LAND, STATE AND THE ELITES IN *MĀLAVA* (C.400 TO 600 CE)

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the interrelation of land, state and the elites. Since fifth century CE, we find the expansion of state polity in pre-state area. With the expansion of state, brahmanical ideology was introduced in society. Further, we see the proliferation of land grants and emergence of subordinate ruler under the Gupta realm. land grants led the emergence of brāhmaṇas as landed elites. Within the timeframe of c. 400-600 CE, this essay shows the rise of political elites, landed elites and how state polity in Mālava was affected by the symbiosis of two elite groups.

Keywords: *Land, State, Elites, Mālava, Economy, Polity*

Introduction

Land donations were a known practice in early India but we see a steep rise in land donations from fifth century onwards. This donation practice brought changes in societal and political system; and those grants are a marker of significant changes in socio-political landscape of that period. During the Gupta regime, land donation process came to be a part of the political process. Most of the time, *brāhmaṇas* got the land donations and gradually the sacred institutions like temples and monasteries became the beneficiary of the grants. A perusal of copper plate inscriptions also tells us that the Brahmannical codes were introduced in the contents of land grant charters, especially in the admonitory part of the grant. We can also see the incorporation of didactic part of *Mahābhārata* in land grants. Since the fifth century CE, political powers also used the land donations to expand their territory and hold control over the region. This is very much prominent in Mālava (Malwa) area. Historically this area remained at the centre of political interest

to the rulers. The geographical location of Mālava also helped to get attention of the political rulers. During the *Guptas*, political structure went through a change especially due to the rise of regional and sub-regional powers. Those newly emerged political elites frequently donated land mostly to the *brāhmaṇas* either individually or as a group and thus created a landed elite class. We also find that lands were also given to various temples and those temples were administered by the *brāhmanas*. Temples or more precisely their administrators also enjoyed the special status in terms of economic and administrative powers on the donated lands. Based on that, we can say that the brahmannical temples also emerged as elite institutions in society or to be very specific, landed elites. The inter-linkage between land grants and expansion of state is unmistakable and hitherto land grant played the role of political weapon in expansion of state society. Land donations also expanded the agrarian economy in different area including the forest zone. Due the course of expansion of agrarian economy, the brahmannical norms were also introduced in non-brahmannical society and *brāhmanas* ruled over the area as local power within the structure of state polity. The year 400 CE can be marked as a mature phase of *Gupta* rule and the brahmannical influence was clear on the polity and society. The next two hundred years are very much important and played a crucial role in forming socio-economic and political shape of the early medieval period. This period marked as watershed in Indian history. This essay has tried to understand the interrelation of land, state and the elites and situating that relation into socio-political and economic process.

Guptas were the first to gain attention of the colonial historians as they tried to find a centralized empirical polity during *Gupta* rule. Vincent Smith took an interest in Guptas from their military campaign. He tried to find the ingredients of European empire in the *Guptas* and mentioned *Samudra gupta* as 'Napoleon of India' (Smith 1908: 265-83). Allahabad pillar inscription of *Samudra gupta* describes his political campaigns thus especially attracted the colonial historians. This inscription also mentions to two powers (*Gaṇasaṃgha*), *Mālavas and Sanakānikas* as well as some forest kingdoms or chiefdoms *(āṭavikas)* as his subordinates. (Fleet 1888: 1-17).

Further, Nationalist historians like R.C. Majumder and others took this idea forward. Majumder went a step forward by claiming that *Samudra gupta* was much more successful than Napoleon They also projected the *Guptas* as an imperial power of the ancient past and the ruling period of the *Guptas*, mentioned as 'Classical Age' by them. *Gupta* rule experienced various cultural developments in Sanskrit literature, art and architectural establishment (Majumder 1954: 145). S.R Goyal also described the 'unification of Gupta Empire' in the light of Allahabad pillar inscription (Goyal 1967: 128-67).

During the first two decades after the independence, historical studies in India took a leap forward due to the Marxist school. Firstly, D.D. Kosambi set the feudalism debate and later R.S. Sharma introduced the idea of 'Indian Feudalism' (Sharma 1990). Sharma found the feudal ingredients during the *Gupta* rule especially in land grants. According to him, frequent land grants, decentralization of power, giving up fiscal and administrative rights and brahmanization of society were the key to the feudal society. Sharma identified the *brāhmaṇas* and religious institutions 'as the agent of parcelization of sovereignty of the state'.(Kulke & Sahu 2018: 216). However, the idea of 'Indian Feudalism' faced much criticism from various historians, but it is acceptable that the land grants definitely played a pivotal role in forming polity since the middle of first millennium CE.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Herman Kulke later formulated the idea of 'integrative state' (Kulke and Sahu 2018: 211-8; Chattopadhyaya 2018: 190-231). Chattopadhyaya brought political process, state formation and economy together. Especially he introduced the idea of expansion of state society through the process of local state formation and cult appropriation and integration played crucial role in this process. He shows that how bigger power integrated elites from local social groups. In opposition to the feudal state model, Chattopadhyaya find the presence of 'autonomous spaces' in land grant charters where the bigger

power conferred the power to exercise autonomy to the local elite groups. (Chattopadhyaya 2008: 135-52). Recently, Ashish Kumar also developed the idea of subordination of the local rulers under *Guptas*. He specifically emphasized on the *Mālava* territory during the *Guptas* and showed how the *Gupta* kings chose their subordination according to their political interest. (Kumar 2017)

Before elucidating the relationship between land, state and the elite groups in *Mālava*, we should understand the geographical space of this territory. *Mālava* owned a trade route, which served as a corridor between the north-west India and Deccan as well as the hinterland of the trading and mercantile activities of Arabian Sea. *Mālava* area is also fed by many rivers like Narmada, Chambal, Betwa, Sipra and their many tributaries. (Bhattacharyya 1977: xvi-iii) These features have made *Mālava* rich from both the agriculture and trade. Due to these features, *Mālava* had played a critical role in political activities too. The Buddhist text, *Anguttara Nikāya* states about sixteen *Mahājanapadas* or *Solasa Mahājanapada* and *Avantī* was one of them. Jaina *Bhagavatī sūtra* gives us the list of sixteen *Mahājanapadas* which is slightly different from the Buddhist text and the Jaina text refers one *Mahājanapada*, *Mālava* (Raychaudhuri 1996: 85-134). H.C Raychaudhuri opined that *Mālava* is identical with *Avantī*. *Avantī* corresponds to the *Ujjayinī* together with a part of Narmada valley from *Māndhātā* to *Maheśvara* and adjoining districts (Raychaudhuri 1996: 85-134).

Guptas extended their territory in central India but *Mālava* was under the *Śakas* as their seat of power was *Ujjayinī*. *Vākāṭakas* also tried to put their control over this area but *Samudra gupta* defeated *Rudradeva,* identified as *Śaka* king *Rudrasena III*. (Raychaudhuri 1996: 85-134) Beside the *Guptas*, *Vākāṭakas* also established their dominance over the adjoining area of *Mālava*. This conflict also led to the emergence of the subordinate powers in this area as the bigger powers tried to control the region through the subordination of power. We find different names of the small rulers and dynasties in this area. Those powers proclaimed their loyalty, either to the *Guptas* or to the *Vākāṭakas*, but administered their royal powers independently.

Towards the end of Gupta rule, many regional and sub-regional powers rose into prominence and became independent. The process of emergence of these powers leads me to call them as 'Neo-Political Elites', a term which I cannot resist using in this context. The term, 'elite' means a group of people considered superior in a particular society or organization and 'elitism' as a belief that a society or system should be run by an elite (Oxford 2003: 463). However, historical context of elites and elitism go beyond this literal meaning. Elitism always remained a part of political structure in early India but the notion of elitism took a specific shape in terms of brahmannical ideology. Since the inception of *Gupta* and *Vākāṭaka* kingdom, we find the brahmannical ideology emerged as the key stone of polity and brahmannical social order became tantamount to the elitism. Thus, emergence of *brāhmaṇas* as landed and social elite is incontrovertible. With the expansion of monarchical polity and state society, this elitism entrenched into buffer and peripheral zones of the bigger kingdoms.

After the weakening of the bigger kingdoms, emergence of these subordinate rulers has been characterized by Hermann Kulke as political development 'from below' (Kulke 1978: 125-38). Thus, the subordinates emerged as independent using the absence of the bigger rulers. Kulke has demonstrated how sub-regional powers conceived their nuclear area, which went on to become homeland of the regional powers. Kulke also shows that independent or nominally subjugated kings or local chiefs organised their sub-regional powers according to the brahmannical laws (Kulke 1978: 125-38). As regards the societal position of *brāhmana*, Kulke termed them as 'social elite' who had tremendous influence on 'inner colonization of nuclear area and royal court' (Kulke 1978: 125-38). The same thing can be perceived in the case of subordinates of the *Guptas* and the *Vākāṭakas* and they followed the brahmannical codes when emerged as independent rulers. These rulers were much more active in political cultures and framing the polity along with expansion of state society. It indicates that those rulers never confined in only social or courtly activities rather they emerged as an agent of expanding polity and filled up the vacuum of

the political hierarchy in state society. These newly emerged rulers also used the pompous epithets like *'Mahārāja'* or *'Mahāsāmanta'*. It also indicates the imitation of culture from the bigger powers as we see the usage of royal epithets like *'Parama-bhaṭṭāraka'* by the Gupta kings. These newly emerged rulers used these epithets and practiced elitist culture, especially the land donations and conferring administrative and economic power to the donees.

Emergence of these 'neo political elites' in central India is traced back to during the reign of *Samudra Gupta*. Bagh Copper plates tell about the *Valkhā* rulers who submitted their loyalty to the *Guptas* (Ghosh 2015). Among the Bagh copperplates, we find the charters of *Bhulunda* who was the ruler of Valkhā area (Ramesh et. al.1990: 1-13). The name *'Bhulunda'* denotes his non-brahmannical origin as the word seems to be non-sanskritised. We do not have enough information on *Valkhā* and its political structure. Therefore, it would not be rational to identify them as a *'āṭavika'* referred in Allahabad Pillar inscription but the perusal of the land grants indicates that it was a pre-state society before the Gupta influences. In his inscriptions, *Bhulunda* proclaimed his loyaty towards the *Guptas (Paramabhaṭṭāraka-padanudhyāyata)* and referred himself as *'Mahārāja'*. *'Paramabhaṭṭāraka'* was a common epithet, used by *Gupta* kings (Ramesh et.al 1990: 1-13). The term, *'Mahārāja'* also indicates the emergence of monarchical polity and kings often used this epithet. As we can see earlier, *Valkhā* seemed to be a pre-state society and *Bhulunda* or his predecessors could be autochthonous chiefs. With the expansion of monarchical polity, they came within the contours of state polity thus indicates the emergence and convergence of the local chiefs into sub-regional kings. Not only *Bhulunda* but the later rulers of *Valkhā* also proclaimed their loyalty in a same manner (Ghosh 2015). However *Bhulunda* belonged to a non-brahmannical society, he donated land to the temple of *Nārayanadeva* and other brahmanas as *'devāgrahāra', 'brahmadeya'* etc, even his grant also mentioned the boar incarnation of *Viṣnu* (Ramesh et. al 1990: 1-28). *Bhulunda* also donated land to a temple of *'Bappapiśācadeva'* (Ramesh & Tiwary 1900: 10-4) who can be identified as a local or autochthonous deity. The term, *'piśāca'* is related with the evil spirit worship. This practice is not identical with brahmannical ideology. Further, the word, *'Bappa'* means father or lord (Sircar.1966: 45-6). Surprisingly, we do find the brahmannical rituals were introduced at the temple of *'Bappapiśācadeva'*. This can be termed as 'brahmannical mode of cult appropiation' (Chattopadhyaya 2008: 172-90). Later *Nārayanadeva* or *Viṣnu* became city god by surpassing the autochthonous deity. However, we can also see the *pāśupatas* (one of the popular sect of saivism in central and western India in early period) inside the temple of *Nārayanadeva*, which indicates that the sectarian conflict did not take place due to the patronage of political elites (Ghosh 2015). Probably the sectarian division was not so clear during that time and that is why *Śaiva* ascetics resided at the *Viṣnu* temple. The later rulers of *Bhulunda*, were named as *Svāmidāsa*, *Rudradāsa* which denote the brahmanisation and sanskritisation of the society. Not only that, but the later rulers of *Valkhā* also accelerated the grants towards the *brāhmaṇas* and they clearly mentioned *'brahmadeya'* and *'agrahāra'* in their donative inscriptions. Both the grants, *'brahmadeya'* and *'agrahāra'* were enjoyed by the donee *brāhmaṇas* with the right of cultivation; however, they were not directly related to the agricultural practices. These examples signify the emergence of 'neo political elites' in fourth century CE.

The bigger powers like the *Guptas* and the *Vākāṭakas* also followed the brahmannical code of law in their charters and their subordinates copied that format. Mandasore inscription of *Naravarmaṇa* (404-05 CE) states that the ruler donated a land to one of his administrative officer (Chhabra & Gai 1981: 261-6) whereas we find in Gangdhar inscription of *Viśvavarmaṇa* which records erection of a temple of *Viṣnu*, *Mātṛka* and digging up a well (Fleet 1888: 72). The earlier inscription did not mention any eulogy of the donor unlike the later. This difference attracts our eyes but we do not know the exact reason behind this difference of format. Probably, the former grant was issued at the very early stage of their rise and the culture was not clear to them. Khoh Copper-plates of *Hastin*, ruler of *Parivrājaka* dynasty (475-76 CE)

tells about the donation of a village to a *brāhmaṇa* and it states itself that the object of donation is to step up the ladder to heaven, even this grant also consists the verses from the *Mahābhārata* (Fleet 1888: 93-109). This is a common feature of land grants in fifth century CE onwards that the *anuśāsana parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, didactive portion of the epic was incorported in the content of land grant charters. Since that time, the land grant also referred as '*Mahādāna*'.

This tendency of growing brahmanism can be seen in *Traikūṭaka* land grants in northern Konkan, the area which has very strong connection and cultural exchange with the *Mālwa*. We find Traikūṭakas in northern Konkan or *Aparānta* since fifth century CE. On the numismatic evidence, we can say that the *Indradutta* was the first king of the Traikūṭakas (Gupta 1970: 80). Epigraphic evidences establish *Dahrasena* as first independent king of Traikūāakas (Mirashi 1955: 22-4). In Pardi copper-plates of *Dahrasena* (456-57 CE), he proclaimed himself as a follower of *Bhāgavata* while donating a village to a *brahmana*, *Nannasvāmin* (Mirashi 1955: 22-4). This land grant charter also indicates the migration of the donee *brāhmaṇa* as his earlier residence mentioned in the copperplates. Donated village were also exempted from forced labour *(viṣṭi)* and taxes *(ditya)* These exemptions are evidences of brahmannical code but the donation does not bear any specific term whereas the Surat plates of the *Traikuṭaka* ruler *Vyāghrasena* (489-90 CE) referred his grant to the donee brahmana as '*agrahāra*' (Mirashi 1955: 25-8). The Pardi plates never mentioned the *gotra* of the donee brahman but the Surat plates do so, and we also find the name of an area, '*Purohitapallīka*' which means an area inhibited by the priests or *purohitas*.

Donated lands were exempted from tax and forced labour and even the royal troops, officers were prohibited to enter those villages *(acāṭa-bhāṭa-prabeśya)* except to punish thieves and rebels. Nevertheless, to the close to end of fifth century CE, we see that the donees were allowed to collect tax and revenue from the donated land as well as from the inhabitants. *Subandhu*, the ruler of *Māhiṣmatī* issued a land grant charter (487 CE) (Ghosh 2015) in which the donor conferred the

power of collectiong *Udraṅga* and *Uparikara* to the donee brahamana. From this period, we can see that these two fiscal terms *(Udranga, Uparikara)* were mentioned together. There are no conclusive remarks on the exact meaning of the terms, *Udraṅga* and *Uparikara*. *Udraṅga* is described as 'the fixed tax', 'the land tax', 'the principal tax' or 'the tax on the permanent tenants' (Sircar 1966: 349). The mode of payment of *Udraṅga* was not very specified. However, scholars like D.C Sircar opined that it might have been paid in grains in some regions and *Audraṅgikas* or the collector of *Udraṅga* was mentioned separately from the collector of revenue in cash *(Hiraṇyasamudāyika)* (Sircar 1966: 349). The term *'Uparikara'* is explained as additional taxes or the minor taxes or the tax paid by temporary tenants. Sometimes it is called *'Parikara'* (Sircar 1966: 349). However we can see that the term *'Udraṅga'* was also used in land grants in first half of fifth Century CE. The copper-plate of *Valkhā* ruler Bhaṭṭāraka mentioned the grant with the power of collecting *'Udraṅga' (S-odraṅga)* (Ramesh 1990: 51-3, Ghosh 2015) that means the fiscal term was in use since the early decades of fifth Century CE and later on *Uparikara* was added to that. In Karitalai inscription of Mahārāja *Jayanātha* (493-94 CE), a king belong to *Ucchakalpa* dynasty, also mentions that the donee *brāhmana* was conferred the power of collecting *Udraṅga* and *Uparikara* (Fleet 1888: 112-6). In his Khoh inscription (496-97 CE), *Jayanātha* donated a village where the donee was allowed to collect tax, royalties, gold etc.(Fleet 1888: 118-25) Khoh copper plates of *Sarvanātha* also mentioned the *Udraṅga* and *Uparikara* (Fleet 1888: 125-9). Use of these terms gives an evidence of increasing agricultural expansion and this is further endorsed by the inscriptions of later period as well. Matvan Plates of *Traikūṭaka* king *Madhyamasena* (504-05 CE) mentioned that the donee *brāhmana* would enjoy the gifted land, free from the taxes and forced taxes *(sarva-ditya-viṣṭi-parihīna)* by the *'Bhūmicchidra-nyāya'* (Pandit 2012: 152-70).

Majhgawam copper plate inscription of *Hastin* (510-11 CE) mentioned a grant to a *brāhmana* and the content of this grant consists the verses from the *Mahābhārata* (Fleet 1888: 106-9). The *Anuśāsana parva* of the epic invokes that land grant

is a meritorious duty for a king, which indicates the influence of the brahmannical ideology on the epic. The brahmannical ideology also forbid the confiscation of a land grant and thus it is reflected in the contents of land grant charters Majhgawam copper plates also mentioned that if someone takes away this grant from the donee brahmana, he or she would become a black serpent in next birth (Fleet1888: 106-9). Khoh copper plate of *Sarvanātha* (512-13) mentioned the grant along with the power to collect *Udrañga* and *Uparikara*. The increasing trend of brahmannical ideology can also be seen in Matvan Copper plate of *Vikramasena* (533 CE) (Pandit 2012: 152-70) with an indication of political conflict between the *Traikuṭakas* and a ruler of *Vindhya* area. The in-depth reading of these plates tells us that the donee of this grant is similar to the Matvan plates of *Madhyamasena* and reference of an anonymous ruler of the *Vindhya* area referred as black serpent who takes away the granted land indicate towards a political conflict. It also shows that how landed elites were connected to polity. Majhgawam plate invokes a warning that if someone takes away donated land, he or she will born as a 'black serpent' that allegorically means an inferior birth. . Hence we can correlate the usage of the term 'black searpent' in Matvan plates and it can be said that to mention as an inferior person (probably who did not follow the brahmannical codes) and seems to be applied to the ruler of the *Vindhya* region (Pandit 2012: 152-70).

Donates lands were free from taxes taxes and forced services *(sarva-ditya-viṣṭi-parihīna)* by the *'Bhūmicchidra-nyāya'*. *ditya* was a tax and *viṣṭi* (Sircar 1966: 98, 379) means forced labour which villagers were obliged to provide to the land lords. The term *'Bhūmicchidra-nyāya'* is related to the rent free enjoyment of land by one who brings it under the cultivation for first time. (Sircar 1966: 58) The term *' 'Bhūmicchidra-nyāya'* was based on an old custom of allowing a person who brings a fallow land or a jungle land under the cultivation for first time. It was applied by the principle of rent free land.'. *Brāhmaṇas* or newly emerged landed elites played the role of the agent for expansion of agricultural mode of production as well as the incorporation of the forest land or peripheral zone to the state polity. If we look at the Khoh inscription of *Śaṃkhaśobha* (Fleet 1888: 112-6), it can be seen that he pronounced his inheritance of kingdom including eighteen forest regions. Romila Thapar opined that some rulers owned the *brahma-kṣatriya* status and those regions were granted to his ancestors (Thapar 2002: 290-7). B.D Chattopadhyaya has opined that '*brahma-kṣatriya*' status is quite common in rajput clans where the genealogies claimed a brahmannical descent and later transformed into *kṣatriyas*. Sometimes it is referred to someone who is offspring of a *Brāhmaṇa* father and *Kṣatriya* mother. (Chattopadhyaya 2018: 59-92). However, it could also be possible that the ancestors of *Parivrājaka* king *Śaṃkhaśobha* won those areas and brought them under the state polity.

We get numerous references where the donee mentioned that donation as maxim of wasteland. Introducing agricultural activities also produced revenue though Romila Thapar opined that these grants did not produce revenue for the state but it allowed shuffling of revenue at local level. We can find that agriculture was directly forbidden to the *brāhmaṇas* as their occupation but that did not prevent them to supervise the agricultural activities (Thapar 2001: 290-7). *Brāhmanas* also influenced the polity to ensure their interest and therefore state declared those grants would be inherited to the descendants of the original donees. It also indicates that the state did not want to disrupt any settled economic system by confiscating the grant after the death of donee or any other reason. It is also evident from the grants that state donated lands, wastelands, or the forestlands, which were the 'peripheral' zone to the state, to the *brāhmaṇas* to expand agrarian economy. Besides reclamation the wastelands, donating lands to the members belong to highest stratum of society also earned social prestige to the newly emerged royal powers, specifically who did not have illustrious genealogies (Nath 2000: 411-40). This idea resembles the Kautilyan thoughts of *Janapadaniveśa* or the creation of villages. *Arthaśāstra* strongly recommends that the creation of new agrarian settlement through the land donations to the *brāhmaṇas*. *Arthaśāstra* states that land should be given to those who perform sacrificial rituals, learing Vedas and priests. Even

it also refers the village population including the cultivators belong to *Śūdras*. We frequently find the same philosophy in land grant charters where donees were referred as learned vedic scholars or priest etc (Shamasastry 1951: 45-8).

We see that state gave some administrative and fiscal powers to the donees however, administrative powers were 'except to punish thieves and rebels'. Probably, it was a protective measure to prevent any uprising against the newly emerged rulers. *Arthaśāstra* also advised that an ideal king should protect the village from thieves or robbers and the taxes should be exempted for someone who makes the land cultivable for first time (Shamasastry 1951: 45-8). Chammak copper plates of *Vakāṭaka* king *Pravarasena II* imposed obligations on the recipients *brāhmaṇas* that they do not conspire against the king or kingdom or not to wage war against the kingdom or any other village (Sharma 1990: 1). Decentralization of political structure, since fourth century, can be seen in the process of land donation coupled with the fiscal and administrative immunities. Here are the indications of virtual absence of state apparatus for which the donee, the local bodies or the religious institutions became autonomous.

In this context, the concept of 'autonomous space' becomes relevant. The term 'autonomous space' (Chattopadhyaya 2008: 135-52) can be defined as a geographical area within the periphery of the state with some sort of autonomy of the elite groups without revolting against the ruler. Epigraphic evidences show us that most of the time, *brāhmaṇas* were given autonomy to introduce 'code of law' in the granted villages. He shows us that from *Guptas* and subsequent period onwards, orthodox *brāhmaṇas* tried to represent ancient Indian political thoughts, closely connected with rationalistic conceptions as an integral part of brahmanism (Chattopadhyaya 2008: 135-52). The epigraphic evidences show us that decentralization of political structure and 'virtual absence' of state apparatus led the emergence of local institutions and rulers gave the administrative and fiscal autonomy to those institutions. We see that many temples got the grant from rulers even the temple authority were allowed to collect taxes as a local landlord. We have

also seen either any individual *brāhmaṇa* or a group of *brāhmaṇas* were also allowed to exercise the autonomy. *'Charter of Viṣṇuṣena',* named after the *Maitraka* ruler, *Viṣṇuṣena*, who ruled over Kathiawar region around 592 CE. This charter was issued as *'ācara-sthiti-patra'* and it contains some codes and decrees to the guild with conferring some power that was applicable locally.(Weise & Das 2019: 40-133). As *Mālava* played as a hinterland to the Kathiawar region, this charter and the role of merchants became relevant to this study. The term, *'ācara-sthiti-patra'* is explained as issuing of any decree or regulation regarding customary laws. The term *'sthiti-patra'* is related the charter of customary laws or record of any decision. Sometime the terms like *'ācara-patra'* is also used as synonymous to the term *'ācara-sthiti-patra'* (Sircar 1966: 4). This charter was issued to the merchant guild or the *'vaniggrama'* with seventy-two types of rules and regulations and some sort of autonomy inside the mentioned area (Weise & Das 2019: 47-133). We also get the reference of *'sthiti-patraka'* in later period too and B.D Chattopadhyaya related it to the term *'Samvit-samāgat'* which correspondents the *Manusaṃhita* (Chattopadhyaya 2008: 135-52). The term *sthiti* is thus taken as the 'mutual agreement or contract' or 'document recording the fixed decisions of a corporate body'. Chattopadhyaya elucidated this term in describing the 'autonomous space' in early India. (Chattopadhyaya 2008)

Granting land to the *brahmanas* also had a political perspective. The notion 'legitimation' in political system was not new but came into prominence towards decline of the powers like the *Guptas* and the *Vākāṭakas* and rise of monarchial states. After the decline of bigger kingdoms, many local chiefs rose to the rank of kings and newly emerged kings needed legitimate power by the *brāhmaṇas*. Richard Solomon observed that since *Gupta* period, genealogy and eulogy of the donor introduced in copperplate inscriptions and even often elaborated and took great portion in charters (Solomon 1998: 115-6). This was an integral part of legitimating which endorsed the 'neo political elites' right to rule over an area. For this purpose, they created a group of beneficiary by donating villages to the *brāhmanas* for acquiring the

support. However, we see the patronage towards the merchants in different copper plates. We have the references of merchant guild or *'vaniggrama'* in around Kathiawar in the very early years of sixth century CE but merchant guild referred in the later charter, was much organized in nature. (Chakravarti 2019: 25-7, 277-87). Ranabir Chakravarti opined that through the merchant guild a few hamlets which were probably of non-agrarian in nature, transformed into state society and in that case, merchants were no less effective agent of the state than the *brāhmaṇas*. (Chakravarti 2019: xv-i).

From the above discussion, we can see that the land character formed the concept of elite groups. As the *Mālava* had both rural and urban settlement, *Brāhmaṇas* became the landed elites in rural area and played the role of an agent for expanding agriculture and state society whereas the hamlets and non-agrarian area observed the emergence of merchants as elites. State patronized both the elite groups and autonomy were given as per state's interest. We also see that the exercise of autonomy drove the society to produce surplus production. Charter of *Viṣṇuṣena* also tells us that the guild heads were permitted to employ labours as per needs as well as they were asked to release those labours during the crop harvesting season. Probably the state did not want to hamper either trade or agriculture for the sake of balanced economy. In later period, co-existence of both elite groups became much evident in *Mālava.*

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