest like the Mahāvana. In these forests trees were cut for wood and timber, and animals and birds were hunted for purpose of eating and other needs. The Lichchhavi youths are mentioned as moving about in the dense forest of the Mahāvana with bows and arrows, strings set and surrounded by hounds. There was a regular industry of catching birds like parrots, peacocks, quails, partridges, mallards etc., by means of snares which were sold in markets.

Tenure: Rent and Taxes:

The rural economy of India at the time of growth of Buddhism was based upon the system of peasant proprietorship. A holding was formally subject to re-assignment by tribal assembly, even when cultivated by the same family for a long time. The state had the right over the abandoned and forest land, and also the

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44. AN., III, pp.75-76.
45. GHI., p.176.
ownerless estate. The ownership of land was limited by the right of the state to certain taxes from the holders. Of such taxes, tithe or Bhāga was the most important. It was levied on raised produce, and it varied from the one-sixth to the one-twelfth of the total produce, according to the decision of the ruling power. Tithe was realised in kind at barn doors, or by survey of the crops under an official or Mahāmaṃṭa, or measured out by a village syndicate or head-man (Grāma-Bhojaka) himself. The Sākyas levied tithe or Bhāga on the Lumbini village which was reduced to one-eighth by Aśoka. The other taxes or Bali were 'Milk Money' and special levy on produce for certain emergencies etc., as were prevalent in the monarchies of the time.

There is no mention of corvee or forced labour. It should

49. Cf. Gau., X.24; Manu., VII.130; JRAS., pp.618 f.
51. ibid., II.378.
52. ibid., V.169.
53. Lumbinī Pillar Inscription, JRAS., 1898, pp.546 f.
   See D.C.Sirkar : Inscriptions of Aśoka, p.66;
   R.B.Pandey : Historical and Literary Inscriptions, p.39
54. BI., p.25.
be noted that we have no definite knowledge of such
taxes being raised in these republics, although their
possibility is not ruled out. It is definitely known
that the Mallas of Kusinārā fixed a fine of 500
pieces on those of their subjects who did not go out
to receive the Buddha. We also know for certainty that
the Śākyas realised Bāli which was abolished in the
Lumbini village by the Mauryan emperor Aśoka. The
land could be transferred by gift or sale. This is
borne out by the fact that Ambapāli, the famous courtesan
of Vaisālī, donated a big mango garden known as Ambapāli-
Vana to the Buddha and his Sangha. But no owner could
sell or mortgage his part of the land without the consent
of the village council. And also no individual could
acquire either by purchase or by inheritance any exclusive
right in any portion of the common grass-land or woodland.

Industry:

The main industry of these republicans was of
course agriculture. Besides, they had made considerable
progress in various arts and crafts. We do not have much

57. Lumbini Pillar Inscription of Aśoka, op.cit.
58. Mahāvastu, I, p.300; Vinaya, I, pp.231-33; SBE., XVII,
p.108.
60. ibid., p.25.
definite knowledge about them. The Jātakas, which speak of the pre-Buddha time and mostly of the monarchies, throw light on the arts and crafts of their age which might have continued in the time of the Buddha, and also in those republics which grew on the ruins of the old monarchies. The Jātakas refer to eighteen important handicrafts, but make specific mention of only four. The probable list of the eighteen crafts might have included: workers in wood, workers in metal, workers in stone, weavers, leather-makers, potters, ivory-workers, dyers, jewellers, fisher-folk, butchers, hunters and trappers, cooks and confectioners, barbers and shamooers, garland-makers and flower-sellers, sailors, rush-workers, basket-makers and painters. This list should not be taken to be an exhaustive one. It is significant to note that the existence of some mining industry is clearly suggested by the story of the quarrel ever Gandhabhande (precious Jena—mine) which led to a fatal war between Magadhan king Ajātaśatru and the Lichchhevi Republic. Besides, there were many other professions of which the most important were: bow and arrow-making, acting, dancing, singing, chariot-making,

61. CHI., p. 183.
62. Vide Rhys Davids (BL., pp. 40–41), which also gives a detailed account of the each of these crafts. Cf. Dīgha-Nikāya, I, 51, wherein Ajātaśatru gives a list of different occupations of his time.
63. Aṭṭhakathā, Turnour : op.cit.
snake-charming, tailoring, and elephant-training. In this connection it must be noted that some trade names were very comprehensive. For instance, Kammāra meant a worker in any metal; Vaddhaki covered all kinds of wood-craft including ship-building and cart-making; architecture also involved special modes of wood-work done by Thapati Taehshhaka (planer) and Bhamakāra (turner). The description of the Licheshhavis as very fond of brilliant colours in dress and equipment, ornaments, carriages drawn by horses and palanquins set with all sort of precious stones, archery and of the extraordinary building activities of the Śākyas and other republics who generally built Vihāras in the memory of the Buddha—all these facts facts are unmistakable testimony to the existence of various associated arts and crafts besides those which have been mentioned in a general list as above in these republics.

64. CHI., p. 184.
65. SBK., XX, p. 190; It gives the story of a Vaiśālī tailor who was desirous of building himself a house for the Saṅgha. See also Sigāla Jātaka (No. 152).
66. Psalm of Brethren, p. 106.
67. CHI., p. 183.
68. DN., II, p. 96; AN., III, p. 239; Mahāvastu, I, pp. 259-61.
69. AN., III, pp. 75-76.
71. BL., op. cit.
Localization of Industry:

The Buddhist Literature reveals remarkable localization of industry. It is particularly noticeable in craft-villages of potters, iron-smiths and woodcrafts which constituted special markets for the whole country - side in razors, axes, ploughshares, goads and needles.

In the Sakyan Republic "men of certain special crafts - carpenters, smiths and potters for instance - had villages of their own." Within the town industries were localized along certain streets and in certain parts. There are mentions of Ivory-workers Street (Vīthi) in Benares, Dyers' Street and Vessa's Street, of weavers' locality (thāna) in the monarchies of the time. It may be safely assumed that this might have been also the case with big republics like that of the Vaijjas. The divisions of the republican cities and towns into different parts and naming them on the basis of occupations of the inhabiting citizens, is a testimony to this fact. Thus it appears that those who practised traditional occupations used to

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72. CHI., p.185.
73. CHI., p.185; BI., pp.10-11.
75. Jat., IV, p.81.
76. Jat., VI, p.485.
78. As for example, Vaiśālī and the other towns, wide

Hoernle : Uvāsagadasāñča, Vol.II, Tr. Note 8, n.4;
settle down in one particular locality under the natural
gregarious instincts and also under the consideration of
certain professional advantages, which made for locali­
ization of trades and industries.

Trade and Commerce:

Trade and commerce appear to have played a very
important part in the economic life of the people in
these republics. Dr.K.P.Jayaswal rightly observes: "It
is a common phenomenon in the career of the Indian
Republics that when those republics lost their political
power, they still retained their commercial intelligence
and turned into traders." The agricultural produce and
the industrial goods in these republics must have been
sold in the village periodical markets (Hāth) and in
the regular bazars of the towns and the cities. Food
stuffs for the towns were brought to the gates and sale
transactions were carried on there, and also custom
duties were collected on that spot. The City of Mithilā
of the kingdom of Videha, which later became a Republic,

79. HP.,p.54.
80. Though there is no mention of 'Hāth' in the Jātaka,
to this day it is the conspicuous features of the
economic life of the Northern India, vide Irvine,
quoted in CHI., p.192.
had four nlgamas or yavamajjhako or market towns. Within
the town there used to be workshops and bazars. There
were show-rooms (ādana) where sale commodities were
displayed, and also they were store-houses where things
were stored previous to their being put on sale. The
common articles of sale consisted of textile fabrics,
groceries, oil, green groceries, grains, perfumes, flowers,
gold and jewellery, carriages, arrows and also strong
liquors which were sold in taverns. It should be noted
here that dealings in strong liquor, poisons, flesh, daggers and slaves were disapproved for the pious people.

Price:

The prices of commodities were not regulated by
the state with the help of legislations. They were left
to be determined by haggling, by competition and by
custom. The practice of speculation in trade and business
was also current.

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84. Jat., II, p. 267; IV, 428; VI, 239; V, VI, 248; etc.
86. CHI., p. 192.
87. AN., III, p. 208.
89. Jat., III, p. 282 f.
90. Vide Jat., I, 299.
Trade Routes: Cities and Towns:

There were different kinds of routes along which the trade and commerce of the time flowed. The land and water routes were the principal channels of trade and commerce. Accordingly traders were described as Thalapatthakamika and Jalapatthakamika. The Ganges formed the principal means of communication in trade for the places through which this river passed, especially from Rājagriha to Vaiśālī. The Ganges was crossed between Rājagriha and Sāvatthī by boats which belonged to the state of Magadha and Vaiśālī. Vaiśālī lay on the road from Rājagriha to Sāvatthī and it was connected with the Ganges by the Gandaka. Sahajāti, which was an important port to which the Vajjiputtakas frequently went by boat, was on the river Ganges. The main land route was from Sāvatthī to Rājagriha which passed through the republican cities of Kapilavastu, Kuśinārā, Pāvā, Hatthigāma, Bhandagāma and Vaiśālī. The confederacies of the Lichchhavis and the Mallas occupied a commanding position on the Uttarāpatha trade route that ran southwards from the Nepal frontier through Champāran district down to the Ganges and then across the river to the ores that produced iron and copper for every one. The another main

92. Jat., I, p.121.
93. Divyāvadāna, pp.55-56.
94. Vinaya, II, pp.159 ff.
95. ibid., II, pp.299, 301; Mahāvastu, IV.23-28.
96. Al., p.44.
trade route was Dakehināpatha, and the two major routes of the Sixth Century B.C. crossed at Sāvatthī. The important cities in these republics were Vaiśāli, Kapilavastu, Kusinārā, Pāvā, Mithilā which are mentioned along with others in monarchies in the early Buddhist Literature, viz., Kāśi, Śrāvastī, Ujjain, Sākala etc., and also the river ports, like Kauśāmbī, Sānajāti, Ayodhyā, Śrāvastī and Kāśi with whom the republics carried on brisk trade. Fords were crossed with the help of boats. Frequent trades were carried on between Videsa, Kashmir and Gandhāra. A merchant who used bullock carts was called Satthavaḥya or caravan merchant. A caravan consisted of 500 wagons, whose course was guided by Thalaniyāmaka and direction was determined with the help of stars. The highways were infested by robbers and arms were carried by the caravan for protection.

The Jātakas refer to the trade and commerce between India and the foreign countries; but we have no definite knowledge of it in regard to these republics.

Medium of Exchange:

Existence of coins as the chief medium of exchange is attested by the earliest Buddhist Literature in which

102. ibid., I.107. 103. ibid.,I.107 ff.
the worth of every marketable commodity, from that of a
dead mouse and a day at a festival up to all kinds of
prices, fees, pensions, fines, loans, stored treasures
and income, is stated in figures of certain coin or its
fraction. However, barter was practised in certain
contingencies. Generally, transactions were carried on,
values estimated and bargains struck in terms of the
Kahāpana (Kārshāpana), a square copper coin weighing
about 146 grains, and guaranteed as to weight and fitness
by punchmarks by private individuals. The other note-
worthy coins were Mikkha and Suvarna (of gold), Kamaśa,
Pādā, Masaka, Kākanikā (of copper), Cowry shells (very
rare) etc., and there was instability as to the relative
value of the standard and token coins in place and time.

Besides actual currency, other legal instrument
of exchange might have been in vogue, such as letters of
credit. There were no banks, and also banking facili-
ties were very few. Money-lending was a established prac-
tice, which was looked upon as an honest and dignified profe-
sion. Money was lent against security bonds, and
instances of defaulters were plenty and frequent. The

105. CHI., pp.193-94; refer for details to the article
by Mrs. Rhys Davids in JRAS. (1901), pp.882 f.
106. ibid.
108. CHI., p.194.
practice of hording money and keeping it concealed in various ways and places was current. The nature and the amount of such horded wealth were recorded on gold and copper plates.

Economic Organisation: Guilds:

There was some sort of economic organisation which is to be seen in the form of guilds or Śreni or Pūgga. The Jātaka speaks of eighteen such guilds or Śrenis. Each guild had its own president (Pāmukhā) or Alderman (Jetthakā). Sometimes different guilds were federated under a common head who acted both as the president and also as the Bhandāgārika (Treasurer). The Jātaka speaks of Sethis who most probably were commercial magnates. The crafts and the traders' guilds used to admit apprentices or learners who were called antevāsikas which literally means borders. The guilds possessed both executive and judicial authorities.

109. ibid., pp.194-95.
110. Jat., I.257, 314; III.281; IV.411; VI.22.
112. Jat., I.308, III.405, IV.137.
113. Hindu Civilisation, pp.357-58; Corporate . . ., p.25.
114. ibid., p.356.
Partnership:

The Jātakas also reveal the very significant fact that partnership in trade and industry was a common feature of the economic life.

Caste : Craft and Dignity of Labour:

The craftsmanship was hereditary. It was usual for the son to follow the calling of his father. But the caste was not a determinant of craft. The Jātaka speaks of princes working as a trader, potter, florist and cook in succession and also as an archer and menial servant. We hear of the Ksatriyas of the Śākyas and Koliyas working in the fields of their 'Bhojakas', Amātyas and Uparājā, and quarrelling for priority of right to irrigate their fields. These facts clearly show a great mobility of labour, irrespective of caste consideration. Of course, certain professions and crafts were considered low and undignified, like the professions of the hunters, trappers, fishermen, butchers, tanners, snake-charmers, actor, dancers, musicians, rush-weavers and chariot-makers etc.

116. Vide Jātaka, I.122; II.128; V.75; IV.128 ff.; VI.34.
118. Vide Kusa Jātaka; Cf. BI., pp.58.
120. BI., p.28.
which, however, indicates that in certain cases there was absence of the dignity of labour. This finds confirmation in the account of the conversations between the Magadhan Prime Minister Vassakāra and the Licchhāvī youths recorded in the Aṭṭhakathā, wherein some of them are recorded to have felt insult and humiliation at being described as herdsmen.

Labour:

The labourers were of different categories. The hireling, wage-earner and day-labour were the most important. They were employed on big land-holdings and had to work hard. The payment of wages was made in form of board and lodging, or in money. The apprentices in trade and industries and also the workers in the same, constituted another set of labourers. The slaves formed the most important element of the labour class, and they were given sympathetic treatment. We have no reference to such labour problems as arising from the unwillingness on the part of the employers to give fair and more wages and also on the questions of extra wages and forced labour by the employees.

121. Turnour: Aṭṭhakathā, JASB., 1838, pp.994 f.n. and 996 f.n.
122. CHI., p.183.
123. ibid.
Enterprise and Co-operative Spirit:

The freedom of initiative and enterprise in economic activities are indicated by the story of a village of wood-workers who migrated to a very fertile island, and also by the fact that the Śākyas on being attacked by Viśādaka moved to a new place and founded a new City of Pippalivana. Further, the people in villages, including women, are recorded to unite of their own accord in performing the works of public utility, such as the constructions of rest-houses, Motel-Halls, reservoirs, roads, and irrigation channels etc., which bears eloquent testimony to this.

General Prosperity:

These republics were noted for their great wealth and general prosperity. In villages people had sufficiency for their simple needs and there was security and independence. There were no land-lords and no pauper. The only serious inroad upon their happiness was made by famines and draughts which were not very frequent. For example, the Līshabhāvasi heavily suffered from a draught in which their people died in large numbers and from which they were saved by the blessing of the Buddha who paid his

125. Mahāvamsa Tikā, PTS., 180.
126. Jat., I.199 f.
127. ibid.; Cf. HI., p.25.
128. HI., p.86.
first visit to the Lichchhavi land on this occasion on their invitation. Further, the tradition speaks of the Videha kingdom, which later became a republic, as of fabulous wealth, having plenty of elephants, horses, chariots, oxen, sheep, and all kinds of wealth of the nature of gold, silver, pearls, gems and other precious things, and also having 16000 villages, store-houses filled and 16000 dancing girls. A similar traditional account is given of the republican cities of Vaishali and Kusinara in the life-time of the Buddha which describes them as 'Opulent, prosperous town, crowded with people and of abundant wealth and food; having 7707 storeyed buildings and the same number of pinnacled buildings, pleasure-grounds and lotus-ponds.' All these accounts and facts bear eloquent testimony to the great richness and economic prosperity prevailing in these republics, which had their base in advanced agriculture and industries and brisk trade and commerce. In the words of Jayaswal, 'The wealth of the Hindu Republic is a matter of admiration both in home and foreign records. Attention paid to trade and agriculture kept their treasury and themselves rich.'