INTRODUCTION
Introduction

The present exercise aims at taking stock of historiography of the agrarian systems of the Deccan during the period of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. Considering the present accent of early medieval historiography on socio-economic processes and the reduction of the dynastic history to its extreme margin, we may start with offering a justification for the topic of the present research. The dynastic name of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas has been used in the present context essentially as a time marker. Thus, it is out of the methodological necessity of setting the temporal limits of the study rather then attaching any undue importance to the history of the dynasty that one has chosen the present topic.

The present exercise is divided into three sections. The first one deals with the historiography of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas with reference to the treatment of agrarian history in it. The second section focuses on the writings on the agrarian history of the Deccan. In the third section, an attempt would be made to assess the current state of research on the agrarian history of the early medieval India to figure out issues which are at the centre stage of academic debate and research.
I

Barring a few discursive remarks by the early generation of Indologists, dealing with epigraphy, no systematic account of the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas existed till as late as the close of the 19th century. The credit goes to R.G. Bhandarkar who tried to present, on the basis of epigraphic evidence available to him at that time, a systematic history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in his account of the history of the Deccan. Though originally this account was intended to be a part of the gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, it came out in the form of a slim book in 1884. Since at that point of time the historical construct was largely conceived in terms of charting out the dynastic history, Bhandarkar did exactly the same. The eighteen pages or so that he devoted to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas consisted of the details about the successive rulers of the Malkhed branch of Rāṣṭrakūṭas and their military achievements, followed at the end by a genealogical table. In his scheme of history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, there was no place for their collateral Gujarat branch of Rāṣṭrakūṭas. However, considering the fact that only a limited number of inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas were available to him, it must be appreciated that the chronological account of the Malkhed branch that he presented remains largely unaltered till date. In his brief account of the history

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1 See for example, I.A., VI, (1877), pp.59-72; RASWI, vol. III, p.32; Jas Burgess and Pandit Bhagwanlal Indraji, Inscriptions From The Cave Temples of Western India with Descriptive Notes, &c., 1881, (Reprint), 1976, pp.92-96 etc.


3 Since Bhandarkar’s concept of the ‘Dekkan’ corresponded largely to the modern state of Maharashatra, he decided not to include in his account the history of the Gujarat branch of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. About the Gujarat branch of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas he writes “we need not notice these princes further, since they
of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Bhandarkar did not give any space to the discussion of economic condition, though religion and society were lucky enough to get a paragraph each. Keeping in view of the historical approach of the time it would be, however, anachronistic to criticize him for this omission.

Thus, putting aside the pitfalls in the account of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas that Bhandarkar presented, one must accept the fact it was his account which brought the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas into the mainstreams of contemporary historical writings. As time progressed, more and more inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas were brought to light and with the discovery of each inscription, the number of writings on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas started swelling. By the third decade of the 20th century the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, at least its dynastic history, had emerged out of obscurity and had became an integral part of any text dealing with the history of the south India⁴.

It was around this time that A.S. Altekar decided to work on the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas as part of his D.Litt degree at BHU, the result of which finally came out in the form of a monograph on Rāṣṭrakūṭas in 1934⁵. Since then this text has acquired the status of a standard text on the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and, precisely for this reason, it deserves a more detailed discussion than do the others.

⁵ A.S.Altekar, The Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Their Times, Poona, 1934.( In his another book, however,1932 has been mentioned as the date of the publication of the text. See A.S.Altekar, State and Government in Ancient India, Delhi et al, (4th edition), 1962, p.393.
A reading of the preface of the monograph raises the expectations of the reader. Here Altekar first prefers to distance himself from what he calls the “first generation scholars” who, to use his own words, “were engaged in determining the chronology and giving the framework of political history”. He then goes on to state that “the material now available is, however, so ample that the historian need not [sic] longer be exclusively or mainly occupied with the court, but can give equal attention to the cottage”  

Notwithstanding this claim, a perusal of the text, however, shows that Altekar ended up largely doing, what he believed, the scholars of the first generation were engaged in. In the entire text it is the ‘court’, in its different manifestations, that occupies the major space; the “cottage” remains on the margins as before.

The text is divided into three parts. The first part (pp.1-131) is devoted to work out the precise date of accession of the different rulers of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the number of battles each of them fought at different points of time. The part-II of the book titled “A comparative study in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa administration” starts with a narration of different administrative units mentioned in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa charters. Here he makes an attempt to find the significance of the numerical figures attached to administrative units largely by looking into the opinions of different scholars and finally decides to agree with one of them, i.e., with the opinion of Rice 7, without adding any thing new. After this he moves on to discuss central government, provincial, district, divisional and town

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6 See, preface to the first edition as given in the second revised edition (1967), p.iii
7 Ibid., p.149.
government, village administration, revenue, military and police and the feudatories. All this discussion takes about more than hundred pages of the book (pp.150-268).

It may be pointed out that it is in this section that Altekar was able to make certain original contribution. However, the nature of contribution was limited to compiling the list of different officials/state functionaries referred to in the inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.

Coming to part III of the book, it begins with a discussion on "religious condition" which opens up with a statement attributing 'Hindu revival' in the north to the Sunga patronage which culminated 'in India as a whole' during the period of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. Next, we are led to 'social condition' wherein we are told by the author that 'the usual theoretical number of the caste (emphasis mine) is four'. When it comes to analyzing the economic condition, we are told that 'it is beset with several difficulties' and that it is only with the help of information supplied by the records of the Cholas that we can have some idea about the economy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa period. Before doing this, however, the author finds it necessary to first 'enquire into the wealth of the country'. The sources which he uses for this enquiry are also noteworthy. Suffice it would be to say that they range in time from second century to the twentieth century. The last section of the text deals with education and literature. The book ends with the concluding remarks which is incidentally the shortest section of the text. However, whatever he states in the conclusion, is in no way related to what has been discussed in the text.

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8 Ibid, p.269.
9 Ibid., p.317.
It may be pointed out that the idea behind bringing out some of the conceptual and methodological flaws inherent in the book is not to undermine, in any way, the contribution of the author to the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. Rather the idea is that, by pointing out the weaker aspects of the text, normally taken to be 'the text' on the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, one would be able to underline the necessity of taking up further research in those directions.

The world of scholarship had to wait for nearly six decades, since the first edition of Altekar’s book, to see the publication of another monograph on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas by A.P Madan\(^\text{10}\). His work on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, which earned him a Doctoral degree, came out in 1990. Considering the fact that many new sources were available and the methods of historical writings had changed considerably since the days of Altekar, one was hoping to get some fresh insights into the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. However, the work of A.P Madan failed to break any fresh ground. Though the author begins by stating his intentions to go beyond what Altekar had already written, the content of the book, however, clearly shows that the author fell far short of the limit set by Altekar, much less going beyond it. The monograph is essentially an enlarged version, that too a poor one, of what constitutes the one third of Altekar’s work. The author, however, has managed to bring together many of the arguments of scholars such as V.V. Mirashi, Bhagwanlal Indraji, J.F. Fleet etc. which were published in different journals and this is perhaps the

\(^{10}\) A.P. Madan, *The History of the Rashtrakutas*, New Delhi, 1990
only endeavor for which he could have been given some credit. However, looking at his references one feels restrained to do so as the author prefers many a times not to divulge the source.

In between the publication of these two monographs came *The Early History of the Deccan*\(^{11}\). Result of the joint venture of Indian scholars, the section on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas has been authored by A.S.Altekar and the result has been no different. Out of the nearly sixty-eight pages that have been assigned to 'the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas', about fifty one pages has been lost to the narration of the dynastic history. However, when it comes to discussing the society and economy, the author prefers to be rather economical by discussing them in merely two and a half pages (pp.309-11) which is just a summary of what he had already stated in his monograph.

The chapter on Rāṣṭrakūṭas might not have added anything new to our knowledge, yet the first two chapters of the book which deal with the historical geography of the Deccan\(^{12}\) was certainly a major contribution to the historiography of the Deccan. Though the main thrust of the chapter is on presenting a general survey of the major historical *janapadas* of the Deccan, it nevertheless serves to emphasise the importance of the Deccan as historical region important enough to be studied on its own right rather than being treated merely as an appendage to the south Indian history.

Writings on Rāṣṭrakūṭas, however, continued to appear in different journals. Three of the scholars who contributed

substantially through their writings, though only to political history, were V.V. Mirashi, Bhagwanlal Indraji and, J.F. Fleet.

V.V. Mirashi, who incidentally does not find a place in the bibliography of Altekar’s monograph, not only edited some of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas inscriptions with his valuable comments, but also wrote many articles which helped solved many riddles of political history\(^\text{13}\). His remarkable skill in epigraphy coupled with his intimate knowledge of the geography of Mahārāstra led to the precise identification of many places referred to in the inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The same statement can be made about Bhagwanlal Indraji and Fleet. It is largely due to their efforts that the political history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas stands on a firmer ground.

The point one wants to make by looking into the nature of writings available on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas is this. There is no dearth of historical research on the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, but they all relate primarily to the political /dynastic history. As compared to this, the writings on the nature of society or economy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas period remain a rarity. In fact, there is hardly any work which tries to explore exclusively such aspects of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas as economy, society etc. The result has been the tacit acceptance of many of the generalizations relating to the early medieval social and agrarian order of the Deccan.

II


Apart from these scholars, whose prime concern was the reconstruction of political or dynastic history, there are some others who have contributed to our understanding of certain aspects of society and economy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas period by way of dealing with the early medieval Deccan. Considering the central thematic concern of such scholars, we can place them in two different categories.

In the first category we may include those who’s central concern, to borrow the terminology used by most of them, was ‘cultural history and ethnography of the Deccan’. The process was initiated by H.D.Sankalia in the late forties through his book on the cultural geography and ethnography of Gujarat\textsuperscript{14}. Using the inscriptive data relating to Gujarat he began by studying of place names to construct the cultural geography of the region with the intention of having “a knowledge of the political and administrative divisions of Gujarat, a knowledge of the significance of the place names...distribution of population ...and of the languages”\textsuperscript{15}. His idea of cultural ethnography included ‘...an insight into the formation and characteristics of various varna and castes, their mutual relationship, their religious belief and customs...’\textsuperscript{16}. The significance of his works, from the point of view of the agrarian history, lies in the fact that in the process of analysis he brought out

\textsuperscript{14} Hasmukh Dhirajlal Sankalia, \textit{Studies in the Historical and Cultural Geography and Ethnography of Gujarat, (Places and people in Inscriptions of Gujarat: 300 BC-1300 AD)}, Poona, 1949. The book was a collection of his lectures which he delivered as part of Thakkar Vassonji Foundation at Bombay University in the year 1944.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. see p.3.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, see p.5.
the variety of rural settlements and the pattern of their organization that existed in historical Gujarat. His section on cultural ethnography was also able to bring out the social composition of rural settlements.

The path of investigation opened up by Sankalia was trodden by a host of scholars\textsuperscript{17} notable among them being Sumati Mulay\textsuperscript{18} and Malti Mahajan\textsuperscript{19}. Excepting the geographical focus of the study, the methods and even the title of the work of Sumati Mulay was strikingly similar to that of Sankalia and as expected she hardly has anything fresh to offer as far as method of analysis is concerned. However, one must credit her for industrious cataloging of data on the place names referred to in the inscriptions relating mainly to Maharashtra\textsuperscript{20}. Similar is the case with Malti Mahajan\textsuperscript{21} who, to a large extent, repeats the same facts and arguments which have been offered by Mulay.

\textsuperscript{17} For a critical appraisal of these works see, B.D.Chattopadhyaya, \textit{A Survey of Historical Geography of Ancient India}, Calcutta, 1984.

\textsuperscript{18} Sumati Mulay, \textit{Studies in the Historical and Cultural Geography and Ethnography of the Deccan (based entirely on the inscriptions of the Deccan from 1\textsuperscript{st} – 13\textsuperscript{th} century AD}, Poona, 1972.

\textsuperscript{19} Malti Mahajan, \textit{A Cultural History of Maharashtra and Goa (from the place names in inscriptions)}, Delhi, 1989.

\textsuperscript{20} Though she starts her work with the intention of covering the entire Deccan, yet it is Maharashtra which remains the central focus of her study.

\textsuperscript{21} Malti Mahajan, \textit{A Cultural History of Maharashtra and Goa (from Place names in Incriptions)}, Delhi, 1989. Also see, M.G.Dikshit, Field and Place names in the Thana Charters of Silâhâra King Mummuni, Saka 970', \textit{JOIB}, 12.3, 1962, pp.264-74.
In this category may be included a series of papers published by A.S. Thyagaraju. The geographical focus of most of his works was on the region of Andhra. Though Thyagaraju did not claim to belong to the area of agrarian history, yet some of the methodological suggestion made by him regarding the study of place names made the study of evolution and growth of agrarian settlements more meaningful. He for example, suggested that the early settlements names were without any endings. It is only after the proliferation of the settlements that there arose the need to differentiate one settlement from another and thus the different kinds of suffixes came into use.

Though these works were not directly related to the study of agrarian system, their importance lay in the fact that they not only offered useful insight on aspects of historical geography of the concerned region but also pointed to the possibility of exploring different dimensions of agrarian settlements through the study of place names occurring in inscriptions. The detail analysis of the place names which works as these offered no doubt add to the growth of our knowledge of agrarian space in their own way, none of them, however, could break away from the conventional mode of looking at historical process through the prism of political history. The spatial and temporal context of their study continued to be dominated by dynastic history. Also, in these works there was more

23 For a critical review of such works see B.D.Chattopadhyaya, A Survey of Historical Geography of Ancient India, Calcutta, 1984, Chapter II.
emphasis on cataloging information under different heads rather then to analyze their implications for society and economy. As a result, despite their sincere efforts, no substantial contribution in the field of agrarian history came from them.

In the second category, we may include those historians who wrote on agrarian history of the Deccan by subsuming it as a necessary, but not necessarily an integral, part of the larger framework of economic history.

It may be stated at the beginning that the initiative in this direction came from scholars who were primarily interested in the region of south India, inclusion of the Deccan in their work being incidental. Though going by the definition of the south India current at the time when such works started appearing, Deccan was considered to be a part of south India, yet it was the area of traditional Tamil-land which invariably remained the central focus of the work.

This perhaps explains the general orientation of contemporary historiography to political history in which largely those areas became the focus of historical studies which experienced the rise and fall of empires. Since the Deccan did not offer legacy of this kind, it was not considered important enough of a region to be treated as separate spatial unit of historical analysis.
One of the earliest works in this category was that of K. M. Gupta. He was possibly one of the earliest scholars to have treated economic history as an object of a separate monograph, though ideally speaking; he did not venture much beyond the limits of issues related to land such as typology of land, revenue and of course the nature of landownership. Though the geographical focus of the work was south India, keeping with the then prevailing concepts of binary division of Indian subcontinent into north and south, he kept the geographical focus of his study wide enough to include Karnataka as well. An important aspect of his exercise was his constant attempt all through the text to draw parallels from northern India. This indeed resulted into bringing into light certain unexplored aspects of agrarian economy such as land tenure and revenue system specific to south India. However, given the volume of the data, both literary and epigraphic, from both the regions, it was probably not possible for him to examine them critically. As a result, he was not able to bring out in clear contours the point of differences or similarity that might have existed in the land system of the north and south. This also led him to make many generalizations at the cost of ignoring features which were specific to certain regions.

Close on the heels of Gupta’s work came another important work by A. Appadorai with a preface by his mentor K. A. Nilakanta Sastry. The book covered the period, to use the expression used by


K.A. Nilakanta Sastri “from the firm foundation of the Côla empire to the reign of Krishna Dêva Râya of Vijayanagara”. The first volume dealt with the rural economy and the second one with the urban economy. One third of the first volume of the book was devoted to the economic life of the village which included nature of village community, agricultural practices, process of cultivation and a detailed discussion on the theory of land ownership where he talks about the “theory of double ownership”\textsuperscript{26}. The author tried to connect the brahmadêya village to the joint type village and non-brahmadêya ones to the sveralty-type village. It is here that he uses some of the inscriptions from Karnataka to make a case for areas located in the Tamil Nadu. Apart from these, however, he also tried to bring in the role of the state in the larger economic activities, though it is different matter altogether that his concept of state and its relation with the economic institution was not different from that of his mentor\textsuperscript{27}. As result, he was not able to throw any new insights in this direction. Despite this limitation, his book, however, was a better reading because of the range of themes discussed, his simple descriptive style and restrained generalizations.

These two texts, especially the text of Appadorai, remained for quite some time the standard reference works on the economic history of south India and any monographs appearing on the south

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., pp.326-31.
Indian economic history since then largely followed the same model till as at least as late as sixties.

Apart from this, writings on the economic history also came from another group of scholars whose central concern was to study the polity. These scholars by and large took the administrative system as their paradigm for describing the political and economic conditions of the past.

Two of the important works on Karnataka, one appearing in sixties and another in seventies, largely followed the same pattern. The first one was the doctoral thesis of G.S.Dikshit which came out in the form of a book in 1964. Dikshit’s work was essentially on polity dealing with the local self government of Karnataka. However, since the historiographical tradition he belonged to always considers the village to be the mother of all such institutions, the discussion on the village life was something of a fait accompli, and it is this that makes the text relevant for us.

The author starts with an overview of the sources and then offers a brief “political history”. From third section onward, he starts discussion the administration and it takes no time to realize that his frame of reference is the same as that of Sastri. He discusses in four chapters (Chapters III to VI) different kinds of institutions such as mahānādu, nādu, assembly of mahājanas, institution of gāmunda etc. In the process of discussing these ‘institutions’ Dikshit provides

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a wealth of details about them. In some cases, the detail itself indicates the need for further investigation of some of the institutions under consideration. His discussion on gâvundas is a case in point. All through his book, he looks at these institutions as a part of larger administrative set up.

The work of G.R.Kuppuswamy, which came out in 1975\(^{30}\), however, is by far one of the most well researched work on the economic history of Karnataka. The work shows a definite sign of departure from the conventional mode of historical writing and one of the obvious indications is his organization of materials sans political considerations. Though the division of the economy into two sections, i.e., rural and urban economy may remind one of Appadorai, the author is careful enough to point out the limitations of making such divisions\(^ {31}\) mutually exclusive.

The author begins by discussing different factors shaping the economy of a given region. Though one may have reasons not to agree with the importance he assigns to factors such as 'political condition' (by which he means 'internecine wars and conflicts')\(^ {32}\), one must credit him for showing his awareness of the importance of local variations in historical analysis. His sub-sections on the rural economy such as parts of villages and section on land system are certainly illuminating. He has been able to bring out the varied cropping pattern and devices of irrigation prevalent in the historical Karnataka.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p.95.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.9
The author has, possibly for the first time, brought out the elements of conflicts that existed in the rural society of Karnataka. However, what is surprising is the conspicuous absence of references to some of the important works which started appearing from the sixties onwards, breaking fresh ground in Indian historiography in general and south Indian historiography in particular.

An overview of these representative texts clearly shows that the frame of reference of most of the scholars, irrespective of spatial and temporal focus of their study, was the same. In all the works discussed above, excepting perhaps Kuppuswami, the shadow of political history looms too strongly. As a result, historical time has been conceived in terms of reigns, or in terms of the rise and fall of dynasties or empires. Even the units of analysis have been dictated by political considerations.

Equally important has been the undue importance that was assigned to the literary sources by most of the historians. It is not that archaeological data such as epigraphy has not been used by them. Their use, however, is limited to corroborating the literary evidence. This point comes out very clearly when we look at their discussion on the nature of landownership. Added to this, the ascent of most of the works has been on the collection of facts/data on the economy of a given period and arrange them into different heads without making any attempt to see how they relate to each other and

33 Ibid., see Chapter II, section-6, pp. 26-27
34 To cite a few of them, Burton Stein 'Economic Functions of a Medieval South Indian Temple', Journal Of Asian Studies, Vol. 19, no. 2, 1960, pp. 163-76; 'Temples and Agricultural development in Medieval South India', Economic
their larger implication for society. The result was that even though the mass of data was generated by these scholars, the point of continuity and change in the economic history always remained absent in their works.\(^{35}\)

### III

Alongside the continuation of the conventional historiographic tradition discussed above, economic history, particularly agrarian history of the early medieval India was also being approached by certain scholars from a frame of reference entirely different from the conventional one.\(^{36}\)

Of all the major alternative perspectives, the one developed by Prof. R.S. Sharma in 60s is considered to be a major breakthrough in

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\(^{35}\) Writing on the state of writings on the state and economy of south India, as late as 1995, R.Champakalakshmi made the following observation, "There has been little or no change in the approaches to the history of the Deccan and Andhra regions of early medieval India, despite the fact that some serious efforts have been made to study various aspects of economy and polity. They continue to be dominated by the narrative method and descriptive accounts of well known institution of the time with little regard for developmental process or changes in agrarian organization, evolution of urban centers and their relationship to political structure". See R. Champakalakshmi 'State and Economy: South India, Circa AD 400-1300' in Recent Perspectives of early Indian History, (ed.), Romila Thapar, Bombay, 1995, pp.266-308.

\(^{36}\) The alternative approaches to early medieval society and economy had started growing around 60s, and since then, a series of perspectives / model have been brought to bear upon the study of early medieval agrarian order of different regions. However, As far as the Deccan is concerned, it has not yet received any exclusive attention by the representative of any of the alternative perspective / models which claims to be different from the conventional one. Its treatment therefore even in works of current historiography has not been much different from that of the conventional one.
the context of early medieval historiography. Taking a cue from the writings of European medieval historians, of D.D.Kosambi, and Marxist historiographical tradition in general, Prof. Sharma constructed the thesis of Indian feudalism and in the process extensively used the epigraphic data from early medieval Deccan to substantiate his arguments.

Central to Prof. Sharma's thesis of rise and growth of feudalism is the practice of making land grants. Sharma would like us to believe that "the origin and the development of feudalism is to be sought in the land grants made to the brāhmaṇas from the first century onwards. Their numbers becomes considerable in Northern India in the Gupta period and goes on increasing afterwards." He further argues that what really affected the existing agrarian order was the transfer of certain rights and privileges in favour of the recipients of the grants. He marshals epigraphic evidences relating to different regions to demonstrate that from the Gupta period onwards, particularly during the period of the Pālas, Pratīhāras and Rāṣṭrakūṭas, not only villages but also their fields and inhabitants along with fiscal and juridical-political rights were increasingly being transferred largely in favour of brāhmaṇa or religious

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38 Ibid.,p. 214.
institutions. As the time progressed, Sharma argues, this privileges was extended to the warrior class also.

The results of this process were manifold, especially in the field of agrarian economy. To begin with, this led to the emergence of a class of landed intermediaries who not only appropriated the land which traditionally belonged to the village community but also reduced the villagers to the state of serfdom. This also led to the greater exploitation of peasants and the realization of agrarian economy. The political manifestation of these developments was the process of fragmentation and decentralization of central authority largely emanating from the practice of granting territories to vassals and officials who became independent potentates. It has however has also been pointed out that in its early phase a ‘great agrarian expansion’ took place in certain regions as the brāhmaṇa recipients took to many tribal areas the knowledge of cultivation for the first time.

Prof. Sharma’s construct of Indian feudalism, however, did not go uncontested. While scholars like D.C.Sircar lost no time in contesting Sharma’s understanding of certain key expressions occurring in the inscriptions, historians like B.D.Chattopadhyaya...

39 Ibid., see chapter ‘II and III.
40 Prof. Sharma also argued that there took place around the middle of the first millennium AD, a decline in commodity production, urban centers and foreign trade resulting into the growth of self sufficient economy in which metallic currency relatively scarce and hence all payments had to be made through assignments of land or of revenue therefrom.
brought out empirical evidence to show the shaky foundation of Sharma’s construct of Indian feudalism\textsuperscript{42}.

The immediate impact of Sharma’s work on historiography was two fold. On the one hand, it gave a severe blow to the conventional mode of conceptualizing economic history, on the other, it brought the early medieval period to the centre stage of debate and discussion. Sharma’s work was followed by a host of scholars who picked up different areas and periods and strove to match their findings with those of Prof. Sharma.

As far as the application of feudal model in the context of the early medieval Deccan is concerned, we may briefly refer to the works done by scholars like R.N.Nandi and K.M. Shrimali. Though neither of them focused exclusively on the entire Deccan region, yet in their respective study they used the data from the areas falling within the Deccan region.

The main focus of Nandi’s works has been the area around the Cauveri basin. He has, however, also used the inscriptive data from Karnataka to show the process of the feudalization of agrarian economy in this region leading to social conflicts which involved brahmanas, the feudal lords and peasant\textsuperscript{43}. In his recent works\textsuperscript{44} which is largely an extension of his earlier article cited above,

\textsuperscript{44} R.N.Nandi, \textit{State Formation Agrarian Growth and Social Change in Feudal South India, c. A.D. 600 to 1200}, New Delhi, 2000.
though he expresses his discomfort with some of the formulations inherent in Sharma's concept of the origin of feudalism\textsuperscript{45}, yet his frame of references remains the same.

K.M. Shrimali's work\textsuperscript{46} relates to the study of the nature of agrarian structure in central India and the Northern Deccan on the basis of the Vākāṭakas inscriptions. Beginning with a brief historiographical note on the economy of Vākāṭakas, he first presents an overview of the Vākāṭakas economy and points out the absence of coins as one of its important features. He relates the absence of coins to the large scale mechanism of land grants, growth of small village settlements and relative non-urban economy\textsuperscript{47}. Significant in this context is his attempt to analyze the place names of the settlements referred to in the inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas which leads him to conclude the 'burgeoning of small rural settlements and the existence of 'relative non-urban economy'. In such a milieu, he finally argues, 'the beginning of feudalism must have found its roots\textsuperscript{48}'. Apart from providing fresh evidence to substantiate Sharma's thesis of feudalism, the importance of his work lies in his attempt to present chronological and geographical distribution of Vākāṭakas inscriptions and of settlements referred to

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, see introduction, specially pp.18-19
\textsuperscript{46} K.M. Shrimali \textit{Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan, A Study in Vakataka Inscriptions}, Delhi, 1987. Another important contribution by the same author relates to the study of the inscriptions of the Silāhāras of Konkan in which he has tried to bring out the limited nature of monetization in the western coastal region. See K.M. Shrimali, 'Monetization in a Coastal Economy: The Case of Konkan under the Silāhāras' in D.N. Jha (ed) \textit{The Feudal Order, State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India}, New Delhi, 2000, pp.345-82.
\textsuperscript{47} K.M. Shrimali, 1987, p.6
in those inscriptions, through as many as five maps. He has also tried to rectify some of the discrepancies of the earlier maps on the Vākāṭakas prepared by Mirashi.

It may be pointed out that the varieties of writings, based on the findings of different regions, that came out in response to Sharma's thesis of feudalism may not relate directly to the area or the themes under consideration. What is important for us in the present context is the fact that they brought in a whole ranges of new issue related to the historiography of early medieval India. However, in the discussion that follows, we would try to confine the focus of our discussion largely to those issues which have direct bearing on the study of agrarian system rather than on the analysis of the construct of feudalism or such other construct which have came up in response it.

In the context of south India, a new line of enquiry was brought in by Burton Stein. Expressing his dissent not only from the conventional notion of the state but also from the feudal thesis of Sharma he argued for the use of the concept of segmentary state from the period of the Pallavas to the Vijayanagara Empire. Stein elaborated his concept, with certain modifications, in his monograph

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48 Ibid., p.30
49 For a general bibliographical reference on feudalism, see Vijaya Kumar Thakur, Historiography of Indian Feudalism, Patna, 1989; D.N.Jha(ed.), The Feudal Order, State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India New Delhi, 2000, pp.1-58; etc.
50 Though Stein started expressing his discomfort with many of the formulation embedded in the conventional historiography of the South India in the early 60s, he first articulated this concept in detail in 1977 in an article titled 'The Segmentary State in South Indian History’ in R.G.Fox (ed), Realm and Region in Traditional India, New Delhi, 1977, pp.3-51.
Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India which came out in 1980\textsuperscript{51}.

Central to his concept of segmentary state has been his understanding of the \textit{nādu} of the Chōla period. Departing from the traditional notion of the \textit{nādu} as unit of administration set up by the government, he conceived them as ‘the basic peasant unit of the age’ and also ‘an ethnic region’\textsuperscript{52}. As a primary unit of agrarian economy, Stein argues, \textit{nādus} were also the primary arena for political action dominated by major cultivating castes. He classifies them into three zones viz. central, intermediate and peripheral and then argues that only the central ones or the ‘core domain of the Cholas’ located in the Kaveri delta were under the effective control of the Cola rulers. In rest of the regions, the Chola state enjoyed only the ‘ritual sovereignty’.

About the nature of agrarian economy, Stein argues, “the segmentary states of medieval South India assume, rather than create, an agrarian order maintained and managed by dominant peasant groups, their chiefs, and prestigious communities of Brāhmanas”\textsuperscript{53}. “The basis of close co-operation between the peasant cultivators ...and the Brāhmanas, Stein suggests, can best be understood as an alliance”\textsuperscript{54} which was mutually beneficial. He maintains that the dispersed peasant society and \textit{brāhmaṇas} closely cooperated with each other in the historical process of manifestation

\textsuperscript{51} Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, Delhi, 1980, (first paperback edition), Delhi, 1985.

\textsuperscript{52} Burton Stein, 1980, p.109

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 63
of the socio-economic system in which asymmetrical relation was fundamental. But the social asymmetry was not powerful enough for the king to appropriate the agrarian surplus unlike their counterparts in northern India.

Stein’s concept has elicited a barrage of criticism from scholars, prominent among them being the upholders of feudal model\(^55\). Though it is true that his concept of segmentary state and the thesis of brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance have not found general acceptance among Indian scholars, yet the overall impact of Stein’s writings on the economic historiography of the South India in general and agrarian history in particular, has been positive\(^56\). His writings provided a much needed breakthrough from the conventional practice of “studying economic conditions by focusing on trade and agriculture as major indicators, to the modern perspective of studying agrarian order involving the notion of system and structure”\(^57\).

However, the most extensive, data based criticism of Stein’s formulation came from Noboru Karashima who published some of

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., p.69


\(^{57}\) Ibid, p.326.
his important research in form of a book in 1984\textsuperscript{58}. Largely a supporter of the feudal model, Karashima, however, takes up many issues, including those raised by Stein, for fresh examination. For example, he reexamines the myth of the village community through a comparative study of the pattern of land holding in \textit{brahmadeya} and non-\textit{brahmadeya} villages. He points out that even though common land was held by \textit{sabhā}, yet stratification did exist. He also brings out evidence relating to the changing agrarian order. However, he attributes these changes to the accumulation of wealth resulting from the expansion of the Chōla imperial power and improvement in the irrigational facilities. What is interesting in his arguments is the fact that these irrigational facilities were created by giving grants to officials by the rulers. His analysis of the spatial characteristic is also interesting.

Karashima suggests the beginning of the feudalization of agrarian economy during the period of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. He however argues that it was the sale of land that helped in the emergence of locally influential landlords such as \textit{udaiyan, araiyan} etc. He points out that during the middle of the Chōla period a class of military landholders starts coming up which coincides with loss of land by at least some \textit{brāhmaṇas}. Karashima also makes an attempt to differentiate different categories of the Cholas officials.

\textsuperscript{58} Noboru Karashima, \textit{South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions AD 850-1800}, Delhi, 1984.
Yet another line of argument has been advocated by James Heitzman. The significance of his work lies in the fact that he tries to explore the pattern of interaction of agrarian economy with the existing political and cultural structures. He seems to suggest that initiatives to expand the agrarian area by creating tanks were taken up by the local lords. He also takes up the analysis of the nature of property rights and points out that the existence of a balance between communal control and private rights. His analysis of the expansion of the temple property and its implications are noteworthy. Pointing out the larger resource and a wider network of certain temples, he tries to relate them to what is known as the process of temple urbanism in south India.

For quite some time, the historiography of the early medieval India was dominated by writings of different kinds on feudal and segmentary models. A fresh breakthrough however was provided by scholars like Herman Kulke and B.D.Chattopadhyaya.

In contrast to the concept of political decentralization embedded in the concept of feudalism, Herman Kulke tried to bring out the integrative function of regional ideology and the land grant in the context of Orissa during the period of the Gajapatis. Thus, Kulke not only challenged one of the dominant construct of feudalism but also pointed to a different dimension of land grant.

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However, the point which he was not able to articulate clearly was the mechanism of integration.

A fresh and comprehensive perspective on the nature of early medieval state and society of the early medieval India has been provided by Prof. B.D.Chattopadhyaya. Showing his discomfort with the characterization of early medieval state as either feudal or segmentary, he articulated an alternative model which is generally described as ‘integrative polity’\(^61\). The political basis of integration, he argued, was brought about by the inter-lineage and intra-lineage network of power.

What was modestly then termed by him ‘essentially a hypothesis’ was included and exemplified in the new perspective which he formulated in the context of early medieval India\(^62\). Rejecting the perspective which tries to explain the transition to early medieval India in terms of collapse of or crisis in early social order, Chattopadhyaya posited the phenomenon of state formation at diverse territorial level as the crucial agency of change and the making of regional society as the main characteristic of the early medieval India.

Apart from these seminal works of Chattopadhyaya, his equally important contribution has been in the field of rural historiography. Of his several writings relating to different aspects of rural settlements and economy\(^63\), perhaps the most important one


\(^{63}\) For some of his important writings on this theme see *The Making of Early Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1994.
has been his case study of different aspects of rural settlements and rural society of early medieval Bengal, Karnataka and Rajasthan. The importance of the work in the present context lies in the fact that apart from questioning certain stereotypic notions prevalent in the current historiography on rural settlements, it also brings out the hazards involved in accepting many of the generalizations made about the land grants without empirical verification. Though certain scholars have expressed their reservations against his perspective of the early medieval India and his refusal to attach greater importance to land grants, yet the fact remains that the impact of his writings in the context of early medieval India has been crucial. His writings have not only led to the opening up of a series of new lines of enquiries in the context of the early medieval India, but have also led to a rethinking about many of the generalizations about land grant.

The points one is trying to make through perusal of some of the texts representing varieties of approaches to agrarian economy may be presented as follows:

1. Though writings on the economic history of north and south India abound, the Deccan is yet to get the same status in Indian historiography. Our understanding of the economic history of the Deccan is still largely based on the stray insights thrown by scholars whose central concern has been the traditional Tamil land. This holds

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for the present study consists not only of the property transfer documents engraved on copper plates but also those engraved on stones of different shapes and sizes. Apart from this, other varieties of records such as hero-stones, inscriptions relating to the gift of gōsāsa and other resources, etc. have also been used for the present study. Though the aims, objective and the strategy of each chapter have been stated in the beginning of each of them, they may briefly be summarized as follows.

The first chapter, which is divided into two sections, relates to delineating what is termed generally in the current historiography as the territory /empire of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The first section of the chapter-I is devoted to defining the spatial context of the study. Contrary to the notion of territory in conventional historiography, the emphasis here has been not to treat it as a politically homogenized and geographically undifferentiated unit of space. In the second section of the chapter, we have attempted to delineate segments having differential political configurations and in the process marked out areas having different political configurations at different points of time.

In the second chapter, we have attempted to look into the way the agrarian space was organized within the territory of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The focus of the study is on the distribution pattern of the settlements, their relation with the natural resources, their typology and the way they were organized into different administrative units.
good for both conventional historians as well as for those who claim to be different from them.

2. Notwithstanding the departure from the conventional canon of historical writings and new historiographical value attached to the land charters, the various frames of analysis that have been offered in the context of early medieval India involve various generalizations which require verification at local level. This is as true of the feudal order as much as of the segmentary one.

3. In both the formulations, land grant has been assigned a crucial position. If Sharma takes, it to be the key to all changes in early medieval India, Stein takes it to be an instruments through which were distributed to all places the standardized message of a great king. The veracity of both the claim awaits empirical verification at local level.

4. The role played by the brāhmaṇas, either as an individual or as a group, in the context of the early medieval agrarian order has been projected as crucial in both segmentary and feudal model. While in the feudal construct, they have been seen as the central factors in agrarian expansion, emergence of rural stratifications

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65 Sharma seems to have been aware of this fact at least in the context of the emergence of class of landlords. See R.S.Sharma, Indian Feudalism, 1990, p.213,fn.1.
and conflict situation etc., in the segmentary model their alliance with peasant has been taken to be the central feature of agrarian order. Generalizations as these are largely based on the findings of certain areas. There has not yet been any serious attempt to test the validity of such generalizations in different regional context, especially in the context of the Deccan region.

5. As has been pointed out by Chattopadhyaya, there is certain degree of commonality between the Segmentary and the Feudal construct when it comes to conceptualizing the nature of relationship between the rural settlements and the existing authority. In both the constructs, the rural settlements are generally assumed to be distant from the political power till the time political power decides to intervene out of the necessity of making grant or for enlarging its resource base. This leads to changes or tensions at different levels. This, as Chattopadhyaya points out ignores ‘not only the differences among social groups in the majority of rural settlements but also other possible area of tensions’.

It is in this context of the points made above that the present research may be situated.

The present study is based entirely on the inscriptions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The corpus of inscriptions which have been put to use

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The third chapter deals with the analysis of the nature of land control exercised by different authority and social groups. The central concern of the exercise is the analysis of various categories of donors referred to in the context of the grant. Apart from that, attention has also been paid to other categories of people who figure in different capacities in the context of transfer of land or its resources. The idea behind it is to bring out the stratified nature of control over land and other rural resources that might have existed during the period of our study. In the conclusion, we have made an attempt to suggest how information provided by inscriptions can help us in the continuing debate on the questions of land ownership.

The fourth Chapter deals with an analysis of the condition of assignment and the nature of assigned resources. The idea behind this exercise is to see the kind of impact they had on the existing agrarian/ rural order. Needless to say that here we have also examined the question of the physical location of the brāhmaṇas who were the recipients of the grants.

The fifth chapter deals with the function and structure of the government to see how state was managing the appropriation of resources. Apart from analyzing different government functionaries mentioned in the land charters and other inscriptions, we have also looked into the nature and distribution of different centers of authority issuing the grants.

Each chapter has a section which includes the concluding remarks. In the end, however we have tried to put together the finding of all the five chapters.