



**Social Stratification in the Eastern Deccan
(C-400 A.D.-C.1200 A.D.)**

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Social Stratification:

Growth in the individual rights of dominant peasant families, the Brahmanical ideologues and the Brahmanical temples, had several implications for the larger socio-economic structure. It is noteworthy that this phenomenon led to the accentuation of the social stratification within the village community. On the other hand, in some cases, it led to new agricultural settlements, and the growth in the private property. The latter led to the concentration of surplus in the hand of a few rich people, thus leading to the growth of a superior landowning group. All these features had further implications for the socio-economic organization of society engendering changes in the nature of the economy as a whole. At this juncture, we find that the growth of temples as the landlords, had significant bearing on the changing economy of the time. The temples had several clusters of villages surrounding them and with the political patronage and ideological significance attached to them, they were in a position to command and manage the productive activities of the period. As a result of the concentration of surplus by the dominant peasant families, brahmanas, brahmanical temples, we find significant growth in the productive activities of the period. We have several instances of tank irrigation being paid a lot of attention in the inscriptions of the period. "In a Western Chalukya grant of A.D. 1052-3, we find a Mahamandalesvara granting house-tax to the Great Tank of the agrahara of Nirili."¹ Similarly, in another inscription of the same period, we have a Mahamatya, granting "twenty mattars of cultivatable land for the upkeep of the tank of Kelawdi."² Through these examples, we get an idea of the care being shown by the local chiefs of the period towards a betterment of agrarian activity. According to R. N. Nandi, the beginnings of bonded labour in the 8th century AD, coincides meaningfully with "the expansion of private farms, improved techniques of agriculture and increase in crop-productions."³ The fact that there an "increase in the crop-production of the period" is attested by several scholars writing on the region of Karnataka.⁴

Surplus production led to a spurt in the commercial activities and an urban like economic activity begins to emerge. This can be attested by the following examples. It has been suggested that the epigraphic evidence for the coins in the Deccan region, for the period which roughly starts with the consolidation of the Western Chalukya power in the Deccan and ends with therestoration of the Chalukyan power by the rulers of Kalyana, is not "as

¹Lionel, Dr. Barnett, 10"A", of the region of Somesvara I (AD. 1052-3), EL XVI, 1922, p. 112

²J. F. Fleet, 35, Kelawadi Inscription of the time of Somesvara I" (A.D. 1053, EI, IV, 1898, p 261

³RN. Nandi, op. cit., 1984, p 25.

⁴Ibid, pp. 40-49, and G.R., Kuppuswamy, op. cit. 1975, pp. 56-57

profuse as they are from the later Chalukyan period onwards”⁵ and this is a significant characteristic of an Urban economy; we have several instances of wages in gold being mentioned. Thus, in an early 11th century A.D. grant of Jayasimha II, we have the grant being made in terms of “50 gadyans of gold”.⁶ We have another instance of an early 12th century AD. grant in which “ten gadyanas of gold is granted out of an impost “.⁷ Further, we have mention of several instances of cash taxes, such as sulka, vadda-ravulda, perjumka and so on, mentioned along with various categories of tax officials associated with the collection of dues in an urban-like setting. We also have mention of a few guilds of both artisans and merchants. These are the sresthi, nakhara, nanadesi, which have all been explained as merchant guilds and such other artisanal guilds as 120 kottali, kalkutiga gottali, kamchagarara gottali. Thus, the data in hand is indicative of growth of a relatively urbanized economy from an earlier chiefly rural setting. We find that most of the urban activity begins to be centered around the Brahmanical temples which emerged as the focal points of marketing and trading activities and the commercial groups now begin to seek validation by participating in gift giving and temple management functions. Their status was hardly different from that of the agricultural groups, for they were “agriculturists now taking to trade”.⁸ Thus we find that the change in the land tenurial structures significantly brought into being new operational factors in the economy which in their turn, brought about change in the nature of dominant social groups and the groups dependent upon them. Gradually the former began to interest themselves in the changed economic activity of the time, namely, the commercial activities. “The agrarian nexus of the commercial groups was, however, never lost as it remained the chief source of surplus appropriation”.⁹

The socio-economic change that took place, would not have been possible without the political and ideological patronage it enjoyed through various means. The social groups involved in the administration of the period have been either, described in terms of “a part of the centralized bureaucratic structure by the conventional historian”¹⁰ or, in terms of a decentralized bureaucracy, trying to entrench themselves at the grassroot levels by the Marxist scholars. It was primarily the dominant social groups, located chiefly at the local and supra local levels which formed an integral part of the political power structure of the early medieval eastern Deccan. The landlords at the local level were able to exercise a great control over the population of their localities, by virtue of their ownership of land and the subsequent involvement in the local power structure. In this context, we have an interesting example of the term 'mahattara' which has not been interpreted as functionary of the State. The very fact that this term has been interpreted as denoting an elder of a village or, a family goes to indicate that the mahattara with strong local kin ties must have occupied a locally powerfully position by virtue of his ownership of landed property, which accorded him both political and social status. This goes to explain the reason why he was elected or selected as member of the village council. According to R. S.Sharma, the term 'mahattara' was elevated at the cost of the other sections of the rural population and they provided a “suitable base for the recruitment of higher functionaries and for the growth of feudalism under the Rashtrakuta rulers”.¹¹

⁵B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Coins and Currency System in South India A.D. 225, 1300*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 118.

⁶Lionel, d. Barnett, 38 "A" "Of the Reign of Jayasimha II (A.D. 1022) 4, XIX, p. 224.

⁷J.F. Fleet, XXXIII, "Western Chalukaya Grant of Jagadekamalla" (AD 1139-40), IA, VI, p.141

⁸R. Champakalaksmi, "Urbanization in south India: The Role of Ideology and polity", Presidential Address, Section 1, PIHC, 47th Session, Srinagar, 1986, p.20.

⁹A.S. Altekar, *Rashtrakutas and their Times*, Poona, 1934, K.R. Basavaraja, *Administration Under the Chalukyas of Kalyana*, Madras, 1983.

¹⁰A.S. Altekar, *Rashtrakutas and their Times*, Poona, 1934, K.R. Basavaraja, *Administration Under the Chalukyas of Kalyana*, Madras, 1983

¹¹RS Sharma, op. cit., 1980, p. 85. 126, JF. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, Oxford, 1975, p4

This can be further substantiated through the way in which the functionaries at the village level itself are described with the use of various terms as urodeya, perggade, gavunda, nal-gavunda, ur-gavunda, gramakuta and so on. Use of these different terms indicate various levels of power held by the rural groups and this in turn, shows the stratified nature of society at the local level and further, it is significant to note here that all these terms are described in the context of the grants, or as their protectors and witness and also, as builders of temples. These evidences best exemplify our contention that the prominent position in the political power structure was acquired by the dominant social groups their control of the landed property. Dominance exercised over the peasant groups, by a few peasants during this period in the Western Deccan region can be partly related to a certain extent to the geography of the region. "Owing to the nature of region, it may be surmised that the necessity to have irrigation facilities must have arisen".¹² There are several examples of the "grants of lands being made for the upkeep of tanks", etc.¹³ This is indicative of irrigation facilities being managed and controlled by the dominant sections of the village community.

It was these social groups which entrenched themselves in terms of local and supra-local elite and were integrated into the state structure of the period. Around 9th century A.D. We have interesting evidence of "a mahasamantadhipati belonging to the Rashtrakuta dynasty, emerging subsequently as a maharajadhiraja"¹⁴ thus establishing dynastic control over the area by overthrowing the earlier ruler.

It was essential for these newly emerging dynastic powers to have a tenacious support of the locally powerful groups in order to, on the one hand, establish their sovereignty over the area conquered and on the other, to fight wars for extending their control over neighbouring fertile tracts. Constant wars were fought by the main ruling families of the Western Deccan region in order to gain the fertile tracts of the Eastern Deccan namely, Vengi or, to get hold of the Kaveri delta in the extreme South. Thus, the Chalukya rulers of Badami were involved in battles with the Pallava and the Pandya rulers of the extreme south and on the other hand, held several campaigns against the Vishnukundin rulers of the Eastern Deccan. "After conquering the latter, the Chalukyas of Badami even succeeded in founding a dynastic line of their own in the Vengi region."¹⁵ The Rashtrakuta rulers of Malkhed were in a similar way involved in the battles with the Chalukya rulers of Vengi and the Chola rulers of the extreme South, "whom they succeeded in subduing several times and extended their sway over the these region".¹⁶ Similarly, Chalukyas of Kalyani were involved in battles with the Cholas of the extreme south and the rulers of Vengi. "These urges of the rulers to gain vast fertile tracts can be linked up chiefly to the geographical configuration of their core areas in the Western Deccan, which was largely a plateau area"¹⁷ devoid of vast tracts of fertile land to enable a constant flow of agrarian surplus required to maintain the ruling strata.

Vengi region, on the other hand, lying between the Godavari and Krishna deltas was "extremely fertile and was frequently the bone of contention between the plateau kingdoms of the Western Deccan and the coastal kingdoms of the East who had desire to control the entire water way."¹⁸

¹²J.F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, Oxford, 1975, p. 4

¹³Ibid, p.7

¹⁴S.K. Dikshit(ed), "4" "Elora Plates of Dantidurga" (A.Da CXXI, "Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions, IA. XI

¹⁵129. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Madras, 1976, (4th Edition) p. 163.

¹⁶Ibid, pp, 158-150

¹⁷Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas*, Delhi, 1986, p 13

¹⁸Ashok Shetter, "Aspects of Agricultural Expansion in Early Medieval Southern Karnataka K. Veerathappan (ed), *Studies in Karnataka History and Culture* (Proceedings, vol. II, of the Karnataka History Congress), Mysore, 1987

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