The qualitative and quantitative aspects of natural resources, human resources (including physical and human capital) and nature of institutional framework (including administrative set-up) have played significant role in shaping various aspects of rural as well as urban life in a given period of the history of a country. In a predominantly agricultural society it is pertinent (absolutely necessary) to understand thoroughly the nature of rural life in order to understand the life of the people in the country as a whole. It is more specifically true about India even today as it continues to be predominantly rural. It has aptly been remarked that "real India lives in its villages" and that "the abode of India's spirit is its rural part". These statements have acquired legitimacy due to the fact about eighty percent of India's population lives in villages. So the path to understand India lies through its villages. It is the rural area that is chiefly instrumental in sustaining more than 80 crore population of this country. It provides the lion's share of the natural resources for economic projects/activities. Man power is chiefly drawn from the country side. Such is the significance of rural area for India and its people. Early medieval society was overwhelmingly rural punctuated by a few urban settlements.

So far no serious efforts have been made by historians to make a comprehensive, systematic and scientific study of the rural life as a whole during early medieval period. The real objective of the rural history is to bring to light the (relation of) material, social and intellectual universe of the rural community or
communities at a particular juncture or in a particular period of history. And yet far from fulfilling such great design studies relating to rural history have usually assumed the form of an enumeration of land measure and fiscal terms which are still not clearly understood. Admittedly, rural history must begin with the study of land use and land management as land lifes at the most basic level of rural experience.

It is often a detailed study of the history of land in particular, and physical environment in general, that the student of rural history can proceed to examine man's relationship with the land over time. This would involve the study of issues like the artifacts, types of land tenure, the nature of land holdings, forms of labour, etc. Such issues are obviously related to those concerning relationship within the rural community, be these a matter of division of labour, rank, status, class or caste. Relationships within villages have to be seen as a want of wider network of economic exchange within village and between villages or between villages and town. It is also necessary to view the village in the context of its existence as the smallest administrative unit of political system. Finally, moving to more abstract, but no less recall or important levels, rural history has to confront the complexity of traditions, beliefs and frames of reference of the people whose life and age it is seeking to grasp.

One of the problems that lies in the way of more satisfactory treatment of the subject is the availability of scant literary sources, inadequate excavation and explorations of early medieval rural settlements, and the absence of the necessary
inter-disciplinary research. Despite above limitations a few scholarly attempts have been made by historians to present thoughtful analysis of some of the aspects of early medieval rural life.

The historical study of the Indian village first engaged the attention of modern scholars in the second half of the 19th century. W.W.Hunter's Pioneer work on rural life, "The Annals of Rural Bengal" (1868), complains of the lack of rural history in India and deals with the impact of the famine of 1769-70 on rural Bengal. H.S.Maine's "Village - communities in the East and West" (1971) a collection of a series of six lectures delivered at Oxford, discusses mainly the land system and describes the constituent parts of the village and its organisation as prevailing at the time, but it relies much on oral information. Baden-Powell's "The Indian Village Community" (1879) is, no doubt, a wider study, but it deals primarily with the modern state of affairs, drawing materials chiefly from the revenue settlement records and district manuals; his statements about the past are speculative for the most part. There are several other works of note dealing with various aspects of village life, produced during 19th and 20th centuries, but then all these works are concerned mainly with modern period.

The first scholar to take serious notice of ancient village life is A.S. Altekar. Nevertheless his book, "A Study of Village Communities in Western India" (1927), is only a fragmentary study confined to the Aryan village of western India. N.R. Roy's "Bangalira Itihasa" (Magha 1356) contains some valuable references to village planning and village life in ancient and early medieval
history of northern India (1962). Similarly, another book, "Villages, Towns and Secular Buildings in Ancient Indian Villages", is written from the architectural point of view. A.N. Bose's "Social and Rural Economy of North India", 2 Vol. (1942-45), also describe the rural life in northern India but covers a period between 600 B.C. to 200 B.C. only. L. Gopal's "The Economic Life in Northern India" 1965; B.N.S.Yadav's "Society and Culture Life in Northern India in the Twelfth Century A.D.", P. Noyogi's "Contributions to the Economic History of Northern India from the Tento the the Twelfth Century A.D.", 1962 throw light on economic characteristics of north Indian villages only. A.K. Choudhary's "Early Medieval Village in North Eastern India" (A.D. 600 - 1200) is no doubt a pioneering work and gives a valuable information regarding rural life of north eastern India only leaving north eastern India, another major part untouched. The Grama Sahitya by Ram Naresh Tripathi (1951-52) is a good collection of the folk songs, agricultural aphorisms, superstition, practices, etc. medieval days. But without any corroborated evidence it would be unwise to rely on the historical value of these folk songs and sayings.

There are some very recent work also on rural life which have been written from the sociological, Anthropological and Statistical points of view. They only analyse the existing conditions of a few select villages of India and do not take account of ancient and early medieval period. So, there is a lack of independent works on the rural life in ancient particularly early medieval period.
Since a comprehensive, systematic and scientific study of the rural life during early medieval period is essentially needed to make our understanding of the history of that period more complete and thorough the research purposes to fill the gap by undertaking research on the problem area.

The main sources on which we have relied most during the course of our study are, epigraphic and literary. The practice of awarding land grants to chieftains and other officers in lieu of military service and to Brāhmaṇs and others on account of one or the other reason such as for maintenance of temples, etc. had become quite common. So the plates containing inscriptions of land and other grants pertaining to period our study become very important source for understanding the contemporary rural life. Some of the important inscriptions related to the problem area of the study include:

1. Nidhanpur inscription of Bhāskarvarman;
2. Madhuban Plate of Harsha, (EI, I, No.11);
   Banskhera Plate of Harsha (EI, IV, No. 29);
3. The Edilpur Plate of Kesavasena;
4. Copper Plate of Bhima Sena II of Gehdawal;
5. Dudhapani Rock Inscription of Udayamana;
6. The Sunderband Copper Plate of Lakshman Sena;
7. The Bengal Asiatic Society's Copper Plate grant of Jayaccandra of the Vikrama year 1223 (A.D. 1177);
8. Machlishahr Copper Plate of Hariscandradeva of Kanauj (VS 1253-A.D.1196);
9. Basahi Plate of V.S. 1164 (IA, XIV, PP. 101 ff.).
Reference to different aspects of rural life are also met, though in a scattered way in literary works of contemporary period. Some of the important literary sources relevant to the proposed study includ: Harṣḥcarita of Harṣḥa, Rājtaraṅgiṇī of Kalhaṇa, Gandavaho of Vākapati, Kādambrī of Bānbhaṭṭa, Ḫaṭ Saritsāgra of Somadeva, the Brhat-Kathāmmanjari of Ksememndra, etc.

The Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa of Vidyakāra and the Suddaktikarṇāmrta of Śādharaḍāsa also throw some important light on the rural life of the period. On agricultural science we have valuable evidence in the Kṛṣiparāśara, a book on agriculture particularly related to the cultivation of Paddy. Among the technical texts, we may refer to the Aparāditapracce, the Mānasāra and the Mayamata. As among foreign accounts we may refer to the works of Hiuen-Tsang, I-tsing and Alberuni.

Apart from the sources listed above an attempt has also been made to extract information required for the study from other available sources. To have further insight we have time and again referred to certain features of present day rural settlements, rituals, religious beliefs, festivals, customs and traditions, etc. as legacies of the remote past.

While examining the various factos of rural life during the period under study, the main thrust shall be on the following hypothesis:

(i) Emerging shifts in socio-economic and political scenario would
always affect of cours in varying degrees the life of the village folk irrespective of their social strata.

(ii) The mounting pressure in agricultural land consequent diversification in non-agricultural activities (village crafts and trade of commerce) would have repercussion for the traditional socio-economic structure in rural areas.

(iii) Socio-economic and political scenario of a period mirrors the contemporary philosophy and ideology.

For systematic analysis and expository convenience the proposed study has been divided in six chapters:

Chapter -I, Introduction deals with various types of villages and village settlements, their physical environment and demographic characteristics.

Chapter-II, Village administration, is devoted to describe the administrative machinary with village as a primary unit of administration.

Chapter-III, Economic life, deals with economic aspects of rural life of the people. It has been segmented into various parts namely - Feudal System, The king and feudal lords; Land relations; Agriculture - Methods and Techniques; Production; Irrigation; Selection of Seeds and Methods of Sowing; Cropping Pattern and Crops; Cattlewealth; Village Crafts and Industries, Condition of Artisans; Trade and Commerce; Land Revenue and other taxes; Peasantry - general condition.
Chapter-IV, Cultural and Religious Life, Religious trends, Traditions and Beliefs; Rituals; Gods and Deities and Festivals.

Chapter-V, Social Life, deals with social structure of rural society under the following heads: Caste and Class; Food and Drinks; Dress and Ornaments; Means of Recreation and Amusement; Customs and Manners; Marriage; Position of Women; Family as a Basic Unit; Inter Personal Relations and Education.

Chapter-V, Conclusion is simply an exercise in recapitulation of important findings.