

Medieval India

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Notes by Kshitij Kumar

Early Medieval

Transition or Static?

Dark Age or Expansion?

Sources

1. Harshacharita by Banabhatta
2. Vikramankadeva Charitha by Bilhana (Western Chalukya king Vikramaditya)
3. Ramacharita by Sandhyakaranandin (Pala king Ramapal)
4. Kalhana's Rajtirangini
5. Chachnama on Arab Invasion
6. Gaudvaho by Vakapatiraja (Yashovarman of Kannauj)

Polity

1. Slow spread of complex state society & regionalisation
2. Steady expansion of monarchical state
3. Increase in land grants
4. Consolidation of political status through land holding; land as foci of power
5. More autonomy; less prominence of bureaucracy
6. Multiplicity of Powers
7. Grand royal titles, Maharajadhiraj

Centrifugal Forces: BD Chattopadhyay

Feudal Society: RS Sharma

Multiplicity of Powers

- A. Gauda-Kannauj Struggle (DC Sirkar)
- B. Chalukyan-Kannauj Struggle
- C. Tripartite Struggle
- D. Chauhans vs Ghorids
- E. Krishna-Tungabhadra Doab Conflict
 - a. Pallava-Chalukya Conflict
 - b. Rashtrakuta-Pallava
 - c. Chola-Chalukya Conflict

Economy

Transformation from monetary to agrarian economy: NR Ray

Agriculture

1. Land grants system
 - a. Expansion into unsettled areas
 - b. Vishti and halabhada
2. Clearing forests and other land reclamation, eg: Kadambas record transforming coastal tracts into paddy fields

3. New technology (Ghati Yantra, Agarhata) and techniques (Krishi Parashara, Krishi Sukti)
 - a. Detailed descriptions of various types of ploughs
 - b. Knowledge of seasons etc (Rajashekar)
4. Construction and managing of irrigation facilities, eg: Chola Village Assemblies had tank committee
5. Crops – different types of cereals (50 types of rice in Bengal), cash crops like betel leaves, arecanut, sugar, cotton)

Irrigation

1. Taittiriya Brahman refers to Brahmans of Ahichchhatra constructing a tank by joining three streams
2. Chola Village Assemblies had tank committee
3. Ramacharitam mentions Ramapala building tanks
4. Bhoja's great reservoir
5. Jalakara or water cess mentioned in donative land grant plates
6. Mention of water lifting devices like Araghatta or Ghatiyanta in inscriptions from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan
 - a. Harbans Mukhia points to evolution of the Ghatiyanta into the persian wheel

(Three Features)

7. Private initiatives in launching and maintaining irrigation works far outnumbered state-led public works, eg: Temples in Kerala
8. Regional diversity in types of irrigation, eg: wells in North India, tanks in Kakatiya, Pallava, and Rashtrakuta, rivulets in Bengal
9. Role of irrigation in expanding cultivation and monarchical state to hitherto untouched areas

Trade

1. Sugar, Textiles, Oils (ghanaka is presser and tailika is seller)
 2. Guilds
 3. Village becomes self-sufficient with Sarthavaha/Sethi declining in prominence and number
 4. Long distance trade in luxury items continues
1. Decline in trade from 600-900
 - a. Decline of cities
 - b. Monetary anaemia
 - c. Absence of foreign coins
 2. Revival and partial monetisation from 900-1200
 - a. Nikshepa-vanika: merchants specialising in money lending and banking

Indian Ocean Trade

1. Segmented voyage: KN Chaudhari voyages from West Asia to South East Asia segmented at Indian western and eastern seaboard
2. Marco Polo calls Indian merchants honest
3. Control of Arabs; Jewish traders also prominent in the area
4. Trade with China (Chinese junk ships) and Sri Vijaya from Coromandel ports Nagapattinam and Mamallapuram and Tamralipti in Bengal
 - a. Indian trade links vital in creating and sustaining cultural links
 - b. Direct royal intervention (Chola expedition to Malacca; Rajendra's delegations to China; Pallava marital links with Cambodia royal families)
5. Horse trade very important; Pandayans possible paid with it in barter later monopolised by Portuguese
6. Indian feudal views cowrie shells as medium of exchange, but they were themselves items of trade

Urbanisation

Urban Decay

3. Many sites point to uninterrupted occupation in 700-1200, denying the argument of urban decay, eg: Chirand, Varanasi, Ahicchatra.
4. New cities emerged
5. Exchange centres called hattas and mandapikas (*pentha* in Deccan) existed in both urban and rural areas (Bandopadhyay, Chakrvarti based on epigraphic sources)
6. "Shulka mandapika" as cess/duty levied in the market by royal admin
7. Al Beruni's account has references to trade networks criss-crossing the subcontinent and also of items that were transported inland and abroad
8. Nagaram were nodes on this trade network
9. Royal cities and cities with **temples** and mathas grew.
 - a. DD Kosambi & RSS said capitals became mobile military camps, however inscriptional evidence shows laying of exchange or ceremonial centres was common
 - b. Climax of temple building activity

Coinage

1. BN Mukherjee: Coin hoards, especially Harikele coin hoard in Bengal, defy assumptions of Indian Feudalism
2. Maybe three-tiered monetary system with cowries, chunri and coins
3. Kashmir exhibits growth in copper coins c. 700-900
4. 'Hundikas' - bills of exchange - indicate partial monetisation
5. Lekhapaddhati from 12th century Gujarat discusses surety bonds, lending practices, types of mortgage
6. Prevalence of barter, eg Pandayan horse purchase

Guilds

10. Voluntary associations of merchants dealing in the same type of commodity such as local grain, textiles, horses.
11. Formed by local shreshtins and itinerant sarthavahas
12. They framed their own rules, regulation, membership and a code of conduct
13. Leader elected, who settled disputes and represented the guild's interests including on tolls, etc
14. Guilds played social and political roles
15. Lekhapaddhati indicates department called 'shreni-karana' constituted to deal with guild activities
16. 'Shreni-bal': troops maintained by some guilds
17. Nandesi guild spread to Java, Burma, Srivijaya

Society

Varna

1. Kaliyuga: Social order breakdown mentioned by Shankaracharya and other writers; kings exalted as restorers of Varnashrama Dharma
 - a. Non-Brahmins Questioned
 - i. Jaina Amitagati reorients varna on basis of conduct rather than birth
 - ii. Kshamendra refers to "Kula-Jati-darpa" as a disease of society
2. Peasantization of shudras due to agri expansion
 - a. Al-Beruni notes no difference between Shudras and Vaishyas
 - b. Food prepared by some Shudras can be consumed by Brahmins
 - c. Anashrita Shudras: Shudras who are not dependent
 - d. Absence of intermediary castes in Bengal and South India
 - e. Absorption of tribes like Agnis, Chandalas into varna fold
3. Proliferation of jatis within varna system
 - a. System of deshbeda i.e. differences account of regions
 - b. Purity of gotra, adherence to profession/dharma
 - c. No varna remained homogenous
 - d. Romila Thapar: Varna was theoretical and ideal, but jati was functional.
4. Misr-jatis (marriages, integration)
5. New literate class -- Kayastha
6. Prominence of agriculture: Post-Gupta laws books call agriculture "samanya-dharma"
7. Upward social mobility
 - a. Kshatriyaisation & Rajputisation
 - b. Kaivartas rose in a revolt in Bengal demanding "clean' status
 - c. Jats too rose from outcasts to upper castes.
8. Social tensions, as reflected in discussions on untouchability, purity, and increasing focus on laying down law books

Women

1. Miniscule scope for education
2. Harita declares Brahmavadini ("women ascetics") an obsolete category belonging to different time cycle (kalpa)
3. Bhakti saints
 - a. Andal - lone woman among 12 Alvars
 - b. Akka Mahadevi - quit marriage to attain salvation.
4. Karaikal Ammaiyar - turned herself into a skeleton shedding her femininity
5. Devadasi tradition in South India
6. "Puja", system along with Bhakti, vratta, tirtha; dana
7. Women rulers: eg: Rudramadevi of Kakatiyas;
8. Lekhapadheti: if a woman is sold into slavery, she loses her caste

Feudalism

1. Religious land grants began with Satavahanas
 2. Samanta System of Gupta Era
 - a. Brihaspati Smriti mentions payments in land grants for military service
 3. Weak centralised polity
 4. Grants to Brahmans by private individuals also
 5. Inhabited and uninhabited land
 6. Vishti: Forced Labour; Halabadha: bound to the plough
 7. Brahmans as managers; tried to introduced scientific practise, eg: Krishi Parashara, Krishi Sukti
-
1. DD Koshambi: Feudalism from two process
 - a. Feudalism from above, i.e. king subordinates autonomous vassals
 - i. Process of converting communal property into feudal property
 - b. Feudalism from below, i.e. rich landlords become intermediaries
 2. DN Jha: Kali Age Crisis
 3. RS Sharma: Economic crisis as cause and effect; monetisation (earlier believed it to be because of fall of Constantinople)
 4. BD Chattopadhyay: Centrifugal Forces

Bhakti

Institutionalisation of gesture and emotion of devotion to a personal god

Evolution

1. Devotion can be traced to **Upanishads**
2. Popularisation of divine figures in **Puranas**