

## **The Social, Economic and Religious Condition of India: In the Records of Faxian and Xuanzang**

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**ABSTRACT:** -The social, economic, and religious conditions of India have always been different during the different time periods. India has witnessed the presence various religions and cultures, from Harappa Civilization, Sanatana (Hinduism), Buddhism, Jainism, Mughals, Sikhs, the so-called whites to the modern Indian society. Religion plays a great role in functioning the society within a particular territory or land. When all records were focused on developing or maintaining only religious scriptures, the thoroughly records of the whole Indian society and its characteristics were lacking. This gap was successfully filled by the travelogues of Chinese and other travelers. It was the travelogues of multiple travelers from which we came to know about the burgeoning society during the reign of Gupta period and, also came to know about how affluent India was during the reign of Mauryan and Ashokan period. The travel records have played a vital role in the excavation of important Buddhist sites and resurfaced the marvelous records of ancient Indian society. It includes the discovery of Ashokan pillars, inscriptions, and excavation of monasteries, viharas, and even the world's first residential University, i.e. Nalanda university and many more. This research paper is focused on the travelogue records of the prominent Chinese travelers Faxian and Xuanzang. The study is secondary data-based research. It has used translated (English) version of the records of Faxian and Xuanzang. The research paper has found the Indian society, mainly comprising Hindus and Buddhists, were in great patronage of the contemporary kings and the societal features, like its economics, were highly influenced by the prevalent religions.

**Keywords:** society, economic, religion, Buddhism, Hinduism, travelogue.

### **INTRODUCTION: -**

The travelling records of the Chinese and other travellers, i.e. Faxian( 399-414 AD) and is continued by Xuanzang( 629-645AD), I-Tsing( 671-695 AD) and Haycho (726-729 AD), Ou Kong (751-790 AD), Ki-Ye (976 AD) and Chau Ju-Kua (c. 1225 AD) mentioned about the condition of India. In this paper, basically discuss the study of India during the period of Chinese Traveller Faxian and Xuanzang. The Fa-Hein, a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator who travelled by foot from China to India, visiting many sacred Buddhist sites in what are now Xinjiang, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka between 399-412 A.D. during the age of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. His journey is described in his important travelogue, A Record of Buddhist King and Fa-Hein. After the Faxian another monk Xuanzang came to India by the followed same path. Some of the condition of India which mentioned by the Faxian, later not described by the Xuanzang. The main reason for this may be the time lag. Kashmiri Pandit Kalhan also wrote about the history of parts of India in his record during the 11th century and also confirmed the facts of the travelogue of Chinese travelers.

### **ECONOMICAL CONDITION-**

Along with India being a group of variations, it has also been called the golden bird. From the time of Chandra Gupta Maurya to Asoka the Great and from the Gupta period to the time of Harsh, it has been an example. Faxiyan, who came to India during the time of Chandragupta Second and Xuanzang in Harsha time? They wrote about the economic and religious, political and Geographical situation of India. The economic prosperity of the era of Chandragupta is reinforced with its abundant gold coins. In addition, he also practised silver and copper currencies. The practice of silver and copper currencies was probably local, but its gold coins were for universal prevalence.

Describing Madhya Pradesh, the Fa-Hein has written that people consume the King's land and give some portion of the produce in the form of a lease to the king. And when they want to leave their land and where they come in mind they keep coming. The king gives no punishment or no corporal punishment. His travelogues give a fine impression of Chandra Gupta's empire. Fa-Hein states that the income of the government was mainly based on the revenue taxes which were one-sixth of the total production and he also stated that the economy was based on agriculture. Government officials were given fixed income and there was no contribution from the people. The donation was prevalent in those times.

Various activities had given energy to the Gupta Empire's economy. Agriculture provided primary subsistence and source of many export goods. Industries of simple crafts flourished and provided a lot of earnings for many citizens and guilds. But a hallmark of the Gupta economy was its trade relations with various civilizations. With these activities, it sustained the Gupta Empire for several hundreds of years.

For the industries of the empire, it mostly relied on light goods and handicrafts. The textile was a fledgeling industry during the Gupta Dynasty. Various sources of thread-like wool and animal skins were processed to make good quality cloth for both domestic and abroad. Handicrafts made of various materials were also used to make different goods.

Besides animal raw materials, mining was also active during the period. India was abundant with gold, silver and copper. It abundance allowed the Gupta government to produce coins, which glorified its rulers. Besides coins, metallurgy trade was also healthy. Most of the industries were tasked to numerous guilds. These trade guilds were both politically and economically influential. Guilds could control one trade in a province and wield economic dominance.

The Gupta Empire had a very diverse trade market for its imports and exports. It had trade relations with the Roman Empire in the west. They export textile, perfume, and other luxury goods to Rome. However, when the Roman Empire fell in the 5th century, they shifted the focus of their trade to the east. The revenue from the land was still the main source of the income of the state. The economic conditions during the Gupta period were specially marked by an all-round development in the field of industry and a large number of articles made of gold point towards the flourishing conditions of the gold industry. Gold ornaments generally satisfied the demands of richer sections of the society settled mainly in big towns and cities.

Trade and commerce had declined during Harsha's period. This is evident from the decline of trade centres, less number of coins, and slow activities of merchant guilds. The decline of trade, in turn, affected the handicrafts industry and agriculture. Since there was no large scale demand for goods, the farmers began to produce only in a limited way. This led to the rise of the self-sufficient village economy. In short, there was a sharp economic decline as compared to the economy of the Gupta period. The nature of the economy during the Harshvardhan regime became increasingly more feudal and self-

sufficient. The decline of trade and commerce which began during the Gupta era itself went on unabated during the Harshvardhan. This is obvious from the decline of the trade centre, scarcity of coins and complete disappearance of guilds of trader and merchants. Naturally, the decline of trade and commerce affected the handicraft and other industries for the deficiency of demand. This decline, even affected agriculture, though indirectly because most of the raw material for handicraft and industries came from agricultural production. But during this period, there was a lack of large-scale demand for agricultural goods.

Therefore, agriculturist now began to produce only to meet their own demands, needs and of the locality but not for the market. This led to the rise of the self-sufficient village economy in which all the needs and requirements of the community were met from within and also distinguished by an increasing dependence on agriculture. In general, there was prosperity within the empire. The cities like Peshawar and Taxila in North-West were, of course, destroyed by the invasions of the Hunas and Mathura and Pataliputra had lost their previous significance but Prayag, Banaras and Kanauj were prosperous cities within. As usual, agriculture was the main profession.

There flourished a number of industries such as- textile, architecture, sculpture and leather. There were different types of skilled and semi-skilled worker such as- Carpenters, goldsmiths, jewellers and other metal-workers, weavers, spinners, painters etc. The butchers, fishermen, public farmers, executors and scavengers were looked down by the society and were to live separately outside the city. The sources of revenue were not many in the days of Harshvardhan. The main source of income was land revenue on the whole taxation was not heavy according to Hein-Tsang.

## **RELIGIOUS CONDITION-**

Faxian mostly talks about the religious condition of Buddhism but Xuanzang mentioned about the comparative condition with others. Fa-Hien who visited India in 399-414 AD found the religious conviction flourishing almost everywhere he visited, with the denigration of Gaya, Kanauj, Kapilvasthu, Ramagama, and Vaisali. He mentioned that 'when he visited Gaya; saw the ruins of Buddhist monasteries and Viharas everywhere and everything was abandoned and forsaken. Kanauj had only two monasteries of the early traditions of Buddhism or we can say Theravada tradition. About Kapilavastu he said that the whole area looked like a desert only ten families of lay peoples lived there with simply a congregation of monks. The place Ramagrama had only one monastery while Vaishali had a Viharas in the great forest. When he reached Sravasti he found not more than 200 families and everywhere ruinous condition of Buddhist structures. In Western India, Buddhism was undoubtedly in a more privileged situation while in the South, where Xuanzang saw Buddhism flourished. Nalanda enjoyed access to the richness. The places which were finished before the Gupta period all were located in Madhyadesh.

But during the time of Xuanzang it even now revealed an indication of the disappearance of Buddhism. Xuanzang described the story of a Stupa of which Buddha had predicted, that this stupa would be burnt seven-time and every time it will reconstruct. After the seventh time, it will show the decline of Buddhism, and Buddhism will disappear from here. During the time period of the Chinese travellers, that stupa had been sear down four times. Xuanzang saw the image of Avalokitesvara at Bodh Gaya, which was drowned tee-totally in the ground by the vanishing of Buddhism.

After the first Chinese traveller Faxian, Xuanzang came to visit India and he also visited the same places mentioned by the Faxian. The travelling records of both two Chinese Buddhist monks seem to

differ on conditions of places where they visited. About the city of Gaya Faxian mentioned that there were only three monasteries at Bodhgaya and the whole city of Gaya was ruined. While in the account of Xuanzang he said that when he visited Bodhgaya there was only one monastery and few monks. Chinese traveller Xuanzang has stated in his travelogue that in many places in India the moral behaviour of priest, monks and nuns was largely disallowed.

## CONCLUSION:-

Faxian and Xuanzang came to India for learning Buddhism as well as some text of Buddhism to take with them. During this journey what they saw in India and feel about India mentioned in their travelling records. They give us Indian measures of space and time, tell us about the castes of India, notes the characteristics of the people, their education, customs, products, dress ("the people have no tailoring") in a kind of ethnographic survey.

Xuanzang as a moderation-loving Chinese deplored Hindu worship excesses such as "the Hindu who covers himself with ashes like a cat who has slept in a chimney."

Sally Hovey Wriggins wrote: "In the course of Xuanzang's travels around the Indian continent, he characterizes each kingdom, describing the length and breadth of the kingdom, the size of the capital, tells us about the soil, products, climate, describes the inhabitants, their clothes, style of writing, money government, kings, codes of law along with his purely Buddhist concerns. At long last, Xuanzang reached his ultimate destination, the Nalanda monastery, located southwest of the modern city of Patna in Bihar state. As a far-famed metropolis of Buddhist monastic education, Nalanda was a veritable monastic city consisting of some ten huge temples with spaces between divided into eight compounds, surrounded by a high wall. There were over ten thousand Mahayana monks there engaged in the study of the orthodox Buddhist canon as well as the Vedas, arithmetic, and medicine. India was prosperous in economical condition while the common people lived their common life with common daily works.

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