Preface

Society is a developing organization that passes through a gradual process of change. It is a series of interaction between human beings sharing a self-sufficient system of action which is capable of existing longer than life span of an individual. As far as Indian society is concerned there often exists evolutionary process of change. An analysis of various literary and other contemporary sources made in historical perspective suggests that from the 6th century A.D. onwards Indian society was passing through transitional phase which witnesses changes taking place in society, economy, polity and cultural aspects such as food habits, language, script, amusement, religion and ethics, etc. It was decisively transforming the existing social order into a new kind of socio-economic, political and cultural order. The study of this period conducted by some noted historians lays emphasis on some certain significant developments which tended as the responsible factor for the above mentioned social and economic changes along with decay of urban centers, decline of trade and commerce, large scale land grants, landed aristocracy, establishment of political instability and growing agrarian character of the society were prominent.

As India has been primarily agriculture based country the peasants have been playing a vital role in the history of land. In a more specific way we cannot think of agriculture without peasants. Peasantry, infact, is a decisive institution which played a significant role in any agrarian society. But the growth of feudal set-up and emergence of rural culture played a vital role to develop the social and economic position of peasantry. During this period, the nature of peasantry turned into subjected lot. The donees had the superior rights over peasantry. They were entitled to collect all kind of taxes. They were also empowered with the right to
evict the peasantry at will and to replace them with new peasants. Thus, the economic life of peasantry had become miserable.

The present study is divided into six chapters which are as following:-

The chapter I entitled *Introduction* centring around on the conceptual study of the peasantry, its definitions, studies conducted by classical thinkers, modern western and Indian thinkers including sociologists, anthropologists, historians, economists, etc. and the approach applied to study of peasantry. Besides, definitions on peasantry and views of historians in regard to peasantry have also been included. Numerous terms (*Kīnāśa*, *Krṣ ṣīvala*, *Karṣaka*, *Kuṭ umbī*, *kṣ etrī*, *halī*, *kārṣika*, *ardhikas*, etc.) denoting to peasantry mentioned in literary and epigraphical sources of our period have also been understood. It also deals with the demarcation of the geographical area associated with the northern parts of the country. The chapter also highlights the survey the works done by various scholars in regard to chronology of early medieval period. Among them Rapson, Sir Johan Marshal and F. J. Richard, V.A. Smith, H.C. Ray, R.S. Sharma, K.M. Munshi and L. Gopal, etc. are included. The historical brief backgrounds of peasantry preceding the early medieval period has also been given in order to understand the continuation and linkage in regard to the institution of peasantry from Vedic period to Gupta period.

The chapter II *i.e. Village Settlements: Communal and Professional Life* throws light on the village, its definitions and village settlements during the period under study. Migration of urban people towards villages played a significant role to create new type of compact settlements. Now the village settlements were mostly inhabited by the cultivators among whom the Śūdras appear to be preponderant. A good number of people from priestly class also lived in the countryside. Cowherds, agricultural labourers, potters, weavers, oilmen, carpenters and several other craftsmen too had their abodes in villages. Some Antyajas, such as Caṇḍālas,
Dombas, Medas, Andhras, etc. had their settlements outside the main village habitat. In the forest and hilly village’s aboriginal people, such as the Śabaras, the Bhillas, the Kirātas, the Pulindas, etc., resided. Various types of villages emerged such as danda, svastika, agrahāra, prastara, prakīrṇaka, nandyāvarta, parāga and padma, etc. Apart from the above types of villages we come across a new type of formation of villages during the period under study. In this formation some villages associated with the name of artisan class such as kaṁsakaṛagrāma (a village of braziers who worked in brass and were known as Kaseras in Modern times), Karmakārgrāma (a village of carpenters), lavaṇatailika (a village of salt manufactures and oil men), madhukajjhari (a village of mahuā distillers), suvarṇakāragrāma (a village of jewellers) and charmmanika (a village of leather workers), etc. Besides, various other types of villages also emerged such as danda, svastika, prastara, prakīrṇaka, nandyāvarta, parāga, padma, etc.

Among other aspects, study of land and its types such as the arable land, pasture land, cremation land, market centre, roads, street and tracks, village boundary, size of village, etc. have been studied. And the village crafts and Industries such as pot-making, wood-work, iron-work, oil-pressing, weaving, basket-making, milk-churning, salt-making, paddy pounding, making of cow-dung cakes, cage-making, rope-making, sugar-making, etc. are other aspects dealt in it.

The chapter III entitled Nature and Classification of Peasantry pertains to the nature of peasantry with the findings that the peasantry formed a compact class. It included rich land owners, share-croppers, tenants, landless labourers, artisans, craftsman and other who were engaged in any kind of agricultural activities. It further deals and examines the outlines regarding their classification made by the contemporary thinkers. They have been categorized into independent peasants, share-cropper peasants, plough owning peasants (classification on the basis of plough), righteous peasants (basis of land right and land tenure), labourer peasants,
storage based peasants (on the basis of grain storage), varṇa-jati based peasants, etc. The growth of feudal set-up, in fact, tended in creating variations in the peasantry. What is noteworthy is that they neither formed a class nor belonged to a varṇa specifically.

The chapter IV entitled *Economic Life of Peasantry* focuses on the study of economic life of peasants. It covers various aspects such as land rights including communal ownership, royal ownership and individual ownership. The agricultural implements and tools used by them included mainly plough, madika, viddhaka, kodala, khanitra, medhi, srni, calani, dhanyakrt, surpa, cleaver, sickle, husking pedal, etc. Besides, the animal power was also employed in their profession. They also used fertilizers in order to increase the fertility of the soil. Irrigation system was also developed in this time. Other aspects dealt in this chapter are process and type of cultivation, cropping pattern and various crops (rice, wheat, barley, pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton, hemp, various type of fruits and vegetables) produced by the peasants. The peasants of the period understudy adopted methods for the protection of their crops. They had to pay various taxes including bhagabhogakara, dasaparadha, udranga, uparikara, pindakara, khalabhiksa, gokara, jalakara, lavanakara, halikakara, pasu, etc. either feudal lords or the officers. In adverse conditions they were provided relief by the state.

The chapter V entitled *Socio-Cultural Life of Peasantry* throws light on the various changes occurred in the society. The most striking development of this period were the proliferation of caste and the adoptability of agriculture by all the varṇas people. The impact of non-brāhmaṇical sects, migration of urban population along-with priestly class towards villages for livelihood not only deteriorated their religious authority but simultaneously weakened their social and economic conditions also. The Vaiśya varṇa left their traditional occupation because of decline of trade and commerce and they adopted either artisanal jobs or
agricultural pursuit as alternate occupation. The socio-economic condition of Vaiśyas was rapidly deteriorating during this time and they came nearer to the Śūdras varṇa in social ranking. The servile Śūdras who by tradition were placed at lower rank in the society got transferred into peasants. They no longer appear as servile people now. Some of them became artisans and agricultural labourers as well.

In culture various food items consisted of wheat, barley, pulses or there kinds, clarified butters, oil, molasses, sugarcane, etc. were consumed by the peasants. In drinks wine, liquor, tody, and various spices were used by them. In dress and ornaments dhotis, sari, rings, kundala, bracelets, etc. were worn by the used by the villagers. Among customs and manners, sati (generally practiced in urban area), marriage before puberty, attraction of women towards the temples and priestly class, etc. were prevalent among the villagers. In the means of recreation and amusements, traditions and beliefs including concept of ahimsa, doctrine of incarnation, worship of cow, turning towards various cults, etc. were in prevalence. Apart from them so many superstitions and traditions were practiced by peasantry. The rituals related to birth, first hair cutting, puberty, marriage, pilgrimages and death, etc. were performed by them. They also celebrated festivals such as Dipāvali, Holi, Goparva, Halaprasāran a, Muṣṭ āgra ha a, etc.

The last chapter i.e. Conclusion not only sums up all the chapters but also includes the findings of the present research work.

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