

## **Trade Centers of Early Medieval Eastern India and Their connectivity**

Anil Kumar<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The Post Gupta social formation was marked by the emergence of regional identities. Right from the time of the Guptas, and more so during the post Gupta time the process of the origin and evolution of states which was till then confined to the upper and middle valleys of Ganga with some activities on this front also going on in some other parts of the sub-continent, came to acquire a regional dimension. This was preceded by a large-scale agrarianisation of the erstwhile peripheral areas and this in turn set in motion the beginnings of differing patterns of regional economies during the period. In the case of eastern India, despite sub-regional variations, one encounters the emergence of a cultural idiom that can be said to have assumed an identity of its own. While talking about eastern India, one needs to take into consideration the differing conjunction of forces that operated in its three sub-regions – Mithila, Bengal and Orissa. While a large part of Bihar constituting the mid-Ganga valley had hitherto been the core area of economic development, the area of Bengal was yet to undergo that process of the exploitation of natural resources. Despite the Magadhan intrusions into these areas and the emergence of localized state systems the developed elements of material culture had at best made only a nominal presence with their major segments remaining in the backwaters of economic development. Bengal was either commercial or administrative, but the situation started changing during the Gupta period. There are references indicating that such centres continued to exist during Gupta and the post-Gupta period with changed character. Most of the urban centres were converted into either religious or fortified administrative nuclei during this period. This change in character itself is indicative of their dissociation from the mercantile activities. There is hardly any convincing evidence of large scale external trade in the early eastern India. The decline in trade is attested by the decline in the fortunes of both Tamralipti and Saptagrama by the early medieval times. Seemingly, the expanding agrarian economy along with the on-going process of state formation in the area sustained the urban centres that also emerged as centres of community activities in different regions. Responses to these queries shall, no doubt, assume the centrality in any discourse related to the making of early medieval India. Such an exercise needs to explicate the concern that all region-specific developments, if these have to have any bearing on the attempts to construct our past, have to be related to the broader processes of the concurrently dominant social formation. A negation of this reality would tantamount to the denial of the elements of commonality in regional formation in north India. Such a stance leads to the projection of a pattern of cultural evolution characterized by the insolubly situated and spatially fragmented societies. Adherence to such a formation brings one face to face with a number of questions that are conceptually uncomfortable. If the process

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<sup>1</sup> Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, India

anilwalipur@gmail.com