CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The present chapter is simply an exercise in recapitulation of important findings of our study. In the preceding pages our endeavour has been to examine the important features of rural life in north India during the early medieval period (560-1206 A.D.).

In the preceding pages our endeavour has been to describe the important features of rural life in north India during the early medieval period (650-1206 A.D.). Broadly a village irrespective of its size, caste, structure, general layout is segmented into three parts - the habitat, the cultivated land and uncultivated land including the pastures, rivers, tanks, reservoirs, uneven land, ditches, orchards, barren land and crematory.

Descriptions of various types of villages - Padmaka, Svastika, Prastara, Kārmuka, Caturmukha, Nandyāvarta, Sarvotobhadra, Daṇḍaka, Agrahāra, Kheta, Khetaka, Kharvaṭa, Ghoṣa, ghoṣaka, Pallī, Pallikā, Pakkaṇa, Paḍā or Paḍā, Koṇci, Koṇikā, Mayūtā, Kuṭika and Ekabhoṣa in literary and epigraphic sources makes it amply clear that apart from certain common features, they varied in terms of size, layout available facilities, surrounding walls and moats. It is interesting that agrahara village does not receive much attention during that period of our study. While, the Pāṭakā, a hamlet connected to a longer village, seems to be a totally new concept regarding village formation of this age.
Occasionally, several Pāṭakās having individual names were associated and identified with the basic village. This signifies a composite type of village, which was open, and large, suited to new cultivators from outside. Formation of Pāṭakās could enable the farmers to settle near their field. So that they might give closer attention to the land by supplying manure to the fields and in protecting the standing crops. These Pāṭakās reminds us of today’s dera system of Punjab.

Village varied in size, number of households/families in a village have been the measure of size. Some were big enough to have several thousand people and others contained five or six families only. Perhaps some single family units also existed. They can be regarded as tiny villages with only as much of land attached to each as could be cultivated by the labour of single family only. Areawise size of the villages varied from 500 daṇḍas to 20000 daṇḍas. The habitat area of a village appear to have covered the area of one to two miles. Special attention was paid to the boundary marks in the villages in order to avoid boundary disputes.

Another signif Feature was that some of the villages such as Swastika, Sarvābhadrā, Nandeyverta, Daṇḍaka, though very few in numbers, were surrounded by moats and walls. It might be possible that in early medieval period due to economic and social changes Feudal lords and official agents made their palaces in the middle of village and surrounded it by a wall and moat to keep themselves safe from outside attacks.
In the second chapter we have examined the pattern of village administration. The village has been the smallest and primary unit of administration directly administered by the village headman and his council members. They had the powers to handle the local disputes. It is interesting to note that the mode of appointment of village headman has not been uniform. There are instances of elected, state appointed and hereditary headman. In addition to this there are instances of an outsider with means having been elected as a headman of the village. The election or appointment of headman has always been made on the basis of age, education and mainly command over wealth. Appointment or election of a wealthy person as headman could be interpreted that such a choice would ensure regular uninterrupted flow of land revenue to state treasury in view of vagaries of nature.

Among other dignitaries mention may be made of mahattaras, mahattamas, uttamas and kutumbin. The mahattaras later called mahattamas, were the leading personalities of the village enjoying power and prestige on account of age, experience, learning and command over wealth. Uttama another village dignitary, made his appearance during the pala period. His rank, however, was lower than that of the mahattama. Similarly, kutumbins were either the family heads of the village households or big cultivators.

To maintain low and order some sort of police arrangement under the supervision of the headman did exist in the village. The total responsibility to look after the well being of the village, was on the headman so that the villagers feel secured and safe.
Dosadhika and Caurodharaṇika appear to be the persons connected with police system. Disputes among the villagers were generally settled by themselves, but the royal courts having three, five or seven judges of the brāhmaṇa, kṣaṭriya or the vaiśya castes also existed in the country side. Those judicial courts or committees, however, were different from the early medieval committees of south India. Justice was administered regardless of the social status of the offender.

For proper administrative control and co-ordination the villages were grouped into various units. A village was put into a unit head by a chief. And these units were further grouped into still bigger units providing a paramedical structure to the central administration and corresponding hierarchy to facilitate control over decentralized form of administration. The headmen were directly accountable to unit chief and unit chiefs were accountable to their seniors heading bigger units.

Discussion in Chapter III brings out some significant changes in the economy of the period with socio-economic ramifications. The most important change in the economy of the period is large scale transfers of land and land revenue to individuals and secular and religious bodies by princes and their subordinates. The process is attested by a large number of charters generally recorded on copper plates mostly grant villages with administrative and financial immunities to brāhmaṇs in the initial stage but also to military officials in the later stage. The economic and political relations between the central government and
the local donees were disrupted by the grant of financial administrative autonomy to the beneficiaries which gave rise to so many fiscal and administrative islands. The reduced size of these economic units created conditions for the development of a kind of social hierarchy based on unequal distribution of land or land revenues. The condition of the artisans and tillers of land was somewhat similar to that of serfs in Europe.

The charters of the period further reveal that feudatories enjoyed great rights over land. The actual rights enjoyed by the sāmantas and the landed aristocracy depended upon the power and prestige enjoyed by them. Sometimes, under the rule of a weak king, the increased power of the samantas led to their greater claim over land. The religious donations, generally given by the rulers to enhance the spiritual merit of their families, thus created a sizeable class of landed aristocracy. We perceive that the religious donees gained complete control over the land, water, mineral, timber and all sorts of things in the donated areas which, in its turn reduced the land rights of the ruler. We can say that donees and royal officers became powerful and autonomous due to these rights.

Agriculture, expectedly, was the principal occupation of the people of northern India in the early medieval period. The sources of this period throw light on the methods, husbandry, processes and tools and implements associated with crop. In northern India plough was the chief implement of cultivation. The forest dwellers and the aboriginals, however, used the spade for
land tilling. Besides plough, the sources of this period refer to many agricultural implements like axe, cleaver, sickle, stick, etc. Contemporary sources reveal a fair knowledge of the use of manure to boost or maintain productivity of land soil by the farmers of the period. The cultivators of this period also practised the system of the rotation of crops.

The cultivators in the early medieval period generally depended for irrigation purposes on rains. However, there are evidences to show that artificial systems of irrigation were also practised. Rains apart the usual artificial means of irrigation were lakes, canals, tanks and wells.

Much attention was paid to preparation of fields and the sowing of seeds. Sowing had grown to be a technical and specialised procedure in this period, demanding careful attention. To bring home the importance of the process of sowing Kṛṣparāśara converted it into a veritable ritual, suggesting about the technical awareness of the cultivators of the period. Almost all types of crops - paddy, wheat, sugarcane, pulses and spices - were grown.

Besides agriculture, cattle rearing was also an important source of income for the rural people. Cattle wealth boosted the economy of the cultivators to a great extent. It is observed that there were village exclusively inhabited by herdsmen where different domestic animals were reared which were mainly used for agricultural activities, transportation and for food. Cattle trading was done through periodic cattle fairs as is evident from
frequent references to horse, mule and donkey fairs.

The artisan castes or the Śūdras continued to form nucleus of the rural manufacturing sector consisting of pot making, salt making, weaving, cost oil extraction, carpenter, blacksmith, making utensils and goldsmith, etc. with the diversification of village crafts. It is also observed that there was perceptible proliferation of cost during the period under study. Though there was general decline in trade, it maintained its importance in villages. The production of all commodities was just sufficient to make village a self sufficient unit. Relative paucity of coins in this period suggest two things; there was a general decline in trade specially in foreign trade; Intra village transactions were based on barter system.

The villagers had to pay a variety of taxes. Bhāgabhogakara, hirāyan and daśāparādha, uprikara, khalabhikṣa, pīndaka appear to be the taxes of regular nature. Apart land revenue there were numerous agricultural taxes such as (i) tax on cattle; (ii) tax on plough; (iii) tax on water; (iv) tax on pasture. Due to the influence of the samanta system, the rate of revenue was no longer uniform likewise the system land revenue collection was also marked by regional variations. As far as the peasantry is concerned it became more pitiable under feudatories vis-a-vis those under direct state control. While discussing cultural and religious aspects of rural life in chapter fourth it was observed that religion has a deep rooted influence on almost all walks of rural life. It was the most famous period in the
history of Buddhism as well as Brāhmaṇism popularly known as Hinduism. In the field of religion it was the period of Tantra and Mantra which affected the life of people in the rural society to a great extent. Jainism is also seen flourishing in some areas. But the gradual decline of Buddhism could also be perceived during the period.

Some sort of tradition and beliefs were practised by the rural people of this period. They attach great importance to the concept of virtue and duty (dharma). They believed that the division of society into castes was predestined. The concept of ahimsa (to avoid inflicting harm on any living creature) was also practised by the common people in rural areas. Also Hindus had to make some animal sacrifice but mostly, offerings were within their means. All were called upon to make offerings within their particular means to the Brāhmaṇs. Doctrine of incarnation, which can be traced back to ancient times, was another popular belief of this period.

Like today, villagers during early medieval period also worshiped their family deity (Kuladevtā), the reminiscent of worship of Kuladevtā are clearly visible in villages today, the presiding deity of the village (grāmdevtā) the field deity (kṣetrapāla); each village had a presiding deity enshrined in a hut or a cave under a tree. Worship of Śiva was popular among the villagers. Snake worship was also an important feature of village life in northern India. Worship of these dieties reflects strong pre-Aryan and aboriginal influence. Although some villages had
temples of brahminic deities such as Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Śūrya, etc. and some Buddhist monasteries were also found in the rural settlements, but the main feature of worship during this period was the influence of non-Aryans on rural worship.

All ritual social, political and economic activities were preceded by rituals and religious ceremonies, for example, certain religious rites were performed on the occasion of first driving of the plough. Rituals and festivals were very common in villages. Certain religious rites were performed on the occasion of the first driving of the ploughs. Some ceremonies were performed on the occasion of Kārtika Saṃkrānti day. Keeping a few handfuls of crops (mustigrahaṇa) in the month Agrahā yōma (Nov. - Dec.) was also associated with rituals; and before the actual harvest of paddy, a celebration was held in Pauṣa (Dec. - Jan.) in which farmers enjoyed a feast and entertained themselves with music and dance. This was called Pusyātrā (modern Pūsabhattā - a sort of picnic). The Durgā Pājā celebration was marked by some vulgar activities. People threw dust and mud over one another and indulged in obscene songs and provocative donees. This was known as Śābarotsava, primarily a non-Aryan festivity. Now a days Holi celebrations are associated with all such vulgarities. But we do not know when these features were incorporated into the Holi celebration. The life of people seems to have been peaceful and simple. They observed a number of festivals. Though festivals were mainly of religious character, some of them provided occasions of marry-making.
In fifth chapter while discussing the social life in rural society we find that rural north India experienced host of social changes during early medieval period. In fact early medieval period could be called a period of proliferation and fragmentation of social formations. The existing varnas were split up into various castes and sub-castes and many several new tribes and castes were annexed to and incorporated in them. During the period even brāhmaṇs on account of unfavourable developments had to adopt change to change circumstances and many of them switched over from their traditionally assigned role or priesthood to crop husbandry.

The period witnessed the rise of ksatriya caste in general and Rājput clans in particular which relegated brāhmaṇas to back seat likewise vaiśya who were controlling the agriculture earlier developed disinterest for agriculture and preference for trade and commerce due to the decline of trade on the one hand and entry of pūdras as cultivators on the other. The general condition of vaiśya did suffer a setback. However, inspite of ups and downs experienced by people belonging to different varnas the untouchables continued to be untouchable as they were not allowed to mix up with the people of other castes.

Various spices were used in food. Villagers, generally, were vegetarians but they ate meat and fish on special occasions. The villagers, in this period too, wore lengths of cloth (dhoties) draped around the body over the shoulders and fastened with a belt and pins; just as the villagers; village folk of ancient times.
Women wore some sort of ornaments at special occasions. Ornaments made of gold and precious stones were the speciality of this period. It might be true in case of well off section of the rural society.

Hunting was the gay time sport for the villagers along with leisure conversation, news about royal courts, memoirs ranging from childhood to adventures of youth, narration of stories about persons, happenings, etc.

Besides blind faith in rituals and superstitions the rural society stuck to customs alien to any civilized society. Using of human flesh in worship, following inhuman practice of sati and resorting to child marriage were some such customs of cours the practice of widow remarriage and intercaste marriages; though very rare, could be taken as progressive customs.

The position of rural woman, irrespective of their caste and class was secondary to their man folk. She had to be at the back and call of their parents and brothers prior to marriage and husband after the marriage.

Sex, it seems, was not a tabook among the lower caste for example, the Candāla and specially Ḍoma woman freely associated themselves with Vajrayānī and Sahajyānī Śadhakas. This could be attributed to the fact that woman of lower caste was part and parcel of labour force of the period. So unlike a upper caste woman they were exposed to male basial instinct.

The work schedule, varna system, limited school facilities allowed little opportunity to majority of the rural
people to get education of any sort. That is why illiteracy was very common and people were wedded to orthodoxy, superstition and rituals. Occupational division of labour was mainly hereditary. Skills and know how associated with a job were generally inherited from their seniors.

On the whole it could be inferred that agriculture was the base of the rural economy or the economy of the country. But we find that system had to live a life of misery and poverty.

On the basis of findings enumerated above, we could safely conclude that - changing socio-economic and political conditions characterized by large scale transfers of land and land revenues, decline of trade in general and with foreign countries in particular; and weakening of central authority led to new administrative formation, emergence of the hierarchy of sāmantas and sub-sāmantas, sizable class of landed aristocracy, self-sufficient village units proliferation of castes and sub-castes within existing varna system and incorporation of new tribes and castes in existing social strata, ups and downs in relative position of different varnas, and new production relations.

Transfer of land to individuals and secular and religious institutions and general decline in trade and commerce led to increased pressure on agricultural land which provided not only necessary boost to traditional village crafts but also led to diversification of non-agricultural activities in the rural areas which in turn imparted flexibility to traditional varna system.
In the changed situation sudras turned cultivators and vaiśyas, the traditional cultivators, for their leaning towards trade and commerce, developed disinterest in agriculture as their profession. In the changed circumstances even some of the brāhmaṇs switched over from their traditionally assigned job of priesthood to crop husbandry. Religion continued to dominate all facets of rural life. Performing all sorts of rituals and invoking supernatural powers before the commencement of any venture, festivity and/or ceremony was common not only among high castes but were religiously followed by tillers of the soil also. The layout of a village conforms to well entrenched orthodoxy. The settlement pattern of a village clearly reflects contemporary social ideology. In the layout of a village the different varnas and castes were assigned space in the village strictly according to their ritualistic position in social hierarchy, for example, the habitats of sudras were, for obvious reasons, invariably located in the south east. Likewise the main entry or exist, i.e. the main passage would always the located in opposite direction.

The cultivators of the period, like modern farmers, were productivity, conscious as is evident from the use of variety of implements, manure, practice of rotation of crops but their efforts were constrained by lack of scientific knowledge and temperament; dependence on nature in view of limited irrigation facilities and inadequate funding besides exploitative land relations.