

Emergence of Local Lineages as Rulers in Eastern India in the Post-Gupta Period (c. 5th century A.D. – c.7th century A.D.)

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Introduction

The period under acted as a phase of crucial transition, as an important demarcating line in Indian History. The imperial Gupta empire was a synthesis of centralized bureaucracy and local authority and it rested on the rise of a prosperous mercantile class following the unprecedented growth of trade, industry and commerce. But it could hardly introduce any substantial improvement in the technique of production. The result was obvious. The mighty Empire's economic resources could not keep pace with its financial requirements, eventually, its burden on the peasantry became heavy and it drifted towards an administrative decentralization based upon landed interests.¹

Nature of state

The decline of the imperial Gupta made way for feudalism to gain its roots in the disintegrated empire. Though it has been pointed out that feudalism existed in the Kuṣāṇa period itself, but it was in this period that it was gaining firm roots.² We can cite the example of Śaśāṅka, ruler of Gauḍa. He started his career as a *mahāsāmanta*. Shrimādhavarāja II of Śailodbhava dynasty was a *mahāsāmanta* of Śaśāṅka. The messenger of Gunaighar inscription *mahāpratihāra mahāpilupati pañchādihikaraṇopārīka mahārāja* Vijaysena was also a *mahāsāmanta* of Gopachandra. Numerous epigraphical references speaks of *sāmantas* and *mahāsāmantas* but they do not inform us about the relationship of these feudal rulers with their masters. The inscriptions do not register the duties the feudatories had to serve as well as the rights they enjoyed. But it was a common factor among the feudatories to rise in rebellion and declare independence against their masters whenever a grim political situation arose in the state. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray opines that seeds of feudalism were sown in this period. Then, it flourished into a big tree in the Pāla and Sena age.³