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## CHAPTER 10

# Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Ancient and Early Medieval India

*Upinder Singh\**

**T**he ancient Indian Brāhmaṇa is an enigmatic figure. This is to some extent due to the frequent confusion between the ideal Brāhmaṇa as he is presented in texts of the Brāhmaṇical tradition, and the Brāhmaṇa as he lived out his life in the real world. In the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas appear as seers (*ṛṣis*), composers of hymns and as sacrificial priests.<sup>1</sup> The Brāhmaṇa of the Dharmaśāstras stands distinctive and resplendent at the pinnacle of the *varṇa* order, embodying qualities of virtue and learning. These texts speak of the six duties (*ṣaḍ-dharma*) of the Brāhmaṇa—performing sacrifices for himself, performing sacrifices for others, studying, teaching, offering gifts and receiving gifts.<sup>2</sup>

The Brāhmaṇa in the real world was more versatile than his *sāstric* counterpart, a fact that the Dharmaśāstras do not succeed in concealing. It is clear that Brāhmaṇas pursued different vocations from early times and that they did not form a homogeneous social group. The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* states that if a Brāhmaṇa could not maintain himself by pursuing the prescribed vocations, he should maintain himself by doing the work of a Kṣatriya, and if this was not possible, by pursuing the vocations of a Vaiśya.<sup>3</sup> However, such departures from the norm were supposed to be a last resort in time of dire emergency and were not considered entirely respectable. The *Manusmṛiti* includes the following among those who should not be invited to a *śrāddha*—Brāhmaṇas who are thieves, outcastes, eunuchs, or atheists; temple priests; paid servants of a village or of a king; those who do not maintain the sacred fire; those who neglect the five great sacrifices (*pañca-mahāyajña*); those who teach for a stipulated fee and are taught on that condition; those who instruct Śūdra pupils and those who are taught by a Śūdra; those who subsist by astrology; those who constantly ask favours; and those who live by tending cattle or by agriculture.<sup>4</sup> In the Buddhist *Jātakas*, we encounter Brāhmaṇa caravan-guards, farmers, animal-herders, hawkers, carpenters, snake-charmers, carriage-drivers and wheel-makers.<sup>5</sup> Ancient Indian history is replete with specific examples of Brāhmaṇa kings, administrative and military officials, warriors, bards, astrologers, philosophers, poets, dramatists, and land-owners. It is the last of these that is of interest to us here, because it is the role of Brāhmaṇa as land-

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owner that lies at the root of the phenomenon of Brāhmaṇa settlements in ancient India, a role that sometimes overlapped with some of the other ones.

The proliferation of Brāhmaṇa settlements is often associated with royal land grants, particularly those of the early medieval period. However, the origins of such settlements actually go back to a much earlier period, and not all Brāhmaṇa settlements were *brahmadeyas* (land gifted to Brāhmaṇas, generally by kings). Apart from this distinction, we can differentiate between Brāhmaṇa settlements on other grounds as well. There were some in which one or a small number of Brāhmaṇas were the major landholders and others that were inhabited by a large number of Brāhmaṇa landholders. In both cases, Brāhmaṇas exercised dominant control over land. The position of dominance was in many cases achieved as a result of grants made by kings, but it could also be due to grants by others, and was sometimes a result of the Brāhmaṇa's own initiative.

#### THE HISTORY OF BRĀHMAṆA SETTLEMENTS: LITERARY AND EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The early history of Brāhmaṇa settlements is reflected entirely in ancient texts, while the later phase is reflected in literature and inscriptions. Royal grants of land to Brāhmaṇas can be traced back to later Vedic texts. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* suggests that the king should give a gift of a thousand pieces of gold, a field, and cattle to the Brāhmaṇa who anoints him. And yet, the same texts tells us that when king Viśvakarman Bhauvana sought to make a gift of land as sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) to his Brāhmaṇa priest Kaśyapa on such an occasion, he was admonished for doing so by the Earth herself, on the grounds that no mortal should give her away.<sup>6</sup>

In the Brāhmaṇical tradition, ambivalence soon made way for wholehearted approval and repeated exhortations to kings to make gifts of land to Brāhmaṇas. In a perceptive statement in the Dānadharma section of the Anuśāsana Parva of the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira that Brāhmaṇas can deify those who are not gods and can dethrone existing gods; they are the king-makers, and only that king who enjoys their favour can hope to remain king.<sup>7</sup> The Dānadharma Parva refers to three major types of gifts—the gift of gold (*hiraṇya-dāna*), the gift of cattle (*go-dāna*) and the gift of land (*prthvī-dāna*). Out of all these, the gift of land is described as the best. The earth is the source of jewels, animals, and grain, hence it is superior to all others items of *dāna*.<sup>8</sup> The Dharmaśāstras and Purāṇas likewise extol the gift of land to Brāhmaṇas and promise fame in this world and happiness in the world to come to those who bestow gifts on worthy Brāhmaṇas.<sup>9</sup>

The earliest reference suggesting that some of the Brāhmaṇa settlements established by means of royal grants enjoyed tax exemptions and privileges comes from the *Arthaśāstra*. Kauṭilya recommends that the king should grant land to the *ṛtvig*, *ācārya*, *purohita* (Brāhmaṇa priests, perceptors and royal chaplains), and *śrotṛiyas* (Brāhmaṇas learned in the Vedas), and that these gifts should be exempt from fines and taxes and should be inherited by the heirs of the beneficiaries.<sup>10</sup> The Dharmaśāstras include Brāhmaṇas among those who should be exempt from the payment of taxes, and they also extol the merit of

royal gifts of land to them. But, it is only in the *Byhaspati Smṛti* that these two things are explicitly connected and that we find a clear statement that land gifted by kings to Brāhmaṇas should be free from taxes.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest literary references to royal gifts of land to Brāhmaṇas thus go back to c. 1000 BC, but these references occur in prescriptive texts. They tell us that the Brāhmaṇical tradition—texts produced, maintained and transmitted by Brāhmaṇas—not surprisingly considered the gifting of land to Brāhmaṇas as good thing. The question is: Were the repeated injunctions reflective of prevailing practice or were they attempts to establish such a practice? Evidence from other sources suggests that it was probably a bit of both. The Pāli canon of the Buddhists refers to kings such as Bimbisāra of Magadha and Prasenajit of Kośala making gifts of land (*brahmadeyas*) to Brāhmaṇas. These texts also refer to Brāhmaṇa *gahapatis* (men who possessed property, particularly landed property) and Brāhmaṇa *gāmas* (villages).<sup>12</sup>

The extension of Brāhmaṇa influence into South India is connected substantially with Brāhmaṇical migrations into trans-Vindhyan India, although there is evidence that the expansion of the Brāhmaṇa community was also to a certain extent the result of the absorption of other groups such as tribal priesthoods into the Brāhmaṇa ranks (although always at a lower level).<sup>13</sup> The southward movement of Brāhmaṇas and Brāhmaṇical culture are reflected in certain epic Paurāṇic myths connected with Agastya and Paraśurāma, two sages who are described as having had strong and abiding associations with the South.<sup>14</sup> The *Sutta Nipāta* refers to Bāvarī, a Brāhmaṇa teacher of Kośala, who built a hermitage on the banks of the Godāvāri river in Assaka country. The figure of the Brāhmaṇa is visible in the courts of kings and chieftains in Sangam literature (the composition of which can be placed between c. 300 BC–AD 300), although bards and poets appear as the primary legitimizers of political power and receivers of patronage. The description of a place called Cellūr in the *Akananuru*, referring to the sacred pillar and the ever-burning sacrificial fire connected with Paraśurāma, marks it out as one of the earliest Brāhmaṇa settlements in Kerala.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest inscriptions referring to grants of land by kings post-date the earliest literary references by many centuries, and are found in the western Deccan.<sup>16</sup> A first century BC Nanaghat inscription of the Sātavāhana queen Nāgaṃnikā mentions villages among the items offered as *dakṣiṇā* to officiating priests in the course of the performance of certain *śrauta* sacrifices including the *aśvamedha*, by her husband Sātakarṇi I.<sup>17</sup> A second century AD Nasik cave inscription of Uṣavadāta, son-in-law of the Śaka Kṣatrapa king Nahapāna, describes of the donor as one who has given sixteen villages to the gods and Brāhmaṇas. The inscription also records the grant of a field by Uṣavadata to provide food for the Buddhist monks dwelling in the cave in which the inscription is inscribed.<sup>18</sup> Belonging to roughly the same period is the inscription of the Sātavāhana king Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi in one of the Nasik caves. This records the grant to Buddhist monks of a field located in a village that previously fell within the jurisdiction of Uṣavadāta. This is the first inscription to associate certain specific privileges and exemptions (*parihāras*) with a gift of land.<sup>19</sup>

There was an increase in the incidence of royal land grants to Brāhmaṇas from the fourth century onwards, and most of them were associated with specific privileges and exemptions. While the imperial Guptas were not apparently great givers of land to Brāhmaṇas, some of their contemporaries (such as the Vākātakas) and subordinates (such as the Parivrājaka kings) were.<sup>20</sup> The earliest royal land grant inscriptions in south India come from the Pallava kingdom—the Mayidavōlu plates and the Hirehadagalli plates (both in Prakrit) date to the third–fourth century AD. The Pūlāṅkuṛi inscription of about the fifth century AD records the creation of a *brahmadeya* settlement, and mentions the superior rights (*mīyāṭci*) of the donees and the subordinate rights (*kārāṅ-kīlamai*) of the cultivators.<sup>21</sup> From the fifth–sixth centuries onwards, we see the intriguing phenomenon of kings virtually all over the Indian subcontinent making gifts to Brāhmaṇas, leading to a significant proliferation of Brāhmaṇa settlements. The details of these grants were generally inscribed on copper plates. Villages granted to Brāhmaṇas in this fashion were known as *agrahāras*, *brahmadeyas*, or *sāsanas*. A more neutral term for a Brāhmaṇa village, and one that does not indicate whether or not it was the result of a royal endowment, is *bhaṭṭa-grāma*. Although there are records of royal grants to other sorts of beneficiaries, including Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples, and a smaller number of ‘secular’ grants, until about the tenth century AD the majority of royal and grants were made in favour of Brāhmaṇas.<sup>22</sup>

The history of Brāhmaṇa settlements in the subcontinent reveals certain general patterns as well as regional specificities. The case of Kerala is particularly interesting. Here, we have a situation of the foundation of a number of Brāhmaṇa settlements via agricultural colonization, apparently at the initiative of the migrant Brāhmaṇas themselves. Brāhmaṇa settlements seem to have appeared in the fertile riverine tracts by the early historical period. Grants made by kings in the early medieval period added to the assets of a section of the Brāhmaṇa class that was already entrenched in the rural landscape as a landed élite, and led to a steady expansion and a re-organization of the Brāhmaṇa villages.

Although Kerala cannot be taken as a typical case even for south India, it does indicate certain points that may have relevance for other areas. The association of some Brāhmaṇas with control over land is something that clearly began much earlier than the early medieval period. However, the early medieval period certainly saw an acceleration and intensification of this process. Royal land grants to Brāhmaṇas during this later period linked kings with an already existent Brāhmaṇa landed élite, strengthening it and expanding its numbers. This goes some way in helping us make sense of the rationale of the complex king-Brāhmaṇa alliance.<sup>23</sup>

While kings were the prime donors of land to Brāhmaṇas, there were others who also contributed. Among the Bengal inscriptions, for example, there are instances of land grants to Brāhmaṇas made by private individuals, grants made to certain Brāhmaṇas at their own request, and grants made by kings at the request of other people.<sup>24</sup> In later times, some of the complexities revealed by these earlier inscriptions disappear, but there are still some clues that suggest that certain other people may have had a hand in grants that were ostensibly made by kings. The thirteenth century Calcutta Sahitya Parishad copper

plate of Viśvarūpasena records the gift of eleven plots of land by the Sena king to the Brāhmaṇa Halāyudha.<sup>25</sup> Five of these eleven plots are described as having been previously purchased by Halāyudha himself. This inscription really seems to reflect the royal ratification of a series of purchases of land by this Brāhmaṇa. Then again, in the inscriptions of Orissa, some of the grants made by the Bhauma-Kara and Gaṅga kings refer to feudatories or members of their families as *viññāpti* (the person at whose request the grant was made). These kinds of evidence corroborate the point made by D.C. Sircar that land grant charters often camouflage the identity of the persons involved in making the grant and sometimes even the nature of the exchange.<sup>26</sup> They suggest that Brāhmaṇa settlements were sometimes the result of diverse initiatives of people whose shadows can sometimes be seen lurking behind the scenes in royal inscriptions.

#### BRĀHMAṆA SCHOLARS, BRĀHMAṆA MIGRANTS

Common sense might suggest that the Brāhmaṇas who were being given grants of land by kings were those associated with the royal court. Certain early medieval inscriptions of Bengal do in fact describe Brāhmaṇa donees as *sāntivārikas* or *sāntyāgārikas*, men in charge of the performance of certain religious rites for the king.<sup>27</sup> Other inscriptions from the same region describe the land grant as having been made as a reward or as *dakṣiṇā* for the performance of certain rites.<sup>28</sup> In the inscriptions of Orissa, some of the Brāhmaṇa donees were connected with the royal court in various capacities such as priests (*purohita*, *punya-vācaka*) or astrologers (*jyotiṣī*). Others were occupants of important administrative posts. Similar instances can be cited from other parts of the country. However, the vast majority of the inscriptions do not reveal a court connection for the Brāhmaṇa donees.

Brāhmaṇas who were given land by kings are variously identified in inscriptions by their ancestry, indicated by references to *gotra*, *pravara*, *caraṇa*, *sākhā*, and native place.<sup>29</sup> As far as vocation is concerned, the inscriptions constantly highlight the Vedic learning of the Brāhmaṇa donees. This is indicated in various ways, including titles such as *ācārya*, *upādhyāya*, and *paṇḍita*. The references to native place indicate that some of the *sāsana* Brāhmaṇas were recent migrants into the area. They show that there was a significant degree not only of upward economic mobility but also spatial mobility among certain sections of the Brāhmaṇa class.

While Brāhmaṇical migrations and the extension of Brāhmaṇical influence that was co-terminus with these migrations were a continuous process, it is possible to identify at least two distinct phases in this process. The details of the earlier phase, which may have begun some time during the centuries in or around c. 800 BC are shrouded in a mythological haze. The eastward movement is reflected in the gradual and grudging acknowledgment of eastern regions in early Brāhmaṇical literature and the extension (eastwards, but never southwards) of the term Āryāvarta. The southward movement is reflected, as already mentioned, in the legends associated with Agastya and Paraśurāma.

The second major phase of Brāhmaṇa migration happened in the early medieval period. The mythical embellishments of the tradition recorded in the *Keralolpatti* conceal

a historical core. Most of the 32 villages as the original Brāhmaṇa settlements in Kerala in this sixteenth century Malayalam text have been identified.<sup>30</sup> Apart from such literary references, a large number of inscriptions dating from the fifth century onwards, document the influx of Brāhmaṇa immigrants from the heartland of *Madhya-deśa* in the middle Ganga valley into Maharashtra, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Some of the Brāhmaṇa migrants came from renowned centres of Brāhmaṇical learning such as Ṭakārī, Śrāvastī, Kolāñca and Hastipada.<sup>31</sup> The phenomenon of Brāhmaṇa migration intensified in the eighth century. The impetus towards the regional classification of Brāhmaṇas and the attempts to fix the relative ranking of the various groups can be linked to the fanning out of Brāhmaṇa communities to different parts of the subcontinent. A major classification divided them into two groups—the Pañca-Gauḍas (northern group) and the Pañca-Draviḍas (the southern group, south here referring to the areas south of the Vindhya). The former included the Sārasvata, Gauḍa, Kānyakubja, Maithila and Utkala Brāhmaṇas. The Pañca-Draviḍa group includes the Gurjjaras, Mahārāṣṭriyas, Karnāṭakas, Trailaṅgas, and Draviḍas.<sup>32</sup>

The tradition recorded in the late medieval Kulajī texts of Bengal traces the ancestry of the Kulīna Brāhmaṇas of Bengal to five Brāhmaṇas from Kānyakubja who were requisitioned by king Ādiśūra in order to coach the Bengal Brāhmaṇas in the correct performance of Vedic rites.<sup>33</sup> Although the details and characters of this story cannot be treated as historical fact, they do suggest a few important things that are corroborated by other sources. Brāhmaṇas of Bengal may not have been as ignorant of Vedic rites as they are made out to be in the story, but it is clear that the prestige of the Brāhmaṇa in early medieval India was still grounded in his Vedic learning. And even if Ādiśūra and his five invitees from Kānyakubja are fictitious characters, it is a fact that many historical kings were extending generous patronage to learned Brāhmaṇas and also that many Brāhmaṇas from *Madhyadeśa* were making their way to eastern lands.

Why were Brāhmaṇas migrating? It has been suggested that factors such as political instability and the pressure on land prompted some Brāhmaṇas to leave their homes and migrate to greener pastures in the early medieval period.<sup>34</sup> These sorts of explanations are not fully convincing, and they do not explain the earlier Brāhmaṇical migration. The migrations of Brāhmaṇas have to be ultimately related to a search for a better livelihood. It is possible that the first, early round of migrations southwards and eastwards were the result of the crisis and decay of a sacrifice-oriented religion. The origins of this crisis may have been situated in a questioning that was going on even in the later Vedic age of sacrifice, and a section of the Brāhmaṇas may themselves have been involved in this questioning. This crisis became more acute and apparent in the sixth century BC in the wake of a number of rival doctrines such as those of the Buddha and Mahāvira that rejected the authority of the Veda, the efficacy of the sacrifice, and the preeminence of the Brāhmaṇa.<sup>35</sup> It is against the background of this crisis that some sections of the Brāhmaṇas whose livelihood had been based on officiating at sacrifices may have been compelled to leave home and hearth in search of alternative occupations that would offer a more secure and lucrative livelihood. This might also explain why the post-sixth century BC literature displays a remarkable diversification in the variety of occupations adopted by Brāhmaṇas.

The second phase of Brāhmaṇa migration in the early medieval period coincided with the proliferation of kingdoms in various parts of the subcontinent and may have had to do with new incentives rather than pressures. The political élites' need for organizational coherence and legitimation opened up new opportunities for the intrepid Brāhmaṇa. By this time, the religion of ordinary people had become increasingly oriented towards theistic devotion (this applies not only to Paurāṇic Hinduism but also to Buddhism and Jainism) and had little to do with the Vedas or with sacrificial rituals. Yet, during the very centuries that saw the virtual eclipse of Vedic religious practice and the elaboration of Paurāṇic Hinduism, we see Brāhmaṇas consistently being advertised in inscriptions as Vedic scholars or at least in terms of their Vedic affiliations, and kings advertising their patronage of these Brāhmaṇas. Clearly, the Vedic connection remained an important badge of prestige for a section of the Brāhmaṇa community, even for those who may have not been actively involved in Vedic study. The enormous gulf that had come to exist between esoteric Sanskritic Brāhmaṇicalism and the lives of ordinary people may have been the very factor that made it a useful legitimizing commodity for élite groups keen to stress their loftiness and aloofness from the masses. It is interesting to note that the two major phases of Brāhmaṇa migration can be connected with the two major phases of state formation, the first in north India and the second, which had a greater subcontinental spread.

During the early medieval period, a number of Brāhmaṇa settlements achieved trans-regional renown as centres of Vedic scholarship. These villages were exporters of Brāhmaṇas and brahmanism, and also centres where brahmanism was being continually redesigned and refashioned. They were like hot-houses of brahmanism, where it was safeguarded and nurtured, where it developed, fermented, and evolved and from where it spread far and wide. The fact that the period between *c.* AD 400–1200 saw such an enormous output in the sphere of Sanskrit literature does not seem to have been a coincidence and can be connected with the phenomenon being discussed here.<sup>36</sup> Brāhmaṇas may not have monopolized the intellectual arena, but they certainly did dominate it. These centuries saw the opening up of avenues of employment for Brāhmaṇas in the administrative structure of an ever-expanding number of royal courts and in the patronage of Brāhmaṇa scholars, poets, and dramatists in these courts. Literacy was an important qualification in this day and age. But patronage through land grants must also have played an important role in promoting and sustaining Brāhmaṇa scholarship. Increasing wealth based on the control of land and the increasing number of settlements inhabited by clusters of Brāhmaṇa specialists in Sanskrit learning—these are the factors that must have provided a section of the Brāhmaṇa intelligentsia with the security and wealth necessary for sustained intellectual activity.

#### THE NATURE OF BRAHMADEYA SETTLEMENTS

As already mentioned, not all Brāhmaṇa settlements were the result of royal land grants. But the fact of the matter is that the available sources (particularly the inscriptions) tell us

largely about the *brahmadeyas*. One of the problems in discussing the history and impact of these settlements in ancient India is that although we can identify certain general trends that hold good for most of the Indian subcontinent, different regions had their own rhythms and specificities. Ideally, an analysis of the phenomenon of land grants to Brāhmaṇas should be based on piecing together the results of a thorough analysis of the entire source material available for different regions. But if general statements have to be made, they must be tempered by a recognition of the differences in the historical patterns between and even within regions.<sup>37</sup> An additional difficulty in discussing the history and historical significance of *brahmadeya* settlements in ancient and early medieval India is that this issue is inextricably tied up with very different theoretical frameworks that contradict each other in crucial respects. It, therefore, becomes difficult to detach the body of empirical data from the theoretical formulations in which they are embedded.

Studies of the land grant inscriptions from different parts of the country have shown that in a few cases land grants involved the establishment of Brāhmaṇa settlements outside the margins of settled agricultural tracts, leading to an extension of the margin of agriculture. But the vast majority of the grants were made in areas that were already settled and where land was already being cultivated. This is quite clear from the general location of many of the gifted villages and also from certain other evidence. Post-twelfth century land grants of Bengal, for instance, often state that the land has been granted along with the habitat land (*vāstu-bhūmi*) and mention the annual income of the gifted land.<sup>38</sup> What the grant did was to simply introduce the Brāhmaṇa donees into an already existing social and economic web.

The tracts of land gifted to Brāhmaṇas could vary from a small piece of land to a village, from a few to a large number of villages. These absorbed varying numbers of Brāhmaṇas, ranging from one to many hundreds. The recipients of the tenth-century Pashchimbhāg plate of Śricandra (from Bengal) records a grant to an unusually large number of donees—six thousand Brāhmaṇas, along with several persons associated with a *maṭha* associated with the god Brahmā and a temple of Viṣṇu. Three *viṣayas* (districts) in Śrihaṭṭa maṇḍala in Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* were granted to them and were transformed into a *brahmaṭpura* that was named Śricandrapura after the king.<sup>39</sup> The details of the boundaries of gifted land indicate that the *brahmadeyas* were sometimes contiguous to each other, and we also encounter instances of multiple gifts to certain donees. In the absence of precise statistical information, we will never know the exact ratio of *brahmadeya* to non-*brahmadeya* land in different parts of the subcontinent. However, the general trend was towards an increase in the number and density of Brāhmaṇa settlements in certain areas.<sup>40</sup>

In order to understand the political, social, and economic significance of Brāhmaṇa settlements created as a result of royal land grants, it is necessary to examine the technical vocabulary of the inscriptions. The precise meaning of some of the technical terms is difficult to unravel and alternative interpretations are possible. The majority of the royal grants gave the Brāhmaṇa settlements a permanent tax-free status.<sup>41</sup> This meant that from the time of the grant, the land or village or villages in question were considered tax-free from the point of view of the state. The dues to which the state may, hitherto, have been entitled were to be paid by the villagers to the beneficiaries of the grant. These Brāhmaṇa

settlements, thus, had a special revenue status. The right to collect revenue from the villages was vested in the Brāhmaṇa donees. The permanent nature of the grant was expressed in statements to the effect that the land was granted according to the *bhūmicchidra-nyāya* and was to last as long as the sun and the moon and the stars, i.e., for ever. This implied (although this is also, sometimes, stipulated separately) that after the death of the donee, his successor inherited the rights that had been bestowed on the original beneficiary.<sup>42</sup>

While revenue rights were an important right bestowed on the Brāhmaṇa recipients of royal land grants, there were others as well. As far as the terms of the grants are concerned, there are significant regional variations, and even within regions there are variations that can be related to dynasty and time. Thus, the grants of the Pālas of Bengal (who ruled parts of Bengal and Bihar between the eighth and the twelfth centuries) usually state that the land was granted up to its boundaries, grass and pastures (*sva-sīmā-tṛṇayūti-gocara-paryanta*), along with its ground (*sa-tala*), with the space above the surface of the ground (*s-oddeśa*), with mango and *madhūka* trees (*s-āmra-madhūka*), with water and dry land (*sa-jala-sthala*), along with pits and barren spots (*sa-gartt-oṣara*). The land was exempt from all dues (*a-kiñcit-parigrāhya*) and was granted along with all the dues such as *bhāga*, *bhoga*, *kara*, *hiranya*, etc. (*samasta-bhāga-bhoga-kara-hirany-ādi-pratyāya-sameta*). The land was not to be entered by irregular or regular troops of the king (*a-cāṭa-bhaṭa-pravésya*). The question of whether or not the Brāhmaṇa donees were granted judicial rights hinges on the interpretation of terms such as *sa-daś-āparādha* and *sa-cauroddharaṇa*. The term *sa-daś-āparādha* has been interpreted in three ways. According to J.F. Fleet, it meant that the donees had the right to proceeds of the fines imposed on those found guilty of certain offences. According to U.N. Ghoshal, it refers to an exemption from punishment for certain offences granted to the donees. And according to scholars such as R.S. Sharma, it refers to the right to try those guilty of certain offences.<sup>43</sup> The term *sa-cauroddharaṇa* can, likewise, be interpreted as indicating the right to punish those found guilty of theft or the right to realize fines from those found guilty of theft.

Inscriptions from other parts of the country also suggest a wide scope of authority vested in the Brāhmaṇa donees. In Orissa, from about the ninth century onwards, the inscriptions of the Bhauma-Karas, Udayavarāha, the Śulkīs and Tuṅgas state that the land was granted along with control over the outposts in the village, landing or bathing places, and ferries (*sa-kheṭa-ghaṭṭa-nādi-tara-sthān-ādi-gulmaka*). This can be understood as indicating the rights over dues collected at these spots, or as rights over military outposts stationed at these places. The other significant stipulation occurs in the inscriptions of the Bhauma-Karas, Ādi-Bhañjas, Śulkīs, and Tuṅgas—'along with weavers, cowherds, brewers, and other subjects' (*sa-tantravāya-gokūṭa-saiṇḍik-ādi-prakṛtika*). Another indication of an enlargement of the scope of the rights granted to the Brāhmaṇa donees occurs in certain inscriptions which describe the land as having been granted along with habitat land and forest (*sa-padr-āranya*).<sup>44</sup> This is similar to a few post-twelfth century AD inscriptions of Bengal which transfer rights over the *vāstu-bhūmi* (habitat land). In any case, what is important to note is that no standard list of exemptions, rights/privileges went hand in hand with all land grants; there is considerable variation even within regions as far as

these are concerned. It is, however, clear that royal grants, generally, gave the Brāhmaṇa donees quite comprehensive rights over the resources of the land. The grant of judicial rights or rights over the person of the villagers is reflected in some, but not all, not even most inscriptions.

At the same time, there are indications that the Brāhmaṇa donees did not, in fact, have one important right—the right to alienate the land (i.e. transfer, sell or dispose of it in some other way). The inalienability of the gifted land is indicated by certain technical terms. For instance, the land is, sometimes, described as granted according to the *nīvī-dharma*, *akṣaya-nīvī-dharma* or *aṇṇadā-dharma*. These terms indicate that the gift was permanent but inalienable.<sup>45</sup> In several inscriptions of Orissa, the land is said to be *a-lekhanī-praveśatayā*, which means that it could not be made the subject of another document, i.e. it could not be sold. Such terms indicate that the rights of Brāhmaṇa donees over the land gifted to them fluctuated between those of a landlord and owner, and were sometimes a little less, sometimes a little more.<sup>46</sup>

#### THE IMPACT OF BRĀHMAṆA SETTLEMENTS ON AGRARIAN RELATIONS

What were the specific implications of the *brahmadeya* settlements for the donees, the state and rural society? The first part of the question is the easiest to answer. Royal patronage strengthened the economic clout of a section of the Brāhmaṇas and led to the further growth of a Brāhmaṇa landed élite. It does not seem appropriate to use the term 'Brāhmaṇa feudatories' for this group, because this would involve an unnecessary confusion with other groups such as *sāmantas* or subordinate rulers to whom the term 'feudatory' with its connotations of providing military service is better suited. Even the phrase 'Brāhmaṇa intermediaries' is somewhat inappropriate, because, although as we shall see, there was a connection between kings and Brāhmaṇas, this connection was not always an overt one and did not, generally, involve a transfer of material resources (such as revenue) by the Brāhmaṇa to the king. For these reasons, it is better to speak of the Brāhmaṇa beneficiaries of *brahmadeya* land simply as a landed élite. In south India, the Brāhmaṇa landholders in such villages were organized into a *sabhā*. The existence of such a corporate organization enhanced the influence and power of Brāhmaṇas in rural society.

As far as the state was concerned, the creation of *brahmadeyas*, generally, meant a renunciation of actual or potential sources of revenue. Land grant charters, sometimes, declare that the land has been granted to the donee along with treasure trove and hidden deposits, forests, and heirless property. If we go by the textual evidence, the king, theoretically, at least, had rights over these. The transfer of such rights to the Brāhmaṇa donees would, therefore, in principle, affect the rights of the state. Where there is the possible transfer of judicial rights, or of the right to collect fines from those found guilty of certain offences—although these are often considered to be the rights of the king—in actual practice, we can presume that most village-level disputes would have been settled by members of the village community itself and it is this community's rights that would have been affected. The inscriptions also indicate that the *brahmadeyas* were supposed to

be free from the interference of the state, its officers, and its soldiers.<sup>47</sup> In the Cōḷa empire, certain important *brahmadeyas* had *taniyūr* status within the *nāḍu* (locality), i.e. they were independent of the jurisdiction of the *nāḍu* they were situated in.<sup>48</sup> All this suggests that for all practical purposes, the Brāhmaṇa settlements were autonomous islands in the rural landscape, where the Brāhmaṇa donees were free to do as they pleased and where the writ of the state did not apply. The apparent independence of the *brahmadeyas*, was, however, tempered by the evidence of a close relationship between certain *brahmadeyas* and the king. This point comes out clearly from certain Cōḷa inscriptions. Two inscriptions from Uttaramerur tell us that the resolution of the Brāhmaṇa *sabhā* was made in the presence of an official deputed by royal order. Two Tanjavur inscriptions record an order issued by Rājarāja I to the *sabhās* in Cōḷamaṇḍalam to send residents of their village to serve the Tanjavur temple in various capacities.<sup>49</sup>

Seen from the point of view of fledgling kingdoms struggling to establish their power, control, and legitimacy, the patronage of a social group that had traditionally enjoyed a privileged socio-religious status did not amount to an inordinate loss of revenue or power. In fact, the kings who 'granted' the land may not have been in a position to realize revenue from the gifted land in the first place.<sup>50</sup> Seen from the point of view of the large, established kingdoms, a grant here and there did not impinge in any significant way on the resources of the state. In fact, if we look at the total number of land grants made by the various dynasties of early medieval India, we generally find that the maximum number of grants (both to Brāhmaṇas and to religious establishments), and the most lavish grants, were generally made by the most powerful dynasties and kings.

How did the creation of these settlements affect villagers who lived on *brahmadeya* land? As already mentioned, the Brāhmaṇa settlements, generally, carried with them a tax-free status, which meant that villagers were supposed to hand over various dues to the donees. Sometimes, the inscriptions refer to taxes in a very general way, at other times, they specify a long list of taxes that the land was exempt from, i.e. that the villagers presumably had to pay to the Brāhmaṇa donee instead. Apart from this, the stipulations in land grant charters that gave the donee rights over water resources, trees, forests, and habitation area would also, presumably, have affected the rights enjoyed by the village community. Does the long list of *parihāras* that we find in many of the land grant charters indicate increasing oppression of the peasantry? How exactly did the establishment of *brahmadeyas* affect the rights of various sections of the rural community—large or small peasant proprietors/tenants, sharecroppers and landless labourers? These questions have been answered in very different ways by different historians. Burton Stein speaks of a segmentary state and a Brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance in early medieval south India.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the writings of the Indian feudalism school describe land grants as leading to an increasing subjection of rural cultivating groups by Brāhmaṇa donees.<sup>52</sup>

There is, perhaps, a small meeting ground for the proponents and the critics of the feudalism hypothesis. The insertion of the Brāhmaṇa donees into the village community introduced a new element in agrarian relations, eroding some of the older ones.<sup>53</sup> There seems little doubt that the *brahmadeya* settlements and the terms of the land grants created a class of Brāhmaṇas who enjoyed superior rights and control over the other inhabitants

and the resources of the village.<sup>54</sup> The terms of the grants clearly indicate that in economic terms, the relationship between the Brāhmaṇa donee and other rural groups was marked by dominance and exploitation.

Whether the substitution of state exploitation and control by the more close-at-hand Brāhmaṇa exploitation and control meant increased levels of subjection of the average farmer is, however, a more tricky question. The level of economic dominance achieved by Brāhmaṇa settlers was clearly affected by a number of variables such as ecology, the availability of arable land, the level of organization of the Brāhmaṇa élite, and the presence or absence of competing social and corporate groups. In Assam, where cultivable land was not in short supply, and where non-Brāhmaṇa groups also held land, the extent of social and economic stratification was not as rigid as in other areas.<sup>55</sup> In south India, corporate organizations of the Brāhmaṇas such as the *sabhā* furthered the power of the *sāsana* Brāhmaṇas. In Kerala, the power and influence of such corporate organizations was enhanced by the absence of competition from corporate organizations of other social groups.<sup>56</sup>

#### CASTE AND RELIGION

The centuries that witnessed the emergence and expansion of monarchical states, land grants to Brāhmaṇas and the proliferation of Brāhmaṇa settlements, also saw the geographical extension of the caste structure and a proliferation in the number of castes. Whether Brāhmaṇism had certain proselytizing tendencies or not is a matter that can be debated. But it is clear that the proliferation of Brāhmaṇa settlements did see the transformation of many tribal groups into peasants, and their exposure to a whole new range of cultural influences.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the strengthening of the Brāhmaṇa's position as landholder enhanced the possibilities of his living out the role that had all along been stressed in the normative Brāhmaṇical tradition—as the custodian and arbiter of cultural norms and religious practices.

The brāhmaṇization of tribal communities did not only introduce many of them to plough agriculture; it also eventually led to either their absorption into caste society or to their marginalization with reference to it by declaring them to be outcastes or untouchables. Caste rankings were (and are) not fixed but fluid, and were mediated by factors such as political and economic power. By introducing Brāhmaṇa donees into the rural social landscape, by buttressing their traditionally high social status with political backing and economic power, and by giving them wide-ranging control over land and its resources, land grants to Brāhmaṇas affected caste configurations at the village level in a big way. Brāhmaṇas emerged as the dominant caste group in the *brahmadeya* villages. The proliferation of castes was connected with the phenomenon of land grants in other more direct ways as well. The flurry of activity in recording a large number of land transactions is seen as a factor that led to the transformation of an occupational group such as the *Kāyasthas* (scribes) into a caste.

The expansion of Brāhmaṇa settlements and the interaction between Brāhmaṇas and different kinds of local communities led to different kinds of negotiations and results, not

least of all on the Brāhmaṇas themselves. Reference has already been made to the emergence of regional classifications and different gauges of relative status of the regional groups. The network of social interactions that the Brāhmaṇas were drawn into also led to the creation of a number of Brāhmaṇa sub-castes. For instance, in the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka regions, the engagement with sectarian religion led to the emergence of the Śiva Brāhmaṇas (Brāhmaṇas associated with Śaiva temples).<sup>58</sup> Integration into local society could also mean that social and marriage practices had to be modified. The Brāhmaṇas of Payyanūr took to matriliney while the other Kerala Brāhmaṇas maintained their patrilineal system. But the proximity with matrilineal groups could lead to other sorts of results. The marriage practices of the Nambudiri Brāhmaṇas of Kerala (the eldest son marrying a Brāhmaṇa woman and the other sons having *sambandam* relationships with Nāyar women) must have been geared towards keeping the property of the Brāhmaṇa family intact and consolidated. But it could only have emerged in the context of a matrilineal society which made it possible for the younger sons to have sexual relationships that did not involve financial or other responsibilities.<sup>59</sup>

The early medieval period was one which saw the increasing popularity of temple-based, sectarian religion. In south India, this was the age of the *bhakti* poets, the Āḷvārs and the Nāyaṇmārs. Was there any connection between the Brāhmaṇa settlements and these developments? Most of the land grants describe the Brāhmaṇa donees as specialists in Vedic learning and contain few references to their sectarian leanings. From about the tenth century onwards, in several regions there was an increase in the royal patronage of temples. During the preceding centuries, some Brāhmaṇas seem to have moulded their activities to the temple milieu. Some of them took to the less prestigious vocation of temple priests, while others adopted the more respectable role of temple managers.

The connection between *brahmadeya* and temple may not be immediately apparent (especially in the initial stages) in all parts of the subcontinent. But we have clear evidence from south India of a direct participation of the *sāsana* Brāhmaṇas and Brāhmaṇa *sabhas* in temple management. Kerala *brahmadeyas* seem to have been temple-centred right from the time that inscriptions are forthcoming. We can also assume that the Brāhmaṇas of Brāhmaṇa villages must have played an important role in the spread of temple-oriented religion, in spite of the fact that the inscriptions persist in emphasizing their Vedic, rather than sectarian, affiliations.

Where Brāhmaṇa settlements came up in the vicinity of tribal areas, they functioned as nodes of reciprocal interaction between Brāhmaṇical and tribal religion, and different sorts of religious syntheses resulted. The term 'brāhmaṇization' (in spite of certain problems) is useful to describe these syntheses. The interactions were reciprocal, but not evenly or equally balanced, as ultimately the Brāhmaṇical elements emerged as dominant. The cult of Jagannātha is a prime example of the brāhmaṇization of a tribal deity. Another reflection of this process is the absorption of regional and local goddesses into the Śakti cult. In Bengal, we see the brāhmaṇical tradition being forced to enter into a dialogue with an already well-established goddess cult.<sup>60</sup>

These developments were made possible by a conjunction of several factors—the spread of Brāhmaṇas and Brāhmaṇa settlements in different parts of the subcontinent, the

socio-economic dominance achieved by certain sections of the Brāhmaṇas, the political power wielded by kings or chieftains aspiring to become kings, the continual need for the legitimation of political power, and the alliance between kings and Brāhmaṇas which was most visibly expressed in the form of land grants. In the days of the initial stages of migration, marriage between migrant Brāhmaṇas and local women may have been an additional factor that furthered the interaction between the Brāhmaṇical and tribal worlds.

### THE POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

That the Brāhmaṇa settlements of ancient and early medieval India had a political dimension is apparent from several things. To begin with, many of these settlements were created by royal decree. The rights of the Brāhmaṇa donees were declared and confirmed by royal charters. Even when they were not created by royal decree, many of the Brāhmaṇa settlements had a special relationship with kings. Brāhmaṇas emerged as ideologues and legitimizers of political power through the crafting of royal genealogies and performance of rituals. Many of these genealogies linked the various dynasties of the time with the epic-Paurāṇic tradition, and gave their kings a respectable *varṇa* status.<sup>61</sup> In Kerala, the circuit between kings, Brāhmaṇas, and temples was the most complete. Myths enshrined in later literary sources give an important place to Brāhmaṇas and the temple in their explanation of the origins of the institution of kingship. The political role of the Brāhmaṇas in the Cēra period is clear in the representation of the Brāhmaṇas of the leading Brāhmaṇa settlements in the king's council (the Nālu Taḷi) at Mahodayapura.<sup>62</sup> The inscriptions of early medieval India bear testimony to the brāhmaṇization of royal courts all over the subcontinent and the emergence of Sanskrit as the language of power, although it never succeeded in completely smothering the autochthonous elements.<sup>63</sup>

There are still the larger questions. Agreed that the *brahmadeya* settlements had a political significance, but what is the precise nature of that political significance? Do the *brahmadeya* villages represent a sort of 'selling-out' of the state, an ancient disinvestment strategy? Was the state backing out of its roles of revenue-collector, provider of administration and law and order, and arbiter of justice? Are we to visualize the *brahmadeya* settlements as thriving amidst the ruins of the crumbling edifice of the state, which, in turn, existed in the midst of a de-urbanized, de-monetized economy?<sup>64</sup> Seen from the point of view of the Indian feudalism model, *brahmadeya* settlements were both a prime cause and a prime feature of the feudal order. There are many aspects of this view of early medieval India that are difficult to accept. Particularly difficult to understand are the precise reasons for and nature of the crisis that is supposed to have gripped early medieval states and why Brāhmaṇas should have been chosen to bail them out.

There is increasing evidence to support a very different sort of picture of early medieval India, one marked by the proliferation of state polities at the sub-regional, regional, and trans-regional level within a context of agrarian expansion.<sup>65</sup> Seen against this background, royal patronage of Brāhmaṇas and the proliferation of Brāhmaṇa settlements assume a totally different significance. Land grants to Brāhmaṇas were not a

symptom of the disintegration of polities but represent a royal integrative and legitimizing policy. The increasing importance of Brāhmaṇa settlements in early medieval India can best be understood in this context. But it is equally clear that such settlements had a long and chequered history that goes back to a much earlier period, as well as a many-faceted cultural impact.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. While the term 'Brāhmaṇa' appears in the Family Books of the *R̥g Veda Samhitā*, the four-fold *varṇa* order does not. The crystallization of the four-fold *varṇa* hierarchy is associated with later Vedic literature. The broad chronology generally assigned to the composition of early Vedic literature is c. 1500–1000 BC and to later Vedic literature c. 1000–500 BC.
2. *yajana, yājana, adhyayana, adhyāpana, dāna, pratigraha*. There are differences of opinion when it comes to the conceptualization of the essence of the Brāhmaṇa insofar as it can be distilled from these texts. Louis Dumont (*Homo Hierarchicus*, Paris, 1967) understands the Brāhmaṇa primarily or in principle as a priest, and stresses his relationship with the king. On the other hand, J.C. Heesterman sees him as a renouncer: 'Brahmin, Ritual and Renouncer', in Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society*, Chicago and London, 1985, pp. 26–44.
3. *Gautama Dharmasūtra* VII. 6 and 7. Cited in P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. 2, Part 1, Poona, 1941, p. 118. The Kṣatriyas were associated with warfare and ruling and the Vaiśyas with animal husbandry, agriculture and trade. The flexibility of vocation is also extended to Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas. The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* seems to be the oldest among the extant Dharmasūtras, which can be dated to the period between c. 600–200 BC.
4. *Manu* 3. 150–165. The *śrāddha* is a ceremony held at stipulated intervals of time in honour of and for the benefit of deceased relatives. The composition of the *Manu Smṛti* is generally placed between c. 200 BC–AD 200.
5. Cited in R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Dacca, 1940, p. 211. The composition of the *Jātakas* can be placed between the third century BC and the second AD.
6. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 39.6; 29.7. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 13.1.14–15 narrates the admonition given by the Earth to this king in the context of the performance of the Sarvamedha sacrifice.
7. *Mahābhārata*, Anuśāsana Parva, Dānadharma Parva 33., v. 17.
8. Dānadharma Parva 62., vv. 2–3.
9. Verses lauding the gift of land to Brāhmaṇas from the *Mahābhārata* and Dharmasāstras frequently appear in land grant inscriptions.
10. *Arthasāstra* II. 1.7. Although certain parts of this text belong to the Mauryan period, additions continued to be made to it till the early centuries AD.
11. *Bṛhaspati Smṛti* 17, 3–4. Cited in D.N. Jha, *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 128. Kane (*History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. I, Poona, 1930, p. 210) dates the *Bṛhaspati Smṛti* between c. 200–400 AD.
12. See Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 43–44, 72.
13. On this latter aspect, see Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 58–59.
14. See K.A.N. Sastri, *A History of South India*, 4th edn., Madras, 1975, pp. 68–74.
15. See Kesavan Veluthat, 'Cellūr—an early settlement', in his *Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Kerala: Historical, Studies*, Calicut, 1978, pp. 12–20. Cellūr/Perumcellūr can be identified with Taliparamba village in Camanore district, Kerala.
16. There is disagreement among historians about the chronology of the Sātavāhana dynasty and their inscriptions. While some scholars place the beginning of Sātavāhana rule in 271 BC, others place it in 30 BC.
17. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 192–97.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–70.
19. The inscription is in the Prākṛit language and is dated in the eighteenth regnal year (124 AD, according to D.C. Sircar). The *parihāras* that are listed are: *apavesa* (not to be entered [by royal troops]), *anomasa*

- (not to be touched [by any of them]), *alonaḥhādaka* (not to be dug for salt), *araṭhasavinayika* (free from the control of state officials), *savajātapārihārika* (to enjoy all kinds of immunities). *ibid.*, pp. 197–99.
20. See J.F. Fleet (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 3: Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*, Calcutta, 1888; 3rd revised edn., Varanasi, 1970. There are very few records of land grants made by the imperial Guptas. If we leave out the spurious Nalanda and Gaya copper plates of Samudragupta, we are left with one gift of land made to a Viṣṇu temple by the emperor Skandagupta (recorded in the Bhitari stone pillar inscription) and a grant by one of his ministers (recorded in the Bihar stone inscription). The paucity of grants made by the Imperial Guptas is interesting in view of the fact that the kings of this dynasty are often viewed as the patrons of a great Brāhmanical revival.
  21. Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 198.
  22. After this point of time, there seems to be a shift in the pattern of royal donation towards temples. It may be noted that even Buddhist kings such as the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar made more grants to Brāhmaṇas than to Buddhist establishments.
  23. It is not possible to prove this point, but a guess can be hazarded that kings were not in the habit of doling out land grants to indigent, destitute Brāhmaṇas, and that those who received such favours already had a certain social and economic standing.
  24. For instance, the Dhanaidaha copper plate inscription of Gupta era year 113 (432–33 AD) tells us that a royal officer (*āyuktaka*) bought some land and gifted it to a Brāhmaṇa named Varāhasvāmin. The five Damodarpur copper plate inscriptions state that a Brāhmaṇa named Karppaṭika made an application to the government of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* stationed in the headquarters at Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* for the grant of a piece of land; the permission was given. Another example of a Brāhmaṇa applying for the grant of land is that of Suprātikasvāmin of the Ghugrahati copper plate of the reign of Samācāradeva. The Tippera copper plate of king Lokanātha records a grant made to over 100 *caturvedī* Brāhmaṇas at the request of a *mahāsāmanta*. The Bengal inscriptions of the fifth–sixth centuries are important from other points of view as well. They record the buying and selling of land in ancient India for the purpose of making gifts, and also testify to the role of a number of local level offices and officials in sanctioning such transactions. (Cited in Puspa Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal* Calcutta, 1967, pp. 4–5).
  25. N.G. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal* Vol. III, Rajshahi, 1929, pp. 140–48, 177–80. Apart from the published sources, for details of the epigraphic evidence from early medieval Bengal, I have drawn on my unpublished M. Phil dissertation titled *The Rural Economy of Bengal and Bihar (Eighth to Thirteenth Centuries): An Epigraphic Study* (submitted to the University of Delhi, 1983).
  26. D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Early Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphical Records*, Lucknow, 1969, p. 7.
  27. The Rampal and Dhulla plates of Śricandra, the Belwa plates, and the Sundarban and Govindpur plates of Lakṣmaṇasena.
  28. The Manahali grant of Madanapāla describes the recipient Vaṭeśvarasvāmiśarman as having received the land as *dakṣiṇā* for reading the *Mahābhārata* to queen Paṭṭamahādevī. The Dhulla plate of Sricandra bestows certain plots of land on the *Śāntivārika* Vyāsaṅgaśarman for the performance of four *homās* in connection with the *Adbhūtaśānti* rite. The Barrackpur grant of Vijayasena states that the land was granted to the Brāhmaṇa Udayakaradevaśarman as *dakṣiṇā* for the performance of the *homa* in connection with the Kanaka Tulāpuruṣa Mahādāna ceremony of the Mahādevī Vilāsadevī, in the palace at Vikramapura.
  29. *Gotra* refers to the exogamous clan system of the Brāhmaṇas. The *gotras* are divided into *gaṇas*, each of which have their own *pravara*. The *pravara* consists of a series of names (one, two, three or five) of supposed ancestral *ṛṣis*. *Carāṇa* refers to Vedic school and *sākhā* to a particular recension of a Veda; these two terms tend to be used interchangeably in the inscriptions.
  30. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, pp. 21–38. M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat suggest two waves of Brāhmaṇa migration and settlement in South India, the first corresponding to the Sangam age and the second to the early medieval period ('A History of the Nambudiri Community in Kerala', in Fritz Staal (ed.), *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Vol. II, Berkeley, 1983, pp. 256–57). According to these scholars, the legend of the 32 Brāhmaṇa settlements reflects the second phase of Brāhmaṇa settlement corresponding to the seventh and eighth centuries AD. The fact that the Brāhmaṇas of the Konkan coast are connected with a martial Brāhmaṇa figure such as Paraśurāma and that the legend refers to Paraśurāma as having presented them with arms in order to enable to protect and rule Kerala is significant. Veluthat (*op. cit.*, pp. 4–5) connects this with evidence of

- the institution called the *ghatikā* or *sālai*, educational-cum-military organizations of the Brāhmaṇas. Perhaps the legend alludes to a militarized section of the Brāhmaṇas. The *Vāyu* and *Skanda Purāna* describe Paraśurāma as having created or bestowed Brāhmaṇa status on Brāhmaṇas in other parts of the subcontinent as well. See Vijay Nath, *Purānas and Acculturation*, pp. 58–59.
31. See Swati Dutta, *Migrant Brāhmaṇas in Northern India: Their Settlement and General Impact, (c. AD. 475–1030)*, Delhi, 1989, p. 224. The identification of some of these places is a matter of debate. They could have been located in modern Uttar Pradesh or in Bengal.
  32. The Chinchani grant of the time of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Indra III suggests that this primary classification may have been in place by the tenth century. See Chitrarekha Gupta, *The Brāhmaṇas of India: A Study Based on Inscriptions*, Delhi, 1983, p. 123.
  33. On this tradition, and the manner in which historians have handled it, see Kunal Chakravarti, *Religious Process: The Purānas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 118 ff.
  34. Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
  35. R.C. Hazra has elaborated on this crisis and its results, particularly the decline of the *śrauta* rites and the emergence of the Smārta Brāhmaṇas, who combined sectarian worship without renouncing their allegiance to the Vedic tradition. See Hazra, *op. cit.*, pp. 193 ff.
  36. This aspect of the post-Gupta centuries has not received adequate recognition or attention. Statements to the effect that there was little that was original in the philosophical or Dharmaśāstra literature produced in the early medieval period display a lack of understanding of the important interpretative role of the commentarial tradition.
  37. An example of this are the differences in the patterns revealed between various parts of South India such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra. Studies of these areas have pointed to further differences in the historical rhythms between various eco-zones that comprise the macro-regions.
  38. The specification of annual income occurs in the Bargaon plate of the Pāla king Vighrahpāla, the Mehar and the Adavadi plates of Daśarathadeva, and in all the land grants of the Sena kings. The income is given in terms of currency units such as *kapardaka-purānas*, *purānas* and *cūmīs*.
  39. D.C. Sircar, *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 67, ll. 35–36.
  40. This point is brought out graphically by R.N. Nandi with reference to the Shikarpur taluka in Karnataka (*State Formation, Agrarian Growth and Social Change in Feudal South India c. AD 600–1200*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 66).
  41. There are, however, a few examples of *kara-sāsanas* from Orissa, Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh. These were land grants that did not carry with them a tax-exempt status.
  42. As was bound to be the case, there was always a gap between what was prescribed and what actually happened. There are a few inscriptions that suggest the resumption of grants and their being handed over to another recipient.
  43. See Fleet, *op. cit.*, p. 189, n. 4; Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of the Hindu Revenue System*, Calcutta, 1929, pp. 286–88; R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300–1200*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 3, 67, etc.; D.N. Jha *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91 suggests that the ten offences that the inscriptions refer to can be related to those listed in the *Nārada Smṛti*—transgression of the king's commands, the murder of a woman, the mixture of *varṇas*, intercourse with another man's wife, robbery, pregnancy caused by a man other than the husband, abuse, insulting language, assault, and procuring abortion.
  44. It must be noted, however, that the term occurs only in three inscriptions—the Jurada grant of Neṭṭabhañja, the Dhenkanal plate of the Śulki king Kulastambha, and the stray Somavarṇśi plate found at Sonepur. The Santa-Bomvali grant of the Kaliṅganagara Gaṅga king Nandavarman contains the term *niveśana-sahita* (together with the habitation). These and other details of the data from the inscriptions from Orissa are from my book *Kings, Brāhmaṇas and Temples in Orissa: An Epigraphic Study, AD 300–1147*, New Delhi, 1994.
  45. See S.K. Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period (Cir. AD 300–550)* (2nd edn. Delhi, 1970), p. 26.
  46. Private ownership in the modern sense entails the right to buy, sell, bequeath, and mortgage property. When trying to understand ancient property systems, however, it is better to try to identify the precise nature, range, and hierarchy of the rights that existed than to use modern concepts of property as the yardstick.
  47. The term *a-cāṭa-bhaṭa-praveśya* is usually translated as 'not to be entered by irregular or regular troops.' An alternative suggestion (Veluthat, *Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Kerala*, pp. 102–115) is that they were militarized groups of Brāhmaṇas in the employ of kings.

48. Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, pp. 202–03.
49. N. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions AD 850–1800*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 37–40. Karashima describes the Brāhmaṇa villages as the local nuclei of the Cōḷa power structure (*ibid.*, p. 40).
50. See Kulke, “Fragmentation and Segmentation versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Indian Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History,” in *Studies in History* 4, No. 2 (1982), pp. 237–63.
51. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 63 ff. There are a number of problems in Stein’s hypothesis, including the fact that he does not examine several important issues related to agrarian structure.
52. See, for instance, R.S. Sharma’s *Indian Feudalism*.
53. Rajan Gurukkal has argued that in South India, the Brāhmaṇa settlements eroded the kinship basis of production relations because they involved the employment of extra-familial labour. (“From Clan and Lineage to Hereditary Occupations and Caste in Early South India,” in Dev Nathan (ed.), *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla, 1997, pp. 205–22).
54. The existence of social and economic stratification, of dominant and subordinate groups in rural society does not, however, mean that we have to characterize these relationships as feudal. Karashima has suggested that there was a significant difference in the pattern of land-holding in *brahmadeya* and non-*brahmadeya* villages (See N. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions AD 850–1800*, Delhi, 1984, pp. xx–xxi). This is difficult to accept.
55. N. Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries AD*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 137.
56. Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*.
57. B.D. Chattopadhyaya (*The Making of Early Medieval India*, Delhi, 1997) argues persuasively that the three major historical processes that were operative through all phases of Indian history (including the early medieval period) are the expansion of state society through the process of local state formation; the transformation of tribes into peasants and the formation of castes; and cult appropriation and integration.
58. R.N. Nandi, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–46.
59. M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cēra Perumals of Mokotai (c. 800 AD–1124 AD)*, Calicut, 1996, p. 148. Of course, it is difficult to say exactly how far back in time these marriage customs go.
60. See Kunal Chakravarti, *op. cit.*
61. There are exceptions to this. The inscriptions of the leading warrior families of Andhra (including the Kākatiya kings) proclaim their Śūdra status (Gynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 51).
62. See Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, p. 33.
63. Towards the end of the early medieval period, Sanskrit was jostled out of this position by the regional languages. In between is the stage of bilingual inscriptions.
64. This is the picture of the early medieval period in the writings of the Indian feudalism school. See, for instance, R.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*
65. The foremost proponents of this perspective are B.D. Chattopadhyaya and H. Kulke. Many recent regional studies of early medieval inscriptions support this framework.

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