

Nature of Odishan Economy

(FROM ANCIENT TO EARLY-MEDIEVAL PERIOD)

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“No single parts unequally surprise, all comes united to the admiring eyes.”

(Alexander Pope)

Modern political thinkers define state with its four essential elements like Population, territory, Government and sovereignty but Chanakya, the ancient most political thinker of India defines state with “*Saptanga* theory.” In his famous work “*Arthashastra*” he states that, a state should have seven essential elements such as: - *Swami* (king), *Amatya* (ministers), *Janapada* (*Jana + pada*, means People’s footprint = people and territory), *Durga* (fort), *kosha* (treasury), *Danda* (Justice) and *mitra* (ally).¹ According to him state should have a sound economic system, through which affluent wealth will flow to the *Rajkosh* (Royal treasury) for all round development of a state. It is not possible to think of the very existence of a mighty state without a strong and sound economy. So our ancient rulers adopted the most sustainable economic system i.e. traditional economy. It is based on domestication of Plants, domestication of animals, cottage industry and artisan’s workshop, trade, commerce with transport and communication.

It has been rightly said that the ancient land of gallant Kalinga had dazzled the

contemporary world by its vigorous maritime activities, wonderful military achievements and enormous economic prosperity² which was the sole cause of the invasion of Asoka to Kalinga in 261 B.C.

To remove the curtain from the glorious economic history of ancient Odisha a humble attempt has been undertaken in this study.

“Economics is a science of human behavior, which teaches us the art of allocation of limited resources, through which consumer can maximize its satisfaction, producer can maximize its profit and society can maximize its social welfare, whereas economy is a system or order, which provides people with the means to work and earn a living.” So economics is theory and economy is practical. An economic system is a system of production, resource allocation and distribution of goods and services with in a society or a given geographic area. Economic structure means the fundamental cause of economic performance or the mechanism or an established principle of the system. There are four different types of Economic systems widely accepted by different countries of the present day world, such as; Traditional economy, Market economy, Command economy and Mixed (Command + Market) economy, (some others are also known

as Capitalism, Socialism, Communalism, Feudalism etc). So what is an economic activity? “An activity that includes manufacturing, distributing or utilizing products or services is an economic activity.” Simply Economic activity can be defined as “an action that involves in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services at all levels within a society”.

Ancient Odisha had adopted the ancient most and sustainable economic system i.e. the “Traditional Economic System.” The basic structure of this economic system buildup on –

1. Agriculture or farming or Domestication of plants (production sector)
2. Animal husbandry or Domestication of animals (production sector)
3. Cottage industry, crafts and technology (Goods Production sector)
4. Trade and Commerce (Distribution sector)
5. Transportation (service sector)

Traditions of praying for “*Dhana* (wealth), *Jana* (manpower), *Gopa* (domesticated animals), *Laxmi* (production)” and “*Anna-Bastrare sukhi rakha*” (bless me with sufficient food and cloth, means always fulfill my prime necessities) before Goddess *Laxmi* (Goddess of Prosperity) are still prevailing in Odisha. Balaram Das, one of the popular poets among *Panchasakha* (five comrades) of 15th century Odisha, describes in his most popular book “*Laxmi Purana*” about all these wealth and properties. Such as:-

“*Gogasthaku debu mora lakshe Padma gaai
Kuber samaan dhana debu maata tuhi
Kolaku nandan je hastaku sunaa baahi
Chaarijuge basithibi amara bara paai*”³

In this *Purana* (epic), *Sriya Chandaluni* (a dalit woman) praying Goddess *Laxmi* to bless her with one *padma* (a unit of counting) best quality cows, abundance of wealth, children, and gold ornaments. These are traditionally considered as the wealth and property in ancient Odisha, along with inland and overseas trade was another source of income, in which Odisha had played a very important role in maritime trade with South–East Asian countries like Java, Sumatra, Borneo, *Srilanka* (Ceylon), Burma (Myanmar), Indonesia and also with African and some parts of Rome.

Production, distribution and transportation are the chief economic activities. The statement of Alexander Pope is very suitable in this regard “No single parts unequally surprise, all comes united to the admiring eyes.” All these are equally important for economic development. Factors of production are the resources people use to produce goods and services, which have been divided in to four categories: Land, labour, Capital and entrepreneurship.

Land

The first factor of production is land. It may be agricultural, natural or industrial production, by the use of land is possible. Economically the land means all within and around it, such as earth, water, forest, mines, air, atmosphere, rain, wind weather everything. There is an Odia saying that “*hati banare thile madhya rajankar*” (king is the owner of wild elephants), means- king was the virtual owner of all types of properties within his territory, so also the owner of all lands of his kingdom. Literally kings were called ‘*Mahipala*’, ‘*Abanipala*’, ‘*Kshetrapala*’, ‘*Kshetraswami*’, ‘*Mahipati*’ ‘*Bhupati*’⁴ etc. bear the same meaning i.e. lord/master/owner/holder of the land. There is a saying in different *Puranas*, ornate and other ancient literatures as

“*Bira bhogyaa Basundharaa*”, means the mightiest hero can be the lord of the earth or a portion of it. ‘Might is right’ was the principle to be the master of the earth.

Distribution of Lands

There were three distinct type of land ownership prevailed in ancient Odisha such as the crown land, common land and individual land. King distributed the lands to different category of people for greater benefit of the state/society and also for his spiritual benefit in following order:-

- Crown land (under the direct control of the king) for royal fortification and some of these were given to the tenants for share cropping. Tenants have to pay some portion of the production to the king as per the agreement.
- Endowment to *Mathas* and *Mandiras* (temple) for its maintenances and daily usages (*Devagrahara*).
- Reward to high intellectuals such as Brahmins (*Brahmagrahara*), and gifts to some special talented persons like- artists, artisans, poets, musicians etc.
- Reward to royal servants such as- ministers, commanders etc. (*Viragrahara*).
- Donations on some special occasions such as performance of *jagyans* and some other religious rituals.
- Open for community use –such as *gochar bhumi* (pasture land), *gohiri gopath or go danda* (cattle path), *puskarini* (pond), *Rajapatha* (highway), canal etc.
- Community land to the tribes and cultivable lands to the peasants.
- Allow to convert *Anabaadi or patita* land to *Aabaadi* land and forest land to cultivable land to desired cultivators.

Individual lands were of two types such as *niskar* (tax free) and *karajukta* (taxable). *Brahmagrahara* (the land donated to the Brahmins), *Devagrahara* (the land donated to the temples and *mathas* for its maintenances and to provide free food to some poor needy persons, *Atithies* and *Abhyagats*) and *Viragrahara* (the lands given to the military heads for their service to the state) were tax free lands. A number of copper plate grants stand as proof that for the first time *Mathara* rulers in Odisha, issued land grants to the Brahmins and this tradition continued up to the *Somavamsi Gajapati* rulers. The purpose of donating *Brahmagrahara* and *Devagrahara* were both religious and political in nature, means to gain *punya* (religious benefit) and to achieve support of the most intellectual and influential section of the people. All these were granted in some auspicious days to please *Devata* (God) and *Brahman Devata* (Brahmin). Kings also gave patronizations to the artists, poets, artisans and people having some special qualities being provided tax free lands. Those who were in the service of the state, they were also provided land grants instead of monthly salary.

Hatigumpha inscription of Emperor Kharavela mentions the extension of a canal from Tanusuliya to Kalinganagari by Emperor Kharavela during his 5th regnal year. This canal project was begun 103 years back by Nanda rulers.⁵

According to the Kanash copper plate of Vighraha king Loka Vighraha, issued from Tattichhapattanam in 280 Guptabda or 600 A.D. that the village Urdhyasrunga was donated to an educational institution for Maitriyaniya Brahmin students, which was run by a Brahmin Maninageswar Bhattaraka.⁶

Kamanalinakshyapura copper plate grant of Samanta Varman, the Ganga king of Kaling, mentions about the “*Dharmaraj Kalingamarga*” which was constructed by Dharmaraj II of Sailodbhaba dynasty.⁷

Bhaumakaras issued land grants to different temples. It is mentioned in the Hanseswar temple inscription of Jajpur that queen Madhab Devi of Bhaumakar king Subhakardev I constructed Madhabeswar Siva temple and appointed a Saivite to perform daily worship of Lord Siva. She also dug a pond near the temple and established a weekly market for growth of trade and commerce. Hindol copper plate of Subhakar Dev III refers the donation of the village Naddilo (present Nundelo of Angul) of Uttara Tosali for maintenance of Pulindeswar Siva temple, situated at Yabangulipatika (modern Angul) by the request of Pulindaraj a feudal ruler. Sibakara Dev III of this dynasty had given his patronization to Buddhism, though he was a Saivite. According to his Talcher copper plate grant issued in 149 *Bhauma Sambat* or in 885 A.D. he refers donation of two villages for maintenance of Buddhahattaraka temple, constructed by Bnitatunga Ambu Bhattarak, the king of Jamagartta Mandal and Prithivi Mahadevi issued two copper plate grants from Boudh on the auspicious day of *Kartika Sukla Saptami* in 158 *Bhauma Sambat* or 894 A.D., in which she mentions the donation of two villages with the advice of Sasirekha, the queen of Mangala Kalasha, Mahamandaladhipati of Dandabhukti for the maintenance of Nareswar Siva temple.⁸ Somavamsi king Balarjuna donated Baidyapadrak village to Ishaneswar Siva temple of Khadirpadrak in his 57th regnal year. He mentioned it in his Lodhia copper plate grant. It is also evident from different historical records

that Gajapati Kapilendra Dev donated a lot of cultivable lands to Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri for offering of daily *Bhoga* (food) to Lord Jagannath and he also constructed the *Bahara Bedha* (outer boundary wall) of Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri in his 15th regnal year.⁹

Copper plate grants of Suryavamsi Gajapatis make reference to different category of lands such as: *Sasya Bhumi* (corn field), *Gohirigopatha* (cattle tracts), *Go-Pracara* (pastural land), *Vastubhumi* (land for human habitation), *Kedara* (garden), *Baluka-patita-bhumi* (Sandy waste land), *Tikkar* (mound), *Jala Kshetra* (watery land) and *Nisiddha Kshetra* (forbidden Land) etc.¹⁰

State's Income:

Land revenue was the principal income source of the state. *Manusmriti* suggests collection of 1/6th to 1/12th land tax on the basis of the nature of the land where as Arthasastra fixes 1/6th of the production to be collected as land tax. But during Nanda rule the imposition of tax was very high. Tibardev introduced fair and simple tax system like moon light. According to the Hindol copper plate grant, Bhauma ruler Suvakara Dev III of Tosali was not in favour of imposition of ‘*Atibakara*’ (oppressive tax) on the people and Suvakara Dev IV of the same dynasty mentions about ‘*Samyakara*’ (normal tax) in his Talcher Copper plate grant. Tribhubana Mahadevi clearly mentions in her Dhenkanala copper plate grant “*na chandakara priyesu*’ (not interested to impose ‘*chandakara*’ or oppressive tax) and introduced ‘*mrudukara*’ (simple tax). In addition to this rulers also collected some additional taxes during emergency situations like war and for some functions of ruling family known as “*Uparikara*”.¹¹

Kings collected fines from the criminals and persons of guilty. There were ten different types of fines collected for ten different crimes in the name of 'sa danda dasaparadha'. Some rulers imposed taxes on domestication of animals such as 'hastidanda' was 'collected' for elephants, 'Aswadanda' for horses, 'Ahidanda' for serpents and 'haladanda' for oxen. Tax 'Bali' was collected from the users of canal water, 'Bhaga' from tenants; 'Bhoga' was a regular land tax, 'Nidhi-Upanidhi' for mineral wealth¹². 'Hiranya' was a tax in cash.

Nibanna charter of Mahasivagupta, the Somavamsi ruler reflects about the conversation of marshy lands, plain lands, sterile lands and fallow lands in to cultivable lands and collected taxes from the cultivators.¹³

Production sector:

Agriculture and cottage industries were the two important productive sectors of ancient Odisha. Kautilya in his book *Arthashastra* provides a list of crops, vegetables and fruits produced during Mauryan rule. These were (1) rice of different varieties, (2) various pulses, (3) sesamum (*tila*), (4) black pepper (5) *Yava*, (6) *Kulutha* (horse gram), (7) *Sarsapa* (mustard)¹⁴ etc. along with different types of vegetables. Sugarcane, jute, cotton, *Tila*, Mustard, coconut, betel leaf, betel nut, castor, bel, gourds, banana and mango are some commercial crops and fruits. Present Odisha is also continuing the production of all above crops and vegetables at a large.

Wang-Ta-Yuan, a 14th century Chinese writer mentions that rice was the staple food of Odisha and was sold at a very low price i.e. 46 baskets against a cowry. Sarala Das in his masterpiece the '*Mahabharat*' refers about the production of sufficient paddy in Odisha. Besides

rice wheat and barley were also produced in Odisha. *Madala panji* and '*Charyapadas*' refer the production of cotton and silk cotton in Odisha. Odisha was rich in forest products like timber, bamboo, bark, roping material, medicinal herbs, various roots, fruits and flowers, different animal products like hide, skin, bone, horn, teeth, bone and ivory. Kautilya states Odishan forest was a best breeding ground of best quality elephants and "The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" refers about the best quality ivory of Odisha.¹⁵

Weaving, carpentry, blacksmithery, gold and silversmithery, other metal industries, Stone carving, ivory work, pottery, terracotta and horn work were the main cottage industries of ancient and early medieval Odisha. The Mahabharat refers that the people of Kalinga presented different varieties of cotton and silk cloths like *Dukula*, *Kausika*, *Patrona*, *Pravara* etc. to Pandavas.¹⁶ Making of carts, ships, chariots, and household articles and furniture were well known to the Odishan carpenters. It is also evident from different archaeological sources like Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves and excavations of Sisupalgarha that Odishan metal artisans were well versed with the making of different ornaments for men and women, different household utensils, agricultural equipments, weapons and iron anchors. Discovery of glass bangles from Sisupalgarh proves the presence of glass bangle industries in ancient Odisha.¹⁷

Trade and Commerce:

Buddhist literature provides the evidence of Odishan trade with other parts of India through land route that Tapassu and Bhalluka, two merchants of *Utkal* (Odisha) had have their business with *Madhyadesh* (central India) and transported goods by bullock carts in caravan. In Ancient time the trade between North and

South India was running through the land of Odisha and *Kalinga Sagar* (present Bay of Bengal) was under the control of Odisha. Kalidas in his work *Raghuvamsam* mentions the king of Odisha as “*Mahodadhi Pati*”. The flourishing sea ports of Odisha like Tamralipti, Pithunda, Dantapur etc provided ample scope and opportunity to the *Sadhavas* (merchants) for overseas trade with South East Asian countries, Rome and Africa. The excavations from Sisupalgarha proved our trade relations with Rome. The chief items of import were silk, spices, fine cloths, diamond and other precious stones, ivory, elephant, betel and betel nut, drugs, forest products etc and imported silver from Srilanka (Ceylon), gold from Rome and fine silk from China.¹⁸ Hiuen Tsang mentions in his account that cowry shell was used in small businesses by the people of Kangoda and elephants were exported to over sea countries from it.

Coins:

Barter system was in practice at a large in Ancient and Medieval Odisha, side by side use of Cowry and different metal coins were also used for trade and commercial purpose. During Mauryan rule *Karsapana* was used by the rich people. Hatigumpha inscription was silent about the type of coins used in the reign of emperor Kharavela. Perhaps the Mauryan Puncha-marked coin was in use during emperor Kharavel's Rule and the gold coin was used for external trade and copper coin for internal trade in Ancient Odisha. Recent discovery of a gold coin weighing about 7 grams from Radhanagar near Jajpur district, Odisha by a farmer named Benudhar Naik is traces back to Kushan period by Dr. Sunil Kumar Pattanaik, secretary, OIMSEAS.¹⁹

Weight and measures:

Mana, *Ganda* (four), *Pana* (20 *ganda*=80 in numbers), *Punja* (four), *hala* (two), *joda* (two) are some weigh and measure terms used by the Odias in Ancient and medieval age. Sarala Das in his book “*Sarala Mahabharat*” mentions about the measurement of land as:

“*Kodie hata tuhi Karibu nala kaathi
Panchabinsa nalare Maanek Prakati
Bimsa maanare je karibu yeka baati
Baatike binaya kari ghenithibu sanjaa
Aambhara aayusa gheni banchithibu raajaa*”²⁰

(*Santi Parva, Pandavank Bhismanika nikataku
gamana o nitibaakya sraban, pada-24, 25*)

Nalakaathi is an instrument used by the people of Odisha for land measurement. It should a length of twenty hands and twenty *nala* is considered a *mana* and twenty *manas* are equal to a *baati*.

In southern part of Odisha it was totally different. They used to use *Paaikaa* (1/4th), *Adha* (1/2), *Solaa* (1), *Bodaa* (two *Solaa*), *adaa* (two *Bodaa*), *Gaunoi* (four *Adaa*), *Nauti* (four *Gauni*) for measurement of different corns and sometimes liquid things also like oil, honey etc. Land was calculated with *Nauti*, *Bharana* and *Akara*. A *Bharana* of land is equal to twenty *Nauti* and an *Akara* of land is equal to five *Bharanas*. Gold and silver were weighed by *Tolaa*, *chinaa*, *Kaaincha*, *pala* etc. and others were weighed by *Bishaa*.

Ganga Ruler Ananga Bhima Dev measured Odisha by the system *Nalamapa* in between 1165 to 1202 A.D. At that time boundary of Odisha was extended from Hugli River to the

Godavari River in the south. At that time the area of Odisha was 39406 square miles including Midnapur. Tamluk was included in Odisha during Ganga rule and it was extended horizontally up to Boudh. Odishan king collected 15 lakh *Mohara* per annum, was equal to 406250 pounds or 6793750/- *Tanka* (Rupees). The Annual income of Odisha in 16th century was calculated 435000 pound and during the reign of Akbar it was 435319 pound. In 17th century it was 537495 pound and during the rule of Sahajahan it was 4961497 pound, which was equal to 5374955 *Sikatanka*. In 18th century it was 570750 pound, where as it was reduced to 45000 pound during British rule. It seems that the boundary of Odisha was decreased at the arrival of Britishers. Before Ganga rule the length of Odisha was 185 miles and the width was 60 miles.²¹

Conclusion:

Odisha had rich forest resources, plenty of mineral wealth, a well productive land, birth place of Jagannath cult, *Mahima* Cult, *Tantric* Buddhism/*Sahajayana sakha/Vajrajana* Buddhism and *Gaudiya vaishnava* cult, Pioneer of Overseas trade and commerce, rich cultural heritage, strong political will power during ancient and medieval era. But the loss of men power in Kaling War of 261 B.C., invasion and plunder of Mughals, Maratha Burgees and British and frequent occurrences of natural calamities like flood, drought and famine broke the economic backbone of Odisha. Then the adjective poor and poverty are added before the name of Odisha by the critics and economists.

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