

Urban Decline and Rural Growth in Early Medieval Haryana

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ABSTRACT

During the early medieval period, Haryana went through major changes in its agriculture and settlement patterns. The once-busy towns that had grown under the Gupta and post-Gupta rulers began to decline, while villages and rural life started to expand and gain importance. Archaeological finds and inscriptions from places like Thanesar, Agroha, Sugh, and Hansi show that many urban centers of the Gupta period lost their role as trade hubs. Instead, they were replaced by villages focused mainly on farming and land-based activities. This period saw the spread of land grants, the clearing of new lands for cultivation, and the rise of local peasants and rural elites who became central to the economy. Earlier, historians often viewed the decline of towns as a complete collapse of urban life. However, new studies suggest that the process was more complex. The fall of towns did not mean the end of economic or administrative systems - it meant their relocation and transformation. Many of the functions once performed in towns shifted to villages, leading to a more decentralized political and economic structure. Records and inscriptions from Haryana mention the creation of new settlements, such as *agraharas* and *brahmadeyas* (land grants to Brahmins), which show the growing value of agriculture and land ownership. Rural areas became centers of both production and governance. Historians like R.S. Sharma and B.D. Chattopadhyaya see this shift as part of a larger change across early medieval India, where the focus of power and economy moved from cities to the countryside. In this way, Haryana's early medieval transformation reflects the broader trend of ruralization that reshaped the village's life, economic, and their social life.

Keywords: Early Medieval, Urban Decline, Rural, Growth, Village

INTRODUCTION

India has historically been an agrarian country, with agriculture forming the backbone of its economy until the introduction of the New Economic Policy of 1991, which marked a gradual shift toward industrialization and an increased contribution of industry to the national GDP. In this historical context, the early medieval period of Haryana also reflects the same fundamental pattern - an economy primarily based on agriculture.

This paper examines the Urban Decay and Rural Growth in Haryana during the early medieval period. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people in this period, and the cultivation of land played a crucial role in the development of civilization. The study is primarily based on primary sources including literary sources and

epigraphic evidence, which provide direct insights into the agrarian conditions of the time. Secondary sources have also been used to support and interpret the information obtained from these primary materials.

During this period, Northern India experienced a complex and fragmented political landscape, characterized by the coexistence of multiple kingdoms and regional powers. This multiplicity of monarchical polities contributed to the growth of agrarian activities, as rulers encouraged the expansion of cultivation to strengthen their economic base and political control. Land grants, forest clearances, and the establishment of new settlements played an important role in extending agricultural frontiers. The early medieval period in Haryana represents a significant phase in the long history of agrarian economy - one in which the expansion of

agriculture not only supported the sustenance of rural society but also shaped the political and economic foundations of the region and this process resulted in the redefinition of older urban centres through religious and administrative functions, while newly established villages emerged as vibrant spaces of cultivation, authority, and cultural continuity.

Economically, the region's trajectory mirrors that of the Indian subcontinent as a whole, passing through several phases of transformation - from prehistoric agricultural settlements to early urbanization, and subsequently to agrarian expansion. Archaeological evidence from various sites in Haryana, including Rakhigarhi, Mitathal, Banawali, and Bhirrana, indicates that the process of urbanization began quite early, dating back to the Bronze Age Harappan civilization¹. The material uniformity of artefacts, however, suggests a certain stagnation in technological innovation and social complexity, which may have contributed to the eventual decline of the Harappan urban phase².

However, despite their technical advancement, the Aryans did not develop an urban culture in this region. The Rigveda, the earliest extant Indo-Aryan text, reflects a predominantly pastoral and rural society and even expresses ambivalence toward urban settlements an attitude that has led some historians to characterize the early Aryans as "anti-urban"³. The Rigvedic Aryans were familiar with plough cultivation, but their knowledge of crop diversity was limited; the text mentions primarily *yava* (barley) as a cultivated grain⁴. Artisanal production remained rudimentary, with craftsmen such as potters, weavers, wheelwrights, and smiths forming the core of the productive sector⁵. Trade was conducted primarily through barter, as coinage and organized markets had yet to emerge.

During the later Vedic period (c. 1000–600 BCE), corresponding to the composition of the *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads*, Aryan populations migrated eastward toward the Ganga plains modern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where iron technology and fertile alluvial soils facilitated more intensive agriculture. Consequently, Haryana's significance in the political and cultural landscape of the Aryan world gradually declined⁶. Nonetheless, the region retained its agrarian foundation, setting the stage for its continued role as a rural hinterland in subsequent historical periods.

The early medieval period marks one of the most debated phases in the history of northern India, characterised by a major transformation in patterns of settlement, production, and political control. In this era, regions such as Haryana underwent visible shifts from the urban-commercial networks of the earlier Gupta age to a predominantly agrarian and village-based economy. The process of urban decay and rural expansion was neither sudden nor uniform; rather, it reflected long-term changes in the economic structure, resource distribution, and administrative patterns of the subcontinent⁷.

Haryana, situated between the Yamuna and the Ghaggar river systems, occupied a crucial position in the north Indian plains. Archaeological findings from sites such as Thanesar, Agroha, Sugh, and Hansi indicate that while several early historic towns gradually declined, new rural settlements emerged in their vicinity⁸. The decline of long-distance trade routes, the disappearance of coin-based exchange, and the increasing reliance on agrarian production collectively contributed to the weakening of urban centres. Simultaneously, the extensive issue of land grants (*agraharas* and *brahmadeyas*) to religious institutions and Brahmins promoted rural colonisation, resulting in the expansion of cultivable land and the

1. Possehl, Gregory L. *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002. P 71-74.
2. Lal, B. B. *The Saraswati Flows On: The Continuity of Indian Culture*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1997. P-145.
3. Witzel, Michael. "Early Sanskritization: Origins and Development of the Kuru State." *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 1–26.
4. Rigveda., *Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith.*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973. P-72.
5. Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. P-65.
6. Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. P-15.
7. Sharma, R.S. *Urban Decay in India (C. 300–1000 CE)*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987, P 14-18.
8. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P 498-502.

consolidation of local agrarian elites⁹. Historians such as R.S. Sharma, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, and D.N. Jha have interpreted this transformation as part of a larger historical process a shift from an urban-commercial economy to a feudal-agrarian order¹⁰. According to this perspective, the early medieval period saw the emergence of a new power structure rooted in the countryside, where land became the principal source of wealth, status, and authority. However, recent archaeological studies and regional histories, including those focusing on Haryana, suggest that certain urban centres like Thanesar and Kurukshetra did not vanish entirely; they reoriented their functions as religious and political hubs¹¹.

Objectives

The present study is meant to fulfil the following specific objectives:

- To analyse the process of urban decay during the period of study.
- To identify the changes in agriculture patterns during the period of study.

METHODOLOGY

Historical and analytical method is used in the present study. The entire study is mainly based on primary source of information. Secondary data is also used to supplement the information gleaned from primary sources.

DISCUSSION

Urban Decay

The early medieval transformation of Haryana was a complex and regionally varied phenomenon, marked not by a sudden or uniform decline of urban centres but by a gradual reconfiguration of the settlement and

agrarian landscape. Rather than viewing this period as one of simple urban decay, it is more accurate to interpret it as a process of spatial and functional restructuring, in which the older urban-commercial networks weakened while new agrarian, religious, and administrative formations emerged. Archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic data together reveal the coexistence of decline and adaptation—where older towns lost their commercial vitality but survived through the assumption of new socio-political and cultural roles¹².

At Thanesar (modern Kurukshetra district), the erstwhile capital of King Harsha in the seventh century CE, archaeological excavations demonstrate significant changes in material culture between the Gupta and post-Gupta phases. The later occupational layers exhibit a decline in the use of metallic coinage, refined ceramics, and specialized craft production. This pattern corresponds to the general north Indian trend of post-Gupta urban contraction and commercial stagnation, as emphasized by R.S. Sharma¹³. Nevertheless, Thanesar did not experience complete abandonment. It evolved into a religio-political centre, maintaining its prominence through temples, monasteries, and pilgrimage sites. Thus, its transformation from a mercantile hub to a sacred-administrative complex exemplifies the adaptive resilience of early medieval urbanism.

A similar trajectory is observable at Agroha (Hisar district), historically associated with the Agrawal merchant community. Archaeological investigations conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India¹⁴ (ASI) reveal a post-Gupta decline in trade-related artefacts particularly coins, seals, and foreign goods alongside reduced habitation density and simpler pottery assemblages. These changes indicate an overall economic contraction and localization of production, suggesting that Agroha's earlier prosperity as a long-distance trading centre gave way to a more regionally integrated agrarian economy.

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9. Chattopadhyaya, B.D, *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. P 37-42.
 10. Jha, D.N. *Economy and Society in Early India: Issues and Paradigms*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977. P 81-84.
 11. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P-501.
 12. Chattopadhyaya, B. D, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sharma, R.S, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987).
 13. R.S, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987).
 14. Archaeological Survey of India, *Excavations at Agroha (1978–79 and 1982–84)*, Archaeological Survey of India Excavation Report Series No. 74 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2005).

At Sugh, near Kurukshetra, once a flourishing Buddhist and commercial site connected to the transregional trade networks of the north, the post-Gupta deposits reveal a marked reduction in the volume and variety of urban material culture, including luxury wares and coinage¹⁵. The decline of such sites corresponds with the broader shift from trade-based to land-based economies, a process driven by the proliferation of land grants, the clearing of forest tracts for cultivation, and the rise of local agrarian elites.

In contrast, the Hansi fort complex (dating to the 10th–11th centuries CE) reflects a different pattern of urban evolution. Rather than representing continuity from earlier commercial urbanism, Hansi exemplifies the reorientation of urban space for military and administrative functions under the emerging regional polities of early medieval north India. The fort served as a nodal centre for political control and agrarian management, integrating nearby villages into its fiscal and military structure.

These diverse trajectories collectively underscore that the so-called “urban decline” of early medieval Haryana was not a process of disappearance but of functional transformation. Many towns persisted by redefining their roles from centres of trade to centres of religion, administration, or military governance. This interpretation aligns with B.D. Chattopadhyaya’s¹⁶ influential argument that early medieval urban centres across India underwent processes of adaptation and restructuring rather than outright collapse. Haryana’s archaeological record, therefore, reflects a nuanced and regionally grounded manifestation of the broader agrarianization and decentralization that characterized the early medieval Indian subcontinent.

In the post-Gupta centuries, the fragmentation of centralized imperial authority facilitated the emergence of regional polities and the consolidation of local power at the village level. Haryana, which had formerly constituted an integral part of the prosperous commercial and cultural networks of northern India, began to

experience the gradual attenuation of its urban vitality. Archaeological investigations at sites such as Thanesar (ancient Sthâneúvara), Agroha, and Sugh reveal tangible evidence of this urban decline, including a marked reduction in craft specialization, diminished circulation of coinage, and the disappearance of large-scale trade commodities¹⁷. The contraction of long-distance trade networks was accompanied by a significant shift in economic orientation toward agriculture, leading to the reconfiguration of settlement patterns and production priorities.

Historians such as R. S. Sharma and B. D. Chattopadhyaya have interpreted this transformation not merely as a symptom of economic decay but as a structural reorganization of the sub-continental economy from one centered on urban commerce to one increasingly dependent upon agrarian production¹⁸. This process represented an adaptive response to changing material conditions, as the economy reoriented itself around land and localized resources. The fertile alluvial plains of Haryana, situated between the Yamuna and Ghaggar rivers, provided a particularly favorable environment for this agrarian expansion, sustaining the transition from urban-based commerce to rural self-sufficiency.

A crucial instrument of rural growth in early medieval Haryana was the proliferation of land grants, a practice that reflected both economic and ideological transformations. Royal and sub-royal authorities frequently issued charters conveying land to religious and secular beneficiaries, particularly to Brahmanas, with the dual objectives of expanding cultivation and legitimizing rule. Although Haryana itself has yielded a limited epigraphic corpus, parallels from adjacent regions such as the upper Doab, Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh suggest similar trends. The frequent reference in land grant charters to terms such as *khila* (fallow land) and *aprahata* (untilled or forested land) demonstrates an active policy of bringing new tracts under cultivation through organized settlement¹⁹. The Brahmana donees

15. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P-501.

16. Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. P 40-42.

17. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P 499-501.

18. Chattopadhyaya, B. D, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sharma, R.S, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987).

19. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980. P-67.

often assumed a pioneering role in this process, overseeing the clearing of forests, introducing improved agrarian technologies, and organizing rural communities around temples and ritual centers that served both economic and social functions.

This expansion of agrarian frontiers was paralleled by the establishment of *agraharas* (tax-exempt Brahmana villages) and *brahmadeyas* (Brahmana settlements), institutions that played a formative role in shaping the socio-economic fabric of early medieval Haryana. These land grants not only promoted agricultural productivity but also facilitated the crystallization of local political authority. The donees of such grants often acted as intermediaries between the state and the peasantry, exercising fiscal and administrative control within their domains. As scholars like D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma have argued, this emerging system of land control and local autonomy laid the foundation for what may be characterized as a semi-feudal socio-economic order, wherein ritual status and agrarian dominance were closely interlinked²⁰.

Concomitant with these developments was the rise of new rural elites comprising Brahmanas, local chieftains, and village functionaries such as *gramika* and *mahattara*. These figures became pivotal in managing agrarian resources and in mediating between state and community interests. Epigraphic evidence from northern India, as analyzed by Chattopadhyaya²¹, indicates that such local authorities frequently exercised judicial, fiscal, and administrative powers within their respective jurisdictions. In Haryana, where regional dynasties such as the Pushyabhutis of Thanesar and later the Tomaras and Chahamanas intermittently extended their influence, these localized elites likely assumed significant roles in maintaining agrarian stability and mediating the relationship between the state and the peasantry. Consequently, the village community emerged as the fundamental unit of both economic production and social organization during this period.

Archaeological and textual evidence also suggests

that the expansion of the agrarian economy was accompanied by technological innovation. The adoption of iron ploughshares and improvements in irrigation infrastructure particularly the construction of wells and rudimentary canal systems enhanced agricultural productivity and enabled cultivation in Haryana's semi-arid zones. The environmental constraints of the region necessitated careful water management, a concern reflected in both epigraphic records and prescriptive texts. The *Arthashastra* and *Dharmashastra* literature, though belonging to an earlier period, continued to inform the moral and legal norms of early medieval society by prescribing penalties for the neglect or destruction of irrigation facilities²². The persistence of these injunctions underscores the growing recognition of agrarian production as the economic and ethical foundation of social order.

Equally significant was the transformation in the social valuation of agrarian labour. Whereas early Brahmanical texts often discouraged members of the higher varnas particularly Brahmanas and Kshatriyas from engaging directly in cultivation, early medieval inscriptions and literary references indicate a gradual shift in this attitude. Members of these varnas began to participate more actively in agricultural management, whether as supervisors or cultivators. Sharma interprets this as evidence of a changing social ethos in which agricultural production acquired greater legitimacy and prestige. The valorization of agrarian labor reflected the broader realignment of social and economic priorities, as the village replaced the city as the principal locus of material and ritual life²³.

Thus, the ruralization of Haryana during the early medieval centuries was not merely a consequence of urban decline but an integral part of a larger reconfiguration of regional society. Through land grants, technological adaptation, and the empowerment of local elites, the region transitioned into a complex agrarian order that combined economic productivity with localized authority and ritual legitimation. The early medieval village,

20. Kosambi, D. D. *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980.

21. Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. P 38-42.

22. Kangle, R. P. *The Kautiliya Arthashastra, Part II: An English Translation with Critical and Explanatory Notes*. Bombay: University of Bombay, 1960. P-212.

23. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980. P-94.

therefore, represented both a site of economic transformation and a crucible for the evolution of new political and social forms.

Rural Growth and their implications

Agriculture has traditionally been the principal occupation of the Indian people and has long been regarded as a fundamental component of ancient Indian economic thought, classified under *varta* (livelihood), alongside trade and cattle rearing²⁴. Kamandaka, in his *Nītisāra*, assigns significant importance to *varta*, describing it as a reliable and secure means of sustenance, particularly valuable during times of crisis (Kamandaka, *Nītisāra*, II²⁵). Historically, India remained predominantly agrarian until the introduction of the New Economic Policy of 1991, which gradually enhanced the share of industrial production in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), leading to a structural shift from agriculture to industry (Government of India, 1991)²⁶.

The early medieval was no exception to the agrarian nature of the Indian economy, which continued to depend largely on land and agricultural production. This era is notably characterized by the proliferation of regional political powers, none of which succeeded in establishing a centralized empire comparable to earlier formations like the Mauryan or Gupta empires²⁷. The multiplicity of monarchical polities during this time had a close connection with the expansion of agrarian settlements, as agricultural production served as the principal economic resource sustaining these regional states.

In the socio-religious context, agriculturists occupied a respected position within the social hierarchy. According to Lakshmidhara, citing various Dharmashastra

authorities, there was nothing improper in agriculturists offering food and water to the most revered members of society²⁸. Such references highlight both the economic centrality and moral legitimacy attached to agriculture in early Indian society.

While older towns declined or transformed, the rural landscape of Haryana expanded significantly. Epigraphic records, particularly land grant inscriptions, reveal the emergence of new villages and the extension of cultivation into previously uncultivated tracts (*aranya* or *khila*). These grants, often issued to Brahmins and religious institutions, served both economic and ideological purposes: they integrated local cultivators into a broader agrarian system while legitimising the authority of ruling elites²⁹.

The terms *agrahara* and *brahmadeya* appearing in various inscriptions from north India denote settlements granted to Brahmins, reflecting the diffusion of agrarian control and religious patronage. Such processes promoted rural colonisation and stabilised production by creating landed intermediaries. In Haryana, fertile zones along the Yamuna and Ghaggar plains became centres of intensive cultivation, supported by irrigation systems and local tank construction³⁰.

R.S. Sharma interprets this as the consolidation of a feudal agrarian structure, where surplus extraction depended on land rights rather than trade³¹. B.D. Chattopadhyaya extends this by noting that the new rural order also gave rise to *samantas* and local elites who mediated between peasants and rulers, linking economic production to political control³².

In Haryana, this ideological framework found expression in the proliferation of religious centres such as Thanesar and Kurukshetra, which were not only

24. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980.

25. Kamandaka. *Nītisāra*. Edited and translated by R. P. Kangle. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960. P 10-12.

26. Government of India. *Economic Survey 1990–91*. New Delhi: Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 1991.

27. Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

28. Lakshmidhara. *Kṛtyakalpataru: DānakāGa*. Edited by Pandit Anantakrishna Sastri. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1958. P-112.

29. Jha, D. N. *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977. P-88.

30. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P-502.

31. Sharma, R. S. *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987. P 25-27.

32. Chattopadhyaya, B. D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. P-44.

pilgrimage hubs but also focal points of agrarian control. Temples and monasteries accumulated land and revenue, creating networks of dependents and tenants. The integration of religious authority with rural administration strengthened the cultural cohesion of local communities and facilitated the diffusion of Brahmanical norms into the countryside.

The decline of urban centres in Haryana did not signify economic collapse but rather a reorganization of economic functions. Sites like Agroha, once prominent trading centres associated with the Agrawal merchant community, show archaeological evidence of reduced urban activity after the Gupta period. Similarly, Sugh, near Kurukshetra, which had earlier been a thriving Buddhist and commercial settlement, witnessed diminished craft activity and fewer imported goods³³.

This decline in urban vitality coincided with the absorption of surplus labour and resources into the countryside. Artisans, merchants, and administrators who had previously depended on urban trade began to integrate into rural networks as cultivators, landholders, or service providers. This process strengthened the self-sufficiency of rural communities, which became the primary units of production and exchange. The phenomenon reflects what Kosambi described as the “complete victory of the village,” signifying the dominance of rural structures over urban-commercial forms of economy³⁴.

Rural growth in early medieval Haryana had profound political implications. The weakening of centralized authority, coupled with the rise of local landed intermediaries, led to the fragmentation of sovereignty. Kings increasingly relied on land grants and hereditary offices to secure loyalty, leading to a diffusion of political power among local chiefs. In regions like Haryana, where frontier clearings and agricultural expansion were crucial to state formation, control over land was the primary means of asserting authority.

The *kutumbins* (cultivating households), mentioned in Gupta and post-Gupta inscriptions, formed the core of the rural economy. From this class evolved the various cultivating groups that would later dominate Haryana’s

agrarian landscape. Over time, these groups became integrated into a feudal framework characterized by hierarchical land control, surplus extraction, and localized authority structures³⁵. The political map of early medieval Haryana was thus shaped by the interplay between agrarian growth and the decentralization of power.

The agrarian expansion of early medieval Haryana had far-reaching social consequences. The increasing control of Brahmanas and local chiefs over land reinforced social hierarchies and contributed to the crystallization of caste-based occupations. The division between landowning groups and landless labourers deepened, reflecting the consolidation of the *jati*-based order³⁶. The incorporation of forest tribes and pastoral groups into settled agriculture further diversified the rural population, leading to the emergence of new occupational and ritual communities. Economically, rural growth fostered a degree of stability and self-sufficiency. Villages became centers of production, exchange, and governance. The predominance of agriculture meant that social prestige was increasingly linked to land ownership and agrarian productivity. Religious ideology reinforced this connection, as land and its cultivation came to symbolize moral and cosmic order.

Conclusion

The early medieval history of Haryana reveals a nuanced and coherent process of socio-economic transformation rather than a narrative of decline. The attenuation of classical urban centres such as Thanesar and Agroha did not signify the collapse of civilization, but rather the reorganization of economic structures and social relations. The expansion of agrarian activity, the increasing prevalence of land grants, the emergence of powerful rural elites, and the growing interdependence of religion and economy collectively redefined the region’s landscape. Villages, rather than cities, came to constitute the fundamental units of production, authority, and social identity, serving as the primary arenas through which political and economic power was exercised.

This reorientation from urban to rural modes of

33. Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008. P-500.

34. Kosambi, D. D. *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965.

35. Sharma, R. S. *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*. Delhi: Macmillan, 1980. P-156.

36. Habib, Irfan. *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1982. P-64.

organization represented not a retreat but an adaptation to new material and political realities. The processes of urban decay and rural consolidation were mutually constitutive, together shaping the historical trajectory of Haryana during early medieval period. Far from being a peripheral or passive recipient of broader sub-continental developments, Haryana actively participated in the reconfiguration of the early medieval Indian economy around agrarian principles. The rhythms of agrarian production - of ploughing, irrigation, and harvest - gradually supplanted the earlier patterns of trade, craftsmanship, and monetary exchange symbolized by the “coin and caravan.”

Yet, this transformation did not mark the end of economic vitality or cultural creativity. On the contrary, it laid the foundations for a more localized and resilient social order, grounded in the interdependence of land, labour, and ritual. Through the apparent decline of its cities, Haryana reconstituted itself as a predominantly agrarian region whose village communities became centers of production, redistribution, and cultural life. The history of early medieval Haryana, therefore, is best understood as a story of adaptation and continuity - a transformation through which the region, by relinquishing its urban pre-eminence, discovered enduring strength in its agrarian foundations and village institutions.

Early medieval Haryana also reveals that this period was one of dynamic transformation rather than stagnation. The decline of urbanism and the rise of agrarian settlements signified a structural reorientation of the economy and society. Land grants, the emergence of rural elites, the spread of Brahmanical institutions, and the decentralization of political power all contributed to reshaping Haryana’s historical trajectory. The implications of this ruralization were multifaceted. Economically, it ensured the expansion of cultivation and the stabilization of the agrarian base; socially, it reinforced hierarchical structures and caste organization; politically, it fragmented centralized authority and localized governance. Yet, within this framework, Haryana’s villages became resilient centers of production and culture, sustaining the rhythms of early medieval life.

In essence, the transformation of Haryana during this period exemplifies the larger processes that defined early medieval India - the entrenchment of rural society as the nucleus of economic activity, the intertwining of religion and agrarianism, and the evolution of local institutions that would continue to shape regional history

in the centuries to follow.

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