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Economic and Cultural Transition of Early Medieval India

Economic Condition:

In this era too farming attained its utmost position. The more land were granted the more they were included under cultivation. Agriculture played a vital role in emergence of numerous provincial states. During this time agriculture trade and commerce were in a good condition and the production was also on large scale. The land of the state was divided into four parts on the basis of fertility such as urvaraka, banjar, khilya and maru. Maximum irrigations were done through Rahata. Artificial lakes were also one of the main sources of irrigation. Numerous Arab travelers of 9th-10th century have mentioned about the flourishing agriculture and various types of crops and fruits being cultivated in India. But the normal producing class did not possess good condition. In South India the local bodies were well organized which provided a strong base to the agriculture and the producing class and also helped in large scale production. Thus, these local bodies played a vital role in the economy of the villages.

Textile Industries:

The industries of this period were well developed. With the intermixing of cotton and wool a new form of clothes named 'Kausheya' were made. In the various parts of India woolen and cotton clothes were manufactured on a large scale. Main centers of cotton production in India were Gujarat, Multan, Kalinga, Bengal and Malwa. Silk was also produced in India on a large scale.

Shreni System:

Trade and commerce were carried out by the organizations of the Shrenis. There were various separate organizations of the weavers, potters, gardeners, carpenters, goldsmith, etc. The wages of these artists were based on their skills. The heads of the Shrenis were known as the 'Mahattars'. Similar to North India on South India too the traders were organized into the Shrenis. The first Manigramam was indulged in both land and maritime trade from 9th-13th century. Various Christians were also the members of these Shrenis. Various Ashramas and monasteries received charity from these Shrenis. This depicts that these Shrenis acted as the banking units or the public trusts.

Development in Industries, trade and commerce:

Internal trade was carried out through inland as well as maritime routes but not much information is available about the trade of the time. International maritime trade was carried out with eastern and western countries. Inland trade was carried out with China via Tibet. In 10th century the trade with the Arab countries and Central Asian countries was carried out via Deval, Kabul, Kandhar, etc. Few important ports in western India were Deval, Cambay, Thana, Sopara, etc. on the eastern frontier Tamraparni was an important port. In southern India Malabar was the famous Port. In South-eastern frontier Mabar(Madura) was the famous port for import and export. The commodities of export were- sandalwood, camphor, clove, coconut, various ayurvedic medicines, pepper, itra, etc. the commodities imported consisted of- horses of good breed, wines, dates, silk from China, etc.

Role of temples in generating economy:

The temples played vital role in generating economy. During the reign of Pallavas and Cholas the rulers, traders and the aristocrats donated a huge sum of gold, silver as well as land and villages to the temples. This also led to increase in the number of priests and caretakers of the temples. These workers were initially given grains and later lands. Evidences of loans given by temples to the villages and traders are also available of that time. Thus, these huge wealth in the temples later made the temples as trading units.

Thus, the economic condition of India during that period was prosperous. India was a rich and prosperous country due to its agriculture, trade and commerce. But these wealth was concentrated in the hands of the rulers, aristocrats and temples thus, there was economic disparity between the rich and the common class.

Cultural Transition:

The period between 500A.D-1200A.D is called as the phase of transition because there was transformation in each and every aspect of society, the old system was replaced by the new one, the way we see social and economic transition similarly cultural transition also took place. The political and commercial relation with the Arabs also led to the cultural intermixing of Arab and India. Thus, this cultural transition took place in almost every part of the society such as:

Institution of Marriage:

In the early medieval India marriages generally took place in the same caste a few evidences of inter-caste marriages were also found. Common public followed the practice of monogamy but polygamy was practiced by the aristocratic class. The practice of widow remarriage was followed by the lower class. The system of Swayamvara was followed by the aristocratic class. Child marriage was also prevalent. The Arab travelers Alberuni mentions that the hindus married at very young age. Generally the girls were married at the age of 12 years.

Foods:

There were two categories of people vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The system of food continued in the same way as it was prior to early medieval India. The Arab traveler Suleman mentions that rice was famous among the Indians and they did not prefer wheat. There were huge numbers of coconut trees in the sea shore of Southern India. Numerous fruits such as grapes, groundnuts, oranges, pomegranates, mangoes, lemons, etc were produced in large number. The food was eaten and prepared in a very hygienic and pious manner. In India society a culture of eating Tambul and betel nuts was prevalent. The person who sold betel nuts was called as Tambulika. The Brahmins did not eat flesh. In the hindu society those who avoided eating flesh were appreciated. The practice of drinking wines was

also prevalent from a long time ago. Though the smriti writers prohibited wines for the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas.

Clothes and Attires:

There were various different attires of both male and females. A few clothes such as Dukul, Uttariya and Adhowas. Males also wore Turban. The females wore Nivivadh and Ghaghra. Numerous clothes were weaved such as- turiya, tantu, vem, soma, shalakar, etc. In early medieval India pajamas was prevalent along with the kurtas(kurtan) and turban(ushniya). The practice of wearing upanah i.e shoes was also prevalent.

Amusement:

Games and amusements is prevalent in the Indian society from a very long time ago. Various outdoor games such as horse riding, hunting, wrestling, etc were carried out. Theatre and drama was also organized in order to entertain the public. Birds were also kept as pets for entertainment. The game of dice and chess were most famous among the indoor games. The kids played with dolls. Rangpuja was organized in which Goddess Saraswati was worshipped. In early medieval India dancing, singing, music and theater occupied an important place. Various musical instruments such as veena, nagara, etc were played. Thus, various mediums of entertainments were used by people as per their interest.

Famous beliefs and superstitions:

The early medieval India was the phase of revival of Brahmanism and decline of Buddhism and Jainism. Shankaracharya spread his ideology of Adwaitvad. The rulers who followed Shaivism built numerous shaiva temple. The Lingayat sect gained huge popularity in Southern India. These people worshipped lord Shiva. These had firm belief in tantricism, spirits, and black magic. During this phase women in the family were highly respected. A woman with open hair were considered as a sign of omen. Banyan tree was considered as the abode of God. People also believed in life after death.

Thus, early medieval India witnessed a huge cultural and economic transition where the previous practices and systems were replaced by new ones which made it an era of change and transformations.