

CC-5: HISTORY OF INDIA(CE 750-1206)

III. AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

(D). TRIBES AS PEASANTS AND THEIR PLACE IN THE VARNNA ORDER

The India society during the Early Medieval period i.e., the period between 700 to 1200 CE witnessed a lot of changes take place in the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of the life of the people. There were political fragmentation which brought about some crisis in the socio-cultural life of the people. Trading of commodities also faced some serious set back during this time. Changes in the economic life of the people forced a majority of them to turn to agriculture for subsistence. The creation of feudal society created land rights and power bases. There was a sharp distinction between the landholding class and the landless class of peasants who tilled the lands granted to the Brahmanas as a part of the land grants in the feudal social system. More and more land grants contributed to the expansion of agriculture in this period. The Brahmana donees did not cultivate then lands themselves, rather they employed people to do the cultivation works on their land. This system created the separate classes of landlords and peasants who were both dependent on each other but it was the peasants who had face the oppression at the hand of the landlords. Another noteworthy feature of this period was the proliferation of caste, division of the people based on the system of varna-jati which was decided based on both birth and profession. In this social system the Brahmanas enjoyed the most prestigious position in the society and at the lowest level of the social order we find the sudras, and the untouchables.

Along with the Sudras and the untouchables the people belonging to the tribal groups or communities were also placed in the lowest social order. In order to include the tribal people in the varna –jati system of the society they were hired

by the land owning class of people as peasants to work on their lands. Thus there was peasantization of the tribes for them to be included in the varna-jati framework.

The tribal peoples followed pastoralism as the method of subsistence. There was a subtle movement of the tribe towards the settled way of life. Expansion of agriculture and increase in the number of land grants and moreover including forest lands in the land grants brought about certain changes in their life. In areas where Brahmadeya villages were situated close to tribal communities the latter was introduced to plough agriculture. The tribal communities who got incorporated in the agrarian society have to absorb their tribal identity in to some sort of caste in the then prevalent varna-jati caste system. This new assimilation of the tribal groups of people into the social structure made the position of the tribal communities very fragile . As a result of this inclusion, the tribal people had to take up certain works for their livelihood. Whatever work they decided to do or rather was allowed to do in a society where the lowest rank of people faced the maximum amount of oppression, decided what caste they will belong to. Mostly these tribal communities were given the work and status of the peasants in the Early Medieval agrarian society.
