PREFACE

India has always been a predominantly agricultural country. Land has been the backbone of Indian economy since ancient times. It was on the basis of agricultural surplus that the people of 'Harappa Culture' built their urban civilization. The Aryans came to India as semi-nomadic people with a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy. By the end of the Vedic period, agrarian economy became more stable. With the emergence of settled village economy based on agriculture, land became the main source of wealth and also of taxation.

The present study covers the period from the rise of the Mauryas to the death of Harsha. The period signifies the establishment of the Magadhan imperialism in India. With the formation of a unified State under the Mauryas, the basic features of the land system took a definite shape. In spite of various political changes that followed the decline of the Mauryas, the structure of land system remained, more or less, a continuous process till Harsha Vardhana. His death marks the beginning of an early medieval period, which witnessed the development of certain new tendencies that had already crept into the agrarian structure.

The focus is mainly on the Ganga plains. The presumed validity of treating the entire area as a unit of study
arises primarily from its continuity provided by the river itself. The Ganga plains were the prime loci of Indo-Aryan civilization and remained the centre of political activity during the entire period under study. But no monograph on the land system, as it operated in the Ganga plains, has appeared so far. U.N. Ghoshal’s work, The Agrarian System in Ancient India, published in 1930, is a rapid survey of the evolution of agrarian system in northern India from the Vedic times to the end of the twelfth century A.D. The present study attempts to present a connected and comprehensive picture of the land system as it operated in the Ganga plains.

The chronology of most of the early Indian texts is a matter of controversy. The study is based on those sources which, on broad acceptance, have been attributed to our period. The vedic literature, though overwhelmingly religious and ritualistic, however, has been used in order to trace the origin and development of certain practices related to the land system. The Buddhist texts, especially the Jātakas, provide some useful information about the socio-economic conditions of early India. The Dharmasūtras also throw some useful light on the subject. The Arthaśāstra is the most valuable source of our information on the Maurya period. The Smṛitis are in the nature of legal precepts and describe different aspects of the land system as it stood in
theory. But they become a valuable source of information when corroborated by other contemporary sources. The commentaries on the law-books which belong to a very late period have been used cautiously to interpret some obscure passages. The Epics also provide useful information on the subject. The accounts of the foreigners, though not always reliable, also throw valuable light on certain aspects of the land system. The inscriptions are the most reliable source of historical information. The epigraphic records of our period have been thoroughly analysed. Some technical works like the Aṣṭadhyāyī, the Mahābhāsyā, the Amarakosha have also been utilized. The Kāmasūtra of Vatsyāyana, the literary works of Kālidāsa, the Harshacharita of Bāna, all provide valuable information on different aspects of the land system. All these sources have been tapped critically. The appended bibliography gives a fair idea of all the sources that have been consulted.

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