The early medieval period of Indian history may be seen as a transitional period wherein changes in almost all institutions and spheres of society viz. political, social, cultural as well as economy took place.

In political sphere, due to the continuation as well as acceleration of land grants, the emergence of petty landed estates, the fragmentation or decentralization of political authority and the growth of lord-vassal relationship may be noticed as emerging new trends.

In economic sphere, the decline of trade and commerce, decay of urban centres, paucity and irregular slow circulation of metallic money, the growing agrarian character of society and emergence of self-sufficient economy were the salient features of economy.

In social sphere, the modification of varṇa system, proliferation of castes into hundreds of number and their rigidity were the most striking developments of this period. And if someone looks in terms of class context, the formation of two major classes, those of the landed aristocracy and a large body of subjected peasants may be noticed. In this phenomenon, the declining status of former Vaiśyas and the rise of Śūdras was a further development in early medieval India. In it the most striking development was the transformation of the servile Śūdras into peasantry who thus got transferred into producers on massive scale.

Among other developments, the growing regional identities in art, script, language and in religious sphere the construction of temples, the theory of incarnation, visit to holy places, concepts of pūjā, bhaktī and tantrā, etc. were significant developments.
Defining the Geographical Area of the Study:

Generally, we can define the area of Northern India including the present various States and Union Territories such as Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Delhi, Uttrakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Daman-Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli, in modern perspective. But, so far as the early medieval period is concerned, it is difficult to define the geographical divisions of India. In Ancient India, there were two main and broad geographical divisions of India viz. North and South. In the dynastic records of trans-Vindhyā region (the plateau), the ruler was described as “Lord of the South”¹ and in the same way the king of Indo-Gangetic plain was designated as “Lord of the North”.² These two designation were popular and climatic condition of North and South have molded the life of the people and strategy of the rulers. North India comprised many States from Sind to Bengal and from Himālayas to the Vindhyās. There was no paramount ruler in our period that could control the whole of Uttrapātha. Even the strongest kings of the Gurajara Pratihara dynasty were not able to extend their dominion over the entire northern area. Probably none had the correct notion of Uttrapātha and the term was vaguely used in the official records.³ The same can be said of the other geographical term Āryāvarta. The Cāhamāna records speak of in a very vague manner that the king made Āryāvarta once more the abode of Ārya by exterminating Mlechchhas⁴ (though they were not in the possession of the full area).⁵ The synthetical study of the Gurajara Pratīhāra inscriptions points out that the Gurajaras were ruling over the areas extending from Karnal (East Punjab) to the Vindhyās and from North Bengal to Kathiāwāra peninsula.⁶ Topographically, it does not convey the
proper boundary of northern India. The records of early medieval period do not throw light on the question of the boundaries of northern India, because after the downfall of the Gurajara Pratīhāra rule (10\textsuperscript{th} cent. AD.), \textit{Uttṛāpatha} was disintegrated and small principalities arose at its place.

**Defining the study period:-**

The periodisation of Indian history is very desirable, because it helps to proper understanding by analyzing the stages in its evolution. Though broad divisions are not difficult to make, real problems emerge when one seeks sharp dividing lines. History is a continuous process and, therefore, it can’t be divided into water-tight compartments. Any given tendency or institution has a long history before it finally emerges into a recognizable form, and likewise it continues to live in some form even after it seems to have ceased to exist. Thus in periodisation one can generally have only rough approximation and should not expect to find fixed dates.

When, why and how the ancient period ends and the medieval period begins in Indian history is very difficult to say. The advent of Muslims in India is generally seen as marking the end of the ancient period. The text books on ancient Indian history by eminent scholars such as R.D. Banerji, R.C. Majumdar, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and R.S. Tripathi carry the narrative roughly upto A.D. 1200. But this position is based on the British scheme of dividing Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British period that is broadly accepted by the Indian History Congress.\textsuperscript{7}

The line of demarcation between the first two is by no means easy to fix. There are views of various scholars on the starting point for the medieval which is following:
Rapson\textsuperscript{8} took the establishment of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty to represent the dividing line between the Ancient and Medieval periods. But this suggestion ignores the fact that the Gupta period, which represents the classical age of ancient Indian culture comes after the Kuṣāṇa.

Sir John Marshall\textsuperscript{9} and F.J. Richards\textsuperscript{10} seek to find in the rise of the Guptas the division between Ancient and Medieval India. This implies a wrong notion about the nature of the Gupta period which, no doubt, was an age of the efflorescence and even of the culmination of some earlier tendencies. But, it does not represent any significant transition from the preceding centuries.

V.A. Smith\textsuperscript{11} regards the year 647 A.D. as marking an epoch in the history of India. But in recent studies this suggestion has been rejected, for it is based on the misconception that Harśa was the last emperor in Indian history and that after the death of Harśa everything, including polity and religion, declines.

H.C. Ray\textsuperscript{12} accepts A.D. 916 as the line of demarcation between the two periods in the history of northern India because it saw the beginning of the break-up of the Gurjara-Pratihāra Empire, the last great empire of northern India, after which we find a medley of petty states. He himself recognizes 916 A.D. to be a weak dividing line. No doubt, after their disappearance there did not arise any empire in northern India in comparison to that of the Pratihāras, though we cannot ignore the imperial families of the Candellas, Paramāras, Calukyas, etc.

K.M. Munshi\textsuperscript{13} regards A.D. 997 as the fateful year, with which Ancient India ended and Medieval India began. In that year Mahmud, son of Sabuktigīn, captured Ghaznī. The conquest made by Mahmud led to the ultimate establishment of Muslim rule over Northern India. But it was only
with the Mamlūk Sultans of Delhi that Muslim power definitely established itself; for the intervening period of two hundred years the Muslim did not attempt an effective conquest of India to the east of Punjab. If the establishment of Muslim rule is to be treated as ushering the medieval period the dividing line is to be placed towards the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. Thus, it was not accepted as the demarcating line between the two periods.

L. Gopal\textsuperscript{14} regards A.D. 700 to 1200 A.D. (roughly five hundred years) for the early medieval period which synchronized with the establishment of Muslim rule and may be said to have lasted until the establishment of British rule. In many respects the early medieval period prepared the ground for the later period, which basically represents a continuation of tendencies in the earlier one. The one fundamental deference between these two sub-periods is the presence of Muslims as rulers in the later period, and this accounts for most of the apparent differences. The fact that in the early medieval period the Muslims were not the dominant political power has often led scholars to bracket it with the ancient period. The division of sections in the Indian History Congress seems to have been based on this idea. Thus ancient India is divided into two sections, the first upto A.D. 711 and the second from 712 to 1206 A.D.

Thus, it is difficult to fix a dead line between the two periods and it becomes more difficult when we intend to find the dead line between the ancient and early medieval India.

In the present work the study period acknowledges to the early medieval period from circa 600AD-c.1200AD. It is a transitional phase of Indian history wherein changes in almost all institutions as mentioned in beginning of the study such as polity, social, cultural as well as economy
took place. Moreover, the growing regional identities in art, script, language and the concepts of pūjā, bhaktī and tantrā in religious sphere were the significant developments which separated it from the ancient period.

However, being agrarian nature of the economy and its predominance on all aspects of society the study of peasant communities or of peasantry becomes worth studying. And its significance lies with not only to historians but sociologists, anthropologists, economists and other scholars today as well. The word peasant has been described in the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary as a countryman: a rustic; one whose occupation is rural labour; and peasantry as a body of peasants or tillers of soil; rustic: labourer. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a peasant as one who lives in the country and works on the land: a countryman, a rustic and peasantry a body of peasants. Webesters International Dictionary describes the peasant as being a class that tills the soil as free landowners or hired labourers. According to Encyclopaedia of Social Science, the peasant means a tiller of soil to whom the land which he and his family work offers both a home and a living. International Encyclopaedia of the Social Science describes the peasant primarily to small scale agriculturists who lives in villages and small towns in rural area and the term peasantry refers to people and communities who are peasants.

Various scholars worked on the peasantry in different places and in different era. All of whom use a wide variety of definition and concepts about the peasantry. Some writers have employed the term “peasant” to characterize entire societies. Others have dealt with the peasantry as a part of society within a longer whole. Peasant, a word of French origin came to be widely used in English from the 15th century for one who worked on the land and also lived in the village. Peasant as an object of study remained
ignored for a long time in sociology. Rural sociology which emerged as a full-fledge discipline first in the United States as early as the beginning of this country, had focus on the occupation farming.\textsuperscript{21} Teodor Shanin\textsuperscript{22} argues that the study of peasantry was started in central and eastern parts of Europe during the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He further says that peasant formed the largest segment of the society in Europe. They lived a life characterized by utter poverty and backwardness and the issue of their modernization became a serious challenge to the intelligentsia there. Teodor Shanin\textsuperscript{23} defines the peasantry including the following contents such as:

(i) The peasant family forms as the basic unit of multi-dimensional social organization.
(ii) Land husbandry as the main means of livelihood directly providing the major part of the consumption needs.
(iii) Specific traditional culture related to the way life of small communities.
(iv) The underdog position - the domination of peasantry by outsiders.

Daniel Thorner described the term ‘peasant’ in a broad, as well as a narrow sense. In the narrow sense, peasants are small holders who live by working on the land including sharecroppers and agriculture workers. He further argues that the prevailing practice includes analyses of peasant behaviour at the level of whole social system, nation, sectors, villages, households and individual cultivators. It also argues that peasants are usually seen as farming part of a structured society. Within which they fall between the aristocracy or great landholders on the one hand, and the landless on the
others. In a broader sense, the peasantry has constituted the most numerous social groups in all organized states from ancient to modern times that have rested on traditional forms of agriculture. Marxists have more or less consistently used the word in its more narrow and rigorous meaning and Andre Beteille also accepted this rigorous definition of peasantry because only in this way one can explore more deeply the relationship between those who work on land they themselves control and those who work on land controlled by others. But he himself admits that in the real world there is frequent and considerable overlap between the two categories.

Coming to the Indian context it seems that the agricultural population of India may be divided into three categories:

1. Non-cultivating owners and tenure holders,
2. Owner cultivators and cultivating tenants with recognized rights of tenancy,

In this strict sense of the term only members of the second category can be called peasants. But peasantry in India had always merged with the non-working landowners at one and the landless agricultural workers at the others.

The term ‘peasant’ is one of those major indispensable, useful and therefore imprecise and hard to define words like capitalism and socialism. No practical definition of the term ‘peasantry’ is possible there are as many definitions of this term as there are scholars who have worked or still working on this subjects. Its contents are primarily economic in nature but as with the other two terms certain sociological associations or be implication are very strong and some ideological attachment appear to be indissoluble.
Peasantry, in fact, is a prejudicial word – people tend to have fixed ideas which they hold uncritically about what constitute a peasant and a great deal of confusion is created by seeking to establish an unnatural degree of precision for this convenient and general but inexact term. The problem of definition, which cannot be wholly avoided, can however be reduced to manageable proportion and almost circumvented by first considering the different but not unrelated contents within which the word is most frequently used.

The study of peasantry in the context of socio-economy development in ancient India has remained almost a neglected field so far. In agrarian societies, the key figure in the basic subsistence economy is always the peasants. There is a general denial on the part of the modern scholars to treat the peasant as an independent category. There is hardly any agreement even among sociologists and social anthropologists about the meanings attached to such terms as ‘peasant society’, ‘peasant communities’, ‘peasant culture’ etc. All time they recognize peasant society as a residual category putting together all kind of societies, which is neither manifestly ‘tribal’ nor explicitly ‘industrial’. Some have equated the peasantry with the rural society itself. Raymond firth seems to accepts this broader concept by implying that the peasant category will include in addition to the tiller of soil, all those who live by the various forms of labour which are associated with the community of tillers.

Eric Wolf defines peasants as rural cultivators whose surplus are transferred to a dominant groups of rulers that use the surplus both to maintain their own standard of living and to distribute the remainder among group in society that do not form but must be fed for their goods and special services in term. Robert Redfield places the peasants in rational opposition
to ‘an elite of the manor, town and city’ implying their low status in social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{32} T. Shanin, who use the terms ‘peasantry’ ‘peasant community’ and ‘peasant society’ loosely to views the relationship between the peasants and non-peasants as one between ‘villagers’ and ‘non-villagers’.\textsuperscript{33} For Redfield, the latter group is an elite of manor, town or city, whereas for Shanin, they are the outsiders who subjects the peasants to domination. In the analysis of Russian peasantry .V.I. Lanin, stratified it into \textit{Kuluk}, \textit{Stredniak} and \textit{Bedniak} i.e. rich, middle and poor peasant respectively.\textsuperscript{34} This obvious cleavage within the peasantry undermines the idea of its being a homogeneous category and the peasant’s subjection to dominate by outsiders alone.

W.H. Moreland, defines peasant as a man who, whatever the incidents of tenure may be, cultivates a holdings entirely or mainly by his family labour.\textsuperscript{35} An almost similar definition is giving by Irfan Habib, when he states that peasant is a person who undertakes agriculture on his own implements and using the labour of his family.\textsuperscript{36} Both of them ignore the factor of land control while defining the peasant. In terms of the control and use of land, the peasantry may be differentiated into the non-cultivating land-owners, peasant proprietors, share croppers and landless labourers.\textsuperscript{37}

The peasantry can be dealt with in the context of a peasant system of production, or peasant economy. There have been eras when the peasant enterprise was the prevalent institution and the peasant predominant mode of production. It is very convenient to equate the period when the peasant economy was the dominant mode of production with a certain stage of economic development.\textsuperscript{38} Some of the scholars are of the opinion that this is more important than the contrast between the peasant and the landlord and therefore they give priority to an economic and ecological analysis.\textsuperscript{39} The
peasant effectively controlled the land on which he worked, thus absentee landlord cannot be designated as peasants. V.K. Srivastava argues that a village cannot be equated with peasantry because there are autonomous and independent tribal village. All the villagers are not peasants. He further argues that there are groups of people which do not practice agriculture. The ‘sociology of agriculture’ cannot be interchangeably called the ‘sociology of peasantry’ because of a clear distinction between the farmer and the peasant. Rural sociology does encompass peasant sociology but peasant can be an independent specialization. In some cases, one may clearly distinguish peasant from non-peasants. Subhadra channa is of the view that the term ‘peasant’ always poses difficulties in anthropological literature; there is confusion between what is generally understood as peasant and its theoretical definition. Difficulties surface when the concept of peasantry which evolved in the European situation is applied to the Indian context. The Indian historical situation with its caste based social organization poses a set of different condition for defining peasants. It has led some to altogether reject the usefulness of the concept for the Indian situation. She further argues that Indian peasantry is not undifferentiated. Peasants do not belong to particular caste. Since no village has all the castes, relations between different villages challenge the much acclaimed notion of “self-sufficiency”. V.K. Thakur argues that the term used for peasants in early Indian literature though, more often than not, lacking connotative sophistication and definitional rigour, tends to convey a somewhat similar perception of the existing reality. The usage of the term gahapatī and kuṭ umbin/kuṭ umbika depicted in early texts if explained contextually as well as semantically, put it in a hierarchical and somewhat functional separation from the term as kīnāśa, kṛṣīvala, kṣ eṭ rika, kriṣika, kārsaka,
etc. The term like *pāmara, holavahaka, daśa-kammakāra*, etc. add another dimension to this problem.\(^4\) Thakur further argues that these terms undergo changes in their respective connotation with the passage of time. The element of land control which remains a key hierarchy, determination, requires a qualified inclusion of landless group in the peasant category.\(^5\) Thus it can be deduced from the above analysis of various definitions that the villagers may all be called peasants by using a very wide attribute of the term. These includes rich land owners, share-croppers, tenants, landless labourers, artisans, craftsman and other who were engaged in any kind of agricultural activities in ancient India.

The noted German philosopher economist Karl Marx while indirectly dealing with the peasantry gives the concept of a society characterized by tribal communal ownership of land and self sufficient economy based on agriculture and handicrafts. While being more concerned about agrarian societies in Asia, he came out with the theory of Asiatic Mode of Production (A.M.P.) with a marked feature of ‘stagnatory’ and ‘vegetative life’ and ‘a tremendous staying power’.

The notion of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies has been seriously questioned by Indian historians. The myth of millenary stagnation of early Indian society has been ably exploded by D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, B.N.S. Yadav, D.N. Jha and other Marxist historians of Ancient India, who mark definite stages in the development of its social polity till the beginning of feudalism. While applying the Marxist theory on the economy of early medieval India they accentuate on the decay of urbanization and growth of village culture, self- sufficient economy, paucity of coins, dependent peasantry, etc. as the salient features.
However some recent studies conducted by scholars like B.N. Mukherjee, B.D. Chattopadhaya, Brajesh Krishna, Ranabir Chakravarti, John S. Deyell, and etc. reject Marxist viewpoints. They rather came out with the findings of continuation of surplus that was produced by the peasantry, trade and trading centres, coins, towns, etc.

**Various terms used for Agriculture and Agriculturists:**

Various terms have been describes for the common peasantry in the literary as well as epigraphical sources of ancient India. The term kīnāśa⁴⁴ which occurs in the Ṛgveda (iv. 57.8) is described as a ploughman or a cultivator. The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇi⁴¹⁵ (c. 5th cent. BC) uses a new term kṛṣṇīvala for the common peasantry. Similarly, Patañjali⁴⁶ (c. 2nd cent. BC) also uses the term kṛṣṇīvala. The Arthaśāstra⁴⁷ (c.4th. cent. BC) describes the term karṣaka for the toiling peasantry. It also uses the term ardhastīrika and karmakāra for the sharecropper and the field labourers.⁴⁸ The Amarakośa⁴⁹ (c. 6th. cent. A.D) gives the four terms for the toiling peasantry such as kṛṣṇītraīvi, karṣaka, kṛṣṇīvala and kīnāśa. Halāyudha⁵⁰, who is believed to have flourished in the twelfth century A.D., added kutumbī to the list of Amarakośa. However, he did not relate kīnāśa to this context. The Abhidhānacintāmani of Hemachandra (12th cent. AD) gives as many as seven terms such as kutumbī, karṣaka, kṛṣṇīraī, halī, kārṣika, kṛṣṇīkā and kṛṣṇīvala for the peasantry.⁵¹ The Dharmaśāstra texts also use the words such as ardhastīrī,⁵² ardhika,⁵³ kutumbī,⁵⁴ bhūmikarṣaka,⁵⁵ sīravāhaka⁵⁶ and kṛṣṇītraikā⁵⁷ for the produce sharing peasants. Some inscriptions of this period also give the terms such as karṣakas, kṛṣṇītraikaras,⁵⁸ kutumbins⁵⁹ ardhikas,⁶⁰ etc. for the peasantry. The terms hālika ⁶¹ or halavāhaka ⁶² have
been used for the plough drivers, who represented a class of field labourers, including the lower stratum of dependent peasantry. In his Prakrit lexion *paia-lachchhi-nama mala* (compiled in AD. 972) Dhanapāla listed six Prakrit terms for peasants and agricultural workers such as pāmara, donaya, gahavai, kasaya, seala and halia. The term lāṅgalopajīvīn or one who lives by ploughing is also used for the peasantry in the *Br hatsaṁhitā*. Thus we find the various terms for the common peasantry which indicate to the increasing number and importance of the peasantry. And to understand it in a more historical and geographical background one may have a bird’s eye view on the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of the Term</th>
<th>Locale of the Source</th>
<th>Term/Terms Used</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ṛgveda</em>&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt; (c.1500-1000 BC.)</td>
<td>Land of Sindh and its tributaries</td>
<td><em>Kṛṣṇa</em>, <em>Kārṣa man</em>, <em>Kīnāśa</em>, <em>Akṛṣṭīvala</em></td>
<td>Kāṛṣ man denoting a ‘furrow’ found only in <em>Ṛgveda</em> denotes ‘not agriculture’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Atharvaveda</em>&lt;sup&gt;66&lt;/sup&gt; (c.1000-700 BC.)</td>
<td>Western UP</td>
<td><em>Kīnāśa</em>, <em>Kāṛṣer ṣīvaṇa</em></td>
<td>denotes a ‘plougher’</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Vājasaneyi Samhitā</em>&lt;sup&gt;67&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 1000-700 BC.)</td>
<td>Western UP</td>
<td><em>Kṛṣṇa</em></td>
<td>denotes ‘ploughing’</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</em>&lt;sup&gt;68&lt;/sup&gt; (c.1000-700 BC.)</td>
<td>Eastern UP &amp; Bihar</td>
<td><em>Kṛṣṇa</em></td>
<td>Plougher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhājā Cave Inscription&lt;sup&gt;69&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td><em>Hālika</em></td>
<td>a ploughman</td>
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<td><em>Aṣṭ ādhyāyī of</em></td>
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<td><em>Hālika</em></td>
<td>appears to have</td>
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<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ṛṣaṇini (5th c. BC.)</td>
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<td>connoted an ox utilized for ploughing</td>
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<td>Gāthāsaptaśati of Hāla</td>
<td>Andhra &amp; Maharastra</td>
<td>Halio(Hālika) Pāmara</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Manusmṛti</em> (2nd BC-2nd AD.)</td>
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<td>Kṛṣṇaivala Kṛṣṇaīvī Kṣetrīka Kṣetrīna Kīnāśa Ārdhika</td>
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<tr>
<td>denoting both peasant and ploughman. share-cropper</td>
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<td>Yāñnavalkya Smṛti (100-300 AD.)</td>
<td>Mithila &amp; Videha (Bihar)</td>
<td>Kṣetrīna Ardhasīrī</td>
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<td>Arthaśātra of Kauṭilya</td>
<td>Bengal, Bihar</td>
<td>Kuṭumbīna Ardhasītīka Karṣaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nārada Smṛti (100-300 AD.)</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Karṣaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brāhspati Smṛti (300-500 AD.)</td>
<td>North India</td>
<td>Sīravāhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spurious Gaya Copper-Plate Inscription of Samudragupta</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Kuṭumbī</td>
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<tr>
<td>reference of karada-kuṭumbī(taxpaying cultivators) is significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pañcatantra of Viṣṇuṣarmā (Gupta period or a little earlier)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hālika</td>
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<tr>
<td>ploughman or petty peasant performing manual work of tilling, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Bṛ hatkathā-śloka-saṅgraha</strong> of Budhaswāmina&lt;sup&gt;79&lt;/sup&gt; (Gupta period)</td>
<td><strong>Hālika</strong></td>
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<td>Damodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Budhagupta&lt;sup&gt;80&lt;/sup&gt; (482 AD.)</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td><strong>Kuṭ umbina</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhāruci’s commentary on <em>Manusmrītī</em>&lt;sup&gt;81&lt;/sup&gt; (500-600 AD.)</td>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td><strong>Kṛ ṣ i, karṣ aka Lāṅ gala</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Māliyā Copper-plate Inscription of Mahārāja Dharasena II&lt;sup&gt;82&lt;/sup&gt; (571-72 AD.)</td>
<td>Gujrat</td>
<td><strong>Kuṭ umbī</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Daśakumaracarita</em> of Daṇḍiṇa&lt;sup&gt;83&lt;/sup&gt; (550-650 AD.)</td>
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<td><strong>Hali, Sīra</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Amarakośa</em> of Amarasingh&lt;sup&gt;84&lt;/sup&gt; (c.6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; cent. AD.)</td>
<td><strong>Kṣ etrājīva</strong> <strong>Karṣ aka</strong> <strong>Kṛ ṣ aka</strong> <strong>Kṛ ṣ īvala</strong> <strong>Kīnāśa Sairika Hālika</strong></td>
<td>except peasant these terms are also used for agricultural workers. appears to have connoted an ox utilize for ploughing</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Bṛ hātsaṁhitā</em> of Varāhamihira&lt;sup&gt;85&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 7th. Cent. AD.)</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td><strong>Lāṅ gala</strong> <strong>Karṣ aka</strong> <strong>Kṛ ṣ īvala</strong> <strong>Kṛ ṣ ījīvī</strong></td>
<td>for plough</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Harṣ acarita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kuṭ umbī</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Kuṭ umbika</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Kuṭ umbina</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>kṛṣīvala</strong></td>
<td><strong>kṛṣ umbi is explained as karṣ aka in the commentary of Śaṅkara</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(c.7th. cent. AD.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Auśanasa Śmrīti</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kṣetrina</strong></td>
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<td>(c. 600-900 AD.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parāśara Samrīti</strong></td>
<td><strong>Karṣ aka</strong></td>
<td><strong>Also conceived as a separate mixed caste</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(c. 600-900 AD.)</td>
<td><strong>Ārdhika</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Kāśyapīyakṛṣīsūkti</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kṛṣīkāra</strong></td>
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<td><strong>90</strong></td>
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<td>Medhātithi on Manusmrīti</td>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td><strong>Kuṭ umbī</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Bhūmikarṣaka</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Vāha</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(c.9th. cent. AD.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sārī hyatatūva</strong>&lt;br&gt;Kaumudī of Vācaspati</td>
<td>Mithila (Bihar)</td>
<td><strong>Hālika</strong></td>
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<td>(c.9th. cent. AD.)</td>
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<td><strong>Sārāvalī of Kalyānavarmā</strong></td>
<td>Gujrat</td>
<td><strong>Kṛṣīvala</strong></td>
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<td>(c.9th. cent. AD.)</td>
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<td>Bhaṭṭotpala on Br hatsamhitā</td>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td><strong>Lāṇigala</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Karṣaka</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Kṛṣīvala</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>kṛṣī, Kṛṣījīvī</strong></td>
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<td>(c.10th. cent. AD.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kṛṣī Parāśara</strong></td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td><strong>Karṣaka</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(c.950-1100 AD.)</td>
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<td><strong>In the sense of peasant only</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kullūkabhaṭṭa on Manusmrīti</strong>&lt;sup&gt;96&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 12th. Cent. AD.)</td>
<td>Karṣ aka</td>
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<td><strong>Vijñāneśvara on Yājñavalkysmrīti</strong>&lt;sup&gt;97&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 12th. cent. AD.)</td>
<td>South India Karṣ aka</td>
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<td><strong>Dabok Inscription</strong>&lt;sup&gt;98&lt;/sup&gt; of the time of Dhavalappadeva</td>
<td>Mewara (RJN) Kṛṣṇaka</td>
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<td><strong>Haradatta on Āpastamba Dharmasūtra</strong>&lt;sup&gt;99&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 12th. Cent. AD.)</td>
<td>Kṣetrika Kṣetravāna In the verse of Manusmrīti, this term is used in place of ārdhika</td>
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<td><strong>Parāśara-Madhavaḥ</strong>&lt;sup&gt;100&lt;/sup&gt; (c. 14th. Cent. AD.)</td>
<td>Ārdhika</td>
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**Historical Background of the Peasantry:**

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 and vice-versa. The earliest known civilization had developed system of agriculture in this country well testified by the reports of the archeological excavations which have brought to light many important facts of the early economic history.

The peasantry might have been originated in prehistoric period. Although, it cannot be said anything clearly regarding its origin in India. The
stage at which peasants originate within a society must naturally arrive only after agriculture is established as a major provider of food. The primitive people might have spent the large part of its labour time on the cultivation of plants and harvesting of seeds. In this process not only the food gatherers (mainly hunters) turn into producers but also the monogamistic family itself evolves as a basic unit of social organization. It has been argued that megalithic communities like those of Chopni-Mando among the Vindhyan foot hills who consumed wild rice belonged to the pre-history of agriculture. Domesticated plants came with the Neolithic revolution and two zones where crops were raised have been identified within India. The first is the Bolan Valley itself where grains of cultivated rice and bones of domesticated cattle and sheep-goat have been found within the period B.C.6500 to 4500. The second zone is that of Kachi plain south of Bolan-pass--an arid area. Here at Mehargarh (6th to 3rd millennium BC) the remains of barley and wheat of three varieties have been found. The lowest level gives bones of wild animal’s only. 101

The domestication of plants and cattle marked a notable stage in human progress. But the full-fledged agriculture revolution was emerging; the draught potential of cattle was still unexploited, and there was no trace of the plough, which alone could assure a substantial seed: yield ratio. Moreover, given the paucity of the crops cultivated there could only be one cropping season, ‘Kharif’ in the Bolan Valley and ‘Rabi’ is the Kacchi plain. The cultivated tracts were in any case very restricted, since there were no means of clearing the dense forests and making land there fit for cultivation. It is difficult to conjecture what the internal structure of the crop-raising communities was like. The cultivation might still be a continuation of food-gathering with women as the “principals”. 102 The sexual division of labour
was not sufficient to produce a surplus which could create any class divisions or even occupational stratification.

In India, agricultural revolution and the first urban revolution in fact coincide in Indus civilization. Undoubtedly, the structure of Indus agriculture rested on plough cultivation. The discovery of furrows of a ‘ploughed field’ at Kalibangan has now met the doubts over the absence of any positive evidence. Thus the ploughed cultivation has been noticed and the plough indicates large extent of Indians agriculture, coverings the north-western plains and extending up to Gujarat. The Indus people raised wheat and barley, both of standard modern Indian varieties. In Gujarat, the Indus site, rice has been found along with the bajra millet. The field pea represents pulses and sesame and a species of brassina and the oilseeds. The multiplicity of crops shows that the two harvest system was now firmly established. Henceforth, the agriculture would be a full time occupation and the presence of a peasantry as a social class must, therefore, be inferred. The Indus culture then not only gave India its first cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, but also gave its first peasantry.

**Pastoral phase (1500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), Plough cultivation and agrarian Economy:-**

The Aryans came to India as semi nomadic people with a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy in which cattle rearing played a predominant role. Scholars are of the opinion that the main occupation of the Rgvedic people was cattle rearing and it was the chief sources of their livelihood. Agriculture was not so important for them during this period, but they also practiced agricultural activities at small scale. It seems that towards the end of the Rgvedic period all the agricultural
processes were known to the Aryans. In the first and the tenth manḍalas of the Ṛgveda, clearing of forests (Ṛg. I.10.23), ploughing of fields (Ṛg. X.101.3-4), sowing of seeds (Ṛg. X.131.2), reaping of corn (Ṛg. X.48.7.), and separating corn from the chaff (Ṛg. X.94.13) are mentioned. It also contains many references regarding irrigation, wells (Ṛg. X.25), water for irrigation (Ṛg. X.93), irrigation of fields by means of canals (Ṛg. X.99), and cultivators irrigating their field (Ṛg. X.68). The mentions of artificial water ways such as Kulyā (Ṛg. VII.49.2) and Khanitrimā apah (Ṛg. VIII.49.2) shows that the use of irrigation was known. The word lāṅgala and sīra (Ṛg. IV.57.8) for the plough, Dātra (Ṛg. VIII.78.10) for sickle are also mentioned in Ṛgveda as the implements of agriculture. The Ṛgvedic people were known to have cultivated only one variety of grain called Yava. It seems that agriculture was transforming as occupation of the people at the end of the Ṛgvedic period. A.C. Das described that the Ṛgvedic people no doubt adopted agriculture as their main occupation but at the same time they continued the practice of the domestication of animals.

In the later Vedic period the agriculture became more important occupation of the people. The Atharvaveda mentions ploughing of fields by six or twelve oxen. It also mentions the use of manure in agriculture and canals were dug for irrigation. From the Yajurveda, we know that barley was sown in winter and reaped in summer and rice was sown in the rainy season and reaped in autumn. It also mention that two crops were cultivated every years. It seems that the cropping pattern was also known by people during this period. The later Saṁhitās mention the various crops such as yava (barley), godhūma (wheat), māsa (pulse), mudga (lentil), masūr (lentil), tīla (sesame) etc. which were being grown by the Aryans. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa also mentions all the process of agriculture viz.
ploughing of fields, sowing of seeds, reaping of crops and separating corn form chaff by threshing. The domestication of animals still continued to remains a main occupation of the people which helped in the agriculture. Some natural calamities like famine and draught etc. led to the destruction of crops also. Evidently hymns were recited at the time of sowing seed and gathering corn in order to prevent these evils. Thus from the above references it can be concluded that Aryans were transforming into agriculturist.

As we know, the crystallization of economic class in theṚgvedic period was in a nebulous form. In this period, we can’t clearly demarcate the peasantry but in the later Vedic period, the Vaiśyas are clearly referred as agriculturists. We find the word kīnāśa in theṚgveda (IV. 57.8) which means the ploughman or cultivator of the soil. The author of the Vedic Index pointed out the reference to vis (predominantly peasantry) as a sub–division of Jana in theṚgveda (II.26.3). In theṚgvedic period the position of viś was not considered low. But in the later Vedic period, the position of Vaiśyas or class of peasantry becomes lower in the social scale than that of Brāhmaṇ as or Kṣatriyas. In the Aitereya Brāhmaṇas, the Vaiśyas have been described as one who pays taxes to another (anyasyābalikṛt) is lived on by another (anyasyādyah) can be oppressed or enslaved at will. It also shows that the Vaiśyas were the tenants and the Kṣatriyas or nobles were the landlords. That the Brāhmaṇ as and the Kṣatriyas looked down upon the Vaiśyas is crystal clear from the Brāhmaṇ as texts. The Brāhmaṇ a played an important role in making the peasantry subservient to the nobility. Although, the peasantry was subservient and obedient to the nobility, the dependence of the nobles and warriors upon peasant militia to fight against
enemies and inability to grand land without the consent of the tribal peasantry placed them into a difficult position.\textsuperscript{114}

From the above references it can be concluded that though the economic classes were not clear is the Rgvedic period but it happened so in the later Vedic period. We find the Vaiśyas as an agriculturist people. Most of the Vedic people belonged to the pursuit of agriculture and cattle rearing. They were aquainted with all agricultural activities. Although, we come across various references about famine, draught and other natural calamities but generally the peasants mentioned to live a satisfactory life. Probably the peasant’s ownership was prevalent during this period. In social circle the peasant was assigned a lower status in later Vedic period but it was not considered as such in the Rgvedic period.

**Iron Based Production and Agriculture:**

This period, associated with significant development in the economy, was strengthened by the widespread use of iron, the extensive cultivation of rice, sugar and cotton, the growth of numerous towns in the middle Gangetic plains, the further diversification of craft and their organization into guilds and last but not least the brisk inland and foreign trade as evidenced by the numerous finds of the punch-marked coins. The growing use of iron in agriculture and craft resulted in surplus production which paved the way for transformation of the pastoral and egalitarian society into full-fledge agricultural and class divided society.

During this period, most of the population formed with the cultivators or agriculturists lived in the villages. The farmer has been designated in Pali literature as *Kassaka*\textsuperscript{115} or *Khettapala*\textsuperscript{116} etc. It does not represent a caste but
refers to the person who was engaged in the cultivation of land or agricultural operations. Other terms such as *Kṛṣṇivala*\(^{117}\) (common peasants), *Gahapati*\(^{118}\) (peasant proprietors) and *Kuṭumbikas*\(^{119}\) (well to do peasants) were also used for the peasant during this period. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people as testified by the farmer Bharadvaja Brāhmaṇa who had five hundred ploughs. The farming land which was divided and bifurcated by strips, embankments, etc. was allotted to each family by the ministers of king. It does not mean that there were no big size plots at that time. In the early Pali literature, we come across at least two examples of big farms in Magadha each measuring a thousand *karisasa*. Another field in Kashi being ploughed with five hundred ploughs was owned by the Brāhmaṇas.\(^{120}\) From the sutra literature, it is clear that agriculture had become very important occupation during this period. The farmers now performed a special sacrifice, *Novasasyesti* to celebrate the reaping of their crop.\(^{121}\) The various crops such as rice, pulses, oil, seeds, barley, millets, cotton, sugarcane, etc. were produced by them. From the *Jātakas*,\(^ {122}\) we know that people constructed canals and tanks for irrigation on a cooperative basis. The *Dharmasūtras*\(^ {123}\) also laid down that the ruler and people should construct tanks and canals for irrigation. However, the irrigational needs were not fulfilled and the peasants broadly depended on the rain for irrigation of their fields. And in case of the failing rainy season the peasants had to face many problems.

Animal husbandry was another important and inevitable occupation of the cultivators as it was supplement to the agricultural process. Buddhist ideology on non-injury to living being and reaction against Vedic sacrifices decisively helped to protect the cattle wealth, which was indispensable for the progress of agriculture.
It seems that the state or the king began exercising control over the agriculture during this period. The agriculturists must have been getting protection from the king. Though they had their own headmen to settle their internal disputes, but they were also free to approach to the king directly if they desired so. The Buddhist literature and Jātakas reveal the state intervention in the agriculture at many places. The purohita, who was an indispensable companion of the king, seems to have enjoyed a bhogagama (the revenue of a village). This means the agriculturists were expected to give a part of their agricultural produce to the purohita out of the royal share. Most of the cultivators lived in the village and every village was under the control of its headman called the grāmabhojaka or grāmiṇī. One of the Jātakas informs us that once, when crops failed in a village due to famine, the grāmabhojaka or the headman distributed food to the famine stricken villagers on promise of receiving a share of their next crops. This shows that the grāmabhojaka received the instruction of the state in the hour of need to help the agriculturists and other villagers in time of distress. The state, infact, did not interfere much with the rural affairs. We do not find any trace of state capital being invested in the improvement of agriculture or in the interest of the agriculturists.

Gautama clearly states that every member of the village need not to adopt the agricultural operation and it was especially meant for the Śūdras and Vaiśyas. It, therefore, seems that agriculture was the main pursuit of the Vaiśyas and the same of the Śūdras families were employed in agricultural operation as help to Vaiśyas. The Dharmasūtras assign agriculture to the Vaiśyas who seemed independent peasant proprietors paying a part of the produce as revenue to the state. The Vaiśyas mainly as peasants and secondarily as traders seems to have been the tax payers during this
The introduction of money and greater production brought in the beginning of a capitalistic economy in which big gap was created between the wealthy traders and land holders on the one hand, and small artisans and poor wage earners on the other. As a result of this, the social status of the peasantry must have been declined. Furthermore, the close contact of the peasant with the Śūdras to carry out their occupation of agriculture, cattle breeding, etc. also led to the diminution of the social status of the peasantry.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that this period was marking the development of agrarian expansion due to the growing use of iron in the agriculture. The improved knowledge of cultivation and use of effective implements enabled the peasant to produce surplus. Generally, the peasants were living a peaceful and happy life because; there was no sizeable class of intermediaries between the king and the tillers of the soil. The peasants paid taxes directly to the king/state which normally amounted 1/6th of the produce and in lieu of it the state provided the protection to the cultivators.

**State Controlled Production (c-322-200-BC):**

In Mauryan times, we come across an unprecedented expansion of the economic activities of the State. The distinguishing feature of Mauryan economy is the State control of agriculture, industry and trade, and the levy of all varieties of taxes from the people. The Mauryan state made an important contribution to the development of rural economy by founding new settlements and rehabilitating the decaying ones by drafting surplus settlers from over-populated areas. Not only ordinary peasants but also the Śūdras, meant for their service as slaves and hired labourers, were encouraged to settle in these
settlements with the aid granted to them by the state. In order to bring virgin soil under cultivation, the cultivators were allowed remission of taxes and other concession by way of supply of cattle, seeds and money, in the hope that they would repay when they were in a position to do so. Even the ordinary peasants could not pass on their land to the non-taxpaying peasants. If the farmers failed to cultivate the plots allotted to them; there land was transferred to the others for the better use.

The period under study marked a cleavage within the peasantry. The state’s participation in agriculture by deliberately colonizing new areas and settling it with Śūdras peasant and low class elements was adopted as a policy. It led to the creation of new peasants groups whose subservience to an external authority was total and its control over land precarious. A sizeable portion of the newly colonized area, however, constituted the kings domain (sītā) which was divided into two categories inaugurating new forms of land relation. The first was cultivated by the labourers of different categories under the direction of the royal officers and the second type was leased, by one interpretation to labourers who had nothing to contribute but the labour of their bodies and surrendered 3/4th of the produce to the king and by another to those who lived by valour and paid only 1/4th of the produce. The second category of land was also leased to sharecroppers, having only temporary control over land, who cultivated it for half of the share of the produce.

The Mauryan period also witnesses not only the emergence of a well organized agrarian economy in the upper and middle valley of Ganga but also the dissemination of it into outlying regions of the sub-continent thus inauguration a phase of peasantisation in this part. This also paved the way for the gradual appearance of a structured peasant order marked by varying
patterns of mutual relationships. But despite the growth of superior private rights in land, the period does not record the presence of any intermediate group in land. The landlords did exist under the Mauryas is fairly well known, but the Mauryan kings did not allow even this group to be established between the state and peasants.

There were two types of arable land in the Mauryan period namely crown land and private land. Crown land (sītā) were under the direct control of the state. It was the duty of the state to organize and increase the agricultural productivity of such land through colonization by the superintendent called Sitādhyaṇa. The state officers required to ensure that the work of the cultivators should not suffer on account of the shortage of ploughs, other necessary implements and bullocks. From the inscriptions of this period, it is testified that the people got constructed wells and tanks for irrigation with the financial help received from the state. In the Junagarh inscription of Rudradamana, it is stated that Pusyagupta, the governor of Chandragupta, got constructed the Sudarsana lake in order to provide irrigational facility to the people of this region. The state also provided protection to the peasants in distress.

Agriculture and cattle rearing was the main occupation of the cultivators during this period. Rice of different varieties, coarse grain, seasamum, pepper and saffron, pulses, wheat, barley, linseed, mustered, vegetables, sugarcane and fruits of various kind were grown by the people. It is testified in Indica that the soil of India being fertile, produced two crops every year consisting of fruits and grains. The cultivators were generally given freedom of choice for the cultivation of their crops. But in times of emergency, the cultivators were bound to grow more food for the state. The officer called Samāhartā was empowered to get raise a second crop through
the compulsory labour of the cultivators. U.N. Ghoshal adds that even in normal time, the neglect of cultivation was punished with the cancellation of the lease. Thus the cultivators were required to be honest towards their duties. They were not compelled for the payment of arears relating to their agricultural holdings during the cultivating season. The state also encouraged farmers to raise new variety of crops and for that they were allowed to import rare seeds from other places without paying any duty to Govt. Besides, leases of prepared field were to be granted to the taxpaying farmers with occupancy right for life. The farmers marked the boundaries of their farms and ware houses.

Though agriculture continued to be the main occupation of the Vaiśyas since vedic time but the references of the Arthaśāstra points to the fact that now it included some number of Śūdras as well. The participation of Śūdras in agriculture work must have led to the degradation of the peasantry in social status. However, for the sake of improving their general condition and conferring property rights a tendency would have been imminent in this regard in this period as rightly verified by R.S. Sharma.

Megasthenes refers to the division of the society into seven castes. And the husbandman or the cultivators listed at second place in this division. They formed the bulk of population and were exempted from fighting and other public services. They devoted their whole time in agricultural pursuit. Even in time of war, they were not supposed to be disturbed by the either side of the enemies. They, infact, being regarded as public benefactors were protected from all injury.

During this period, various types of taxes were collected from the common masses. The chief tax, among the taxes, was the royal share in the
produce of the peasants, prominently known as *bhāga* amounting to perhaps 1/6\(^{th}\). But the Greek account suggests that this was levied at the rate of 1/4\(^{th}\), whereas others suggest that the peasants received 1/4\(^{th}\) of the produce as their share. It is significant to note that the share-coppers, who got arable land, were supplied with seed, oxen, etc. by the state. And those who afforded to invest their own capital in the land (allotted to them by the state) received ½ the crop as their share.\(^{140}\) Beside the regular *bhāga* (A.S., 2.6), the peasants were required to pay the *piṇḍakara* (A.S., 2.15), which was lump assessment made on the groups of villages. It is difficult to acknowledge the nature of taxes such as *bali* (A.S, 2.35) and *kara* (A.S., 2.15) perhaps, the latter was probably a part of the product from fruit and flower gardens. *Senābhakta* (A.S., 2.15) probably involved on obligation on the part of villagers to supply provision to the royal army when it passed through their territories. And *Hiraṇya* (A.S., 2.35) seems to have been a payment in cash. The peasants had to pay irrigation tax also at the rate of 1/5, 1/4, 1/3 to the state. *Praṇaya*\(^{141}\) was another tax amounted to 1/3 or 1/4\(^{th}\) of the produce could be levied according to the nature of soil. *Viṣṭ i* (A.S., 2.26) and animal’s taxes were also collected by the state from the common masses. All such taxes constituted as contents of state’s fiscal policy and inevitable so as to cater the financial needs of vast bureaucracy, army and other state employees who were paid in cash. Apart from taxes various other methods and sources were also devised by the state to enhance the position of Mauryan treasury.

Thus this period witnesses the agrarian expansion and state’s successful efforts to control economy. The land was taken into state control wherein the state decisively developed the agriculture and the life of
agriculturists. The state also opted welfare policy for protection to the peasants, interest and helped them in the distress time.

**Grants and Money Economy (c. 200 BC – AD 200):**

The state control over economy established by the Mauryas seems to have been confined to the middle Gangetic plains in the post-Mauryan period. It did not last for more than a century. Now, we no longer hear of state farms tilled by slaves and hired labourers under the supervision of the superintendent of agriculture. The land now seems to have been mainly in possession of individual farmers. As regards the extension of the area of cultivation, state efforts seem to have been replaced by individual efforts. The *Milindapañho*\(^{142}\) refers to the individuals who clear the forests and take other steps for making the land fit for cultivation. And because, they bring the land under use, they were the owner of land. It is testified by *Manu* (X. 44) who describes that a field belongs to him who cleared away the timber and prepare it for farming. It points to the fact that individual efforts were needed in this period to clear away the land and make it arable.

Most of the population of this period also formed the agriculturists as earlier. As noticed above, they enjoyed right on land and worked in their fields. Being the backbone of the society they grew various crops such as wheat, barley, etc. The state also helped the agriculturists in various forms. *Patañjali*\(^{143}\) states that it was the duty of the state to ensure the development of agriculture and protection of peasants. He further insists that the irrigational facilities were to be provided properly by the state. Furthermore it refers to the demarcation of boundaries of arable lands of the private cultivators.\(^{144}\) The law of Manu also testifies that the king was lord of all

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\(^{142}\) *Milindapañho* (c. 200 BC – AD 200)

\(^{143}\) *Patañjali* (c. 300 BC – AD 100)

\(^{144}\) *Manu* (c. 200 BC – AD 200)
land and it was his duty to give protection to the people mainly the agriculturists.\textsuperscript{145} It further recommends that the king should be well versed in the science of \textit{Vārttā},\textsuperscript{146} otherwise he could not exercise an effective control over the agriculture and the agriculturists. It is further enjoined that the king should punish people for theft of agricultural implements and provides corporal punishment accompanied by disfiguration of mutilations of limbs for selling bad or worthless seed and for destroying boundary marks of the fields.\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Manu} prescribes capital punishment also for destroying the tank or a dam meant for the purpose of irrigation. Further, even death sentence was advised for destroying a granary.\textsuperscript{148} In this way numerous ways and means were suggested by \textit{Manu} for the development of agriculture and protection of the agriculturist community. The peasants had to pay 1/6\textsuperscript{th} of their gross produce to the state in order to meet out the expanses.

Another significant development of this period was the introduction of practice of land grants given to the Brāhmaṇas which affected the life of peasants. The earliest epigraphical evidence in this regard belongs to the first century B.C. when a village was granted by the Sātavāhana king in Maharashtra to the priests as a gift in the \textit{aśvamedha} sacrifice.\textsuperscript{149} Such grants were free from taxes and administrative rights were abandoned by the time of Sātavāhana ruler Gautamīputra Šrīkālakṣī (second cent AD) as testified in the grants he made to the Buddhist monks. The land allotted to them could not be entered by royal troops, disturbed by govt. officials or interfered with by the district police.\textsuperscript{150} Though these grants were intended to fulfill religious obligation but we have also some evidence to indicate that some grants were meant to get the land cultivated. It seems that the king also wanted to increase the agricultural land though this practice.
To *Manu*¹ the agriculture was not considered an ideal profession during the post-Mauryan period. It was specially meant for the Vaiśyas. And it was specially discarded for the upper two varnas namely the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas. However, at the same time, it cannot be denied that agriculture and cattle’s rearing was followed by a large section of society as main occupation.

The notion of the state control on means of production was now getting weaker in this time. Though in principle all the land belonged to the king but it seems that the individual ownership on land was on rise. The state still provided the protection to the cultivators and charged taxes from the people. Political instability became imminent after the decline of Sātavāhana and Kuśāñas dynasty for some time. But the situation did not reach to a chaotic stage. The people lived a normal life and they had not to pay numerous taxes like Mauryan time.

**Feudal Beginnings (c. AD 300 – 600 AD):**

The Gupta period acknowledges the restoration of the administrative setup. But unlike the Mauryan administration, there was no state’s monopoly over land and agriculture in this period. A multidimensional development in politico-economic sphere is noticed now in terms of land grants to Brāhmaṇas called *agraharas*, feudalization of land system, the rise of local units of production and the growth of dependent peasantry.

Like earlier period, most of the population constituted the agriculturists during this period. The agriculture and cattle rearing were the main occupation of the people. The injunctions of *Nārada* and *Bṛhaspati* intended to ensure that important steps were taken by the state to develop the
agriculture and to improve the fate of the agriculturists. Probably in the Gupta period, cultivable land had become scarce. It is why Nārada lays down that if the owner of a cultivable land had gone out of the village for a long time, it could be cultivated by some other person but the later had to return the field to the owner after receiving the compensation, he had incurred on cultivating that field. The state also donated pieces of land in the forests to the Brāhmaṇas for cultivation as the development of agriculture had became the need of hour. The safety and security of peasant’s produce was also taken care of. Severe punishment was prescribed by Brhaspati for those who stole corn. Similarly those who stole agricultural implements or damaged the crops of others were severely punished. While donating a piece of land the ruler clearly declared that no one was permitted to obstruct the cultivation of that piece of land given to the donee. So far as the irrigational facilities were concerned we know that canals and tanks were constructed during this period for the farmers. And the government severely punished all those who caused damage to canals, tanks or wells as they were very important means of irrigation. It seems that other necessary facilities were also provided to the peasants by the state.

The majority of farmers generally kept small holdings which were cultivated by them with the help of members of their families. But a few of them had large fields also which were cultivated by labourers or landless farmers. The Brhaspati lays down, in the same context, that agricultural servants should be classified into the low, middle and high categories according to their grain share or wages. It is further advised that a third or a fifth of the produce should be awarded to the cultivators of the soil as their share. And those who cultivated the soil on the basis of food and clothing
should receive 1/5th of the crops, but who worked without taking food and clothing were given 1/3rd of the produce.\textsuperscript{159} The Nārada smṛti also classifies the hired servants into three categories namely soldiers, agriculturists and porters.\textsuperscript{160} It seems that various type of peasants were engaged in the work of agricultural fields.

The Smṛtis have laid down the work of cattle rearing as one of the duties of peasantry. The important domestic animals comprised of the horses, buffaloes, cows, camels, etc. Some of these animals were reared for ploughing, carrying loads, and for food, etc.\textsuperscript{161}

The Amarakośa\textsuperscript{162} gleans that wheat, rice, barley, sesame, etc. were the chief crops in northern India which were grown by peasants. Varāhmihira informs that the peasants had to go through hardship during famines due to heavy rainfall and flood in the rivers and drought. Similarly, crops were sometimes damaged by wild animals, rats, locusts, etc. Sometimes war also created famine condition as they caused great damage to agriculture.\textsuperscript{163} Such adverse condition, infact, created many problems in the life of peasantry.

The practice of land grants led to the fragmentation of land in some part of the country. The land charters also created a considerable class of landed magnates. The another important result of the land grants was the erosion of the rights of the peasantry to the land and also the undercutting of communal rights of forests, pastures, fisheries, water reservoirs, etc. As of their consequence the position of peasantry became servile. In some areas especially where there was a shortage of labour or of producing population, the land was transferred to the beneficiaries who were asked to stay in the donated villages and carry out the orders of the new-masters. They were also
subjected to forced labour. As a consequent, the position of the peasantry underwent deprecation.

Perhaps the major portion of land continued to be in possession of free peasants, who paid revenues directly to the state. They paid generally a fixed portion of their produce i.e. 1/6 as regular revenue to the state. The peasants were subjected to imposition such as *udraṅga*, *uparikara* and *hiraṇya*. The dependent peasants had to perform forced labour also in the service of donees. We notice a subject peasantry overburdened with all kind of taxes and obligations by landed intermediaries during the period under study. The kind of free peasantry found in the age of Buddha or in Maurya times seems to have substantially diminished.

Though, agriculture was continuing as the main occupation of the Vaiśyas but the Śūdras also became dependent peasants due to weakening of slavery and the fragmentation of land during this period. The large state farms of the Mauryan period were now replaced by small plots. As it was not possible to employ a large number of slaves and servants in such small holdings the Śūdras slaves and servants appear to have transformed into dependent peasants who were largely share-croppers. As a consequence the Śūdras status changed into the dependent peasantry who worked in the fields as temporary tenants, share croppers or hired labourers.

Thus agriculture and cattle rearing remained the main occupation of the peasants as earlier. The state provided the protection to agriculturists for the expansion of agrarian economy. But allotment of the land grants to the Brāhmaṇas and officers in lieu of cash payment as their salary, affected the position of peasantry. They had not only to pay various taxes to the donees but also had to oblige their masters with forced labour. A good number of
the free peasants converted into dependent peasants and the Śūdras also transferred into the dependent peasants.

To sum up the agriculture was not a popular occupation of the people of India in the initial stage of human life. They depended on the natural resources. Agriculture became the main occupation of people after the neolithic period. But, it was not important occupation of the people in Rgvedic period. They lived a pastoral life and the peasantry was in nebulous form during this period. From later Vedic period, agriculture becomes the main occupation of the people. It seems that the peasants lived a peaceful and happy life till the beginning of early medieval period. The peasants paid taxes directly to the king/state which normally amounted 1/6 of the produce and in lieu of it the state provided the protection to the farmers. The king/state also helped the cultivators in the adverse condition. There could not develop a sizeable class of intermediaries between the king and the tillers of soil.
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