REPRESENTATION OF THE KING IN GUPTA INSCRIPTIONS, CREATIVE LITERATURE AND NORMATIVE TEXTS

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "REPRESENTATION OF THE KING IN GUPTA INSCRIPTIONS, CREATIVE LITERATURE AND NORMATIVE TEXTS" submitted by me for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Dedicated to

My Parents

Without them

It would not have been possible

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PREFACE

The institution of kingship had been a regular and dominant form of government in ancient India. This topic has attracted the attention of scholars from all over the world. The proposed study – The Representation of the King in the Gupta Inscriptions, Creative Literature and Normative Texts, deals with the kings and the institution of kingship in the Gupta period. Besides this, the study also provides an insight into the various attributes of kingship in Gupta period.

The first chapter, Introduction, deals with the historiography on the political history of the Guptas and on kingship with special reference to the Gupta period. This chapter also discusses briefly the various sources chosen for the purpose of this dissertation. The second chapter discusses the various Gupta inscriptions which throw light on the various attributes of Gupta kingship. The third chapter deals with the creative literature belonging to the period of the Guptas and discusses in detail the image of the king as given in the literature of this period. The fourth chapter deals with the normative texts composed in the Gupta period and provide us with the ideal picture of kingship in the Gupta period. The fifth chapter gives the conclusion.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The origin of the state, the ideal form of government, and the basis of law are some of the questions which have attracted the attention of scholars all over the world. In ancient India, the science of statecraft was cultivated with the institution of kingship as a dominant form of government. This dissertation deals with the kings and the institution of kingship in the Gupta period. The sources of information that are chosen for this purpose are the Gupta inscriptions, creative literature which includes some works of Kālidāsa, and normative texts such as the *Nārada-smṛti* and the *Bṛhaspati-smṛti*. It is not an exhaustive study of kingship of the Gupta period. But, these sources are complementary to one another and we believe that they will help us re-construct a representative image of the king during the period. The inscriptions provide us with the proclamations of the kings and nobles, the *Smṛtis* give us the ideal picture, and the classical literature is a mimetic reiteration of might have been the reality. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya is one of the most important texts of early India that tells us how a kingdom should be governed. But it began to be composed much before the Gupta period. Another important text, the *Nītisāra* (Essence of Politics) of Kāmandaka, was perhaps written in the Gupta period, but some scholars place its compilation to a later date. That is why, these texts have been used in this dissertation only for comparative purposes.

This dissertation elucidates the various attributes of kingship in the Gupta period, the duties, functions, privileges and powers of the Gupta kings, provides information on the checks imposed on the royal power by the law-givers of this period and focuses on the ideas and doctrines that influenced the kings of the Gupta period.

A number of scholars have written on this subject. Though there are many works which deal with the institution of kingship in ancient India, we are primarily concerned with the Gupta period. Therefore, the works which deal specifically with the Gupta kings and the institution of kingship in this period are taken into consideration and have been

discussed in detail. Apart from these, some other important works are also discussed which throw light on brahmanical political ideas, and describe different features of the institution of kingship. But, before that, a general introduction to the historiography of the Gupta period is called for.

1.1 Historiography on the Political History of the Guptas

1.1.1 General Historiography

The attitude of many European scholars towards the history of the Oriental people was conditioned by their prejudice against the colonised country. However, there were historians among them who were sympathetic to India's past. This duality in attitude resulted in the emergence of two schools among the British historians – the Romantic and the Conservative.[1] Of these two schools, the latter became more popular among the British throughout the 19th century.

The late 19th century saw the emergence of the new Indian middle class which began to be preoccupied with politics and Indian nationalism became a potent force towards the last decades of the 19th century. As a result of these developments, a new reading public, with a passionate and vested interest in Indian society, came into being. New information was being unearthed by the researches of the Sanskritists, numismatists, epigraphists and lay scholars. It was against this background that the first work dealing with Gupta history, written by a Western scholar called Vincent A. Smith, was published in 1904. According to the *Early History of India*, India had never been governed better "after the Oriental manner" than under Candragupta II[2] and the Gupta period was "a time not unworthy of comparison with the Elizabethan and Stuart periods in England."[3] Smith was greatly impressed by Samudragupta and lionized him as the

[1] Philips, C. H. (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1961, pp. 221-22, cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study,* Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 2.
[2] Smith, V. A. , *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1924, p. 315, cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study,* Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 3-4.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 322, *Ibid.*

"Indian Napoleon"[4], who was "endowed with no ordinary powers",[5] and whose southern campaign was simply "wonderful."[6] But being an imperialist, Smith was obsessed with the idea that the complete unity of India is only "a thing of yesterday" and tried to justify the British domination of India. He exaggerated the sternness and ruthlessness of Indian kings and thus mentioned that Samudragupta "made no scruple about setting his own ruthless boasts of sanguinary wars."[7]

John Allan's *The Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasty and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa* was published in 1914. It contained a discussion on the political history of the Guptas, primarily based on the numismatic sources. But, it was devoid of ideological overtones. In 1918, E.B. Havell wrote the *History of Aryan Rule in India from the Earliest Times.* In this book, Havell blamed Smith for his theory of 'Oriental Despotism'[8]. He believed in the philosophy of Pan-Aryanism, according to which the Aryans were responsible for anything that was good in India. He linked this principle to the Guptas and stated that the "Gupta period politically was an Indo-Aryan revival, for the Guptas were undoubtedly the representatives of the Aryan Kshatriya tradition and champions of the Aryan cause against Āryāvarta's adversaries of Turki, Hun, Dravidian and other alien descent".[9]

Though the Indian scholars contributed to the growth of Indological studies in the nineteenth century, their tasks were limited to the editing of inscriptions and manuscripts and writing papers on specialized problems. It was only in the twentieth century that the Indian scholars directed their attention to the writing of political history of India. All the Indian scholars were influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by the nationalist ideal which was expected in a colonised country. An emphasis on the nationalist approach towards history on the part of Indian scholars came about partly as

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[4] Smith, V. A. , *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1924,p. 306, cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, pp. 3-4.
[5] *Ibid*, p. 301, *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 298, cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, pp. 3-4.
[8] Havell, E.B., *Aryan Rule in India in India from the Earliest Times to the Death of Akbar*, London, 1918, Introduction, p. viii cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 4.
[9] *Ibid.*

a reaction against the prejudiced approach of the Western scholars towards India's past and partly from the influence of the nationalist movement on them.

K.P. Jayaswal, the prime representative of the nationalist school, wrote the *History of India, A.D. 150 to A.D. 350* in 1933.[10] This book was written to challenge Smith's view that the period between the extinction of the Kushāṇa and the Āndhra dynasties and the rise of the imperial Guptas "is one of the darkest in the whole range of Indian history." But, Jayaswal's attitude towards the Gupta history was ambiguous. He praised the achievements of the Gupta kings on the one hand, and criticised them for their imperialism on the other hand.

It was R.G. Bhandarkar who, in the 'Introduction' to his *A Peep into the Early History of India,* published in 1900, laid down the rules of a professional historian.[11] According to him, the task of the historian was to describe the past as it actually was strive to be an impartial judge. The historians who followed Bhandarkar, such as H.C. Raychaudhuri, R.C. Majumdar, R.G. Basak, S.K. Aiyangar, A.S. Altekar, R.K. Mookerji, D.C. Sircar, R.N. Dandekar, V.V. Mirashi, R.N. Salatore, B.P. Sinha and S. Chattopadhyaya, wrote on the Gupta history and confined themselves to the study of facts as they perceived them without deliberately subscribing to any particular ideology.[12]

Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty, written by H.C. Raychaudhuri in 1923, is still considered as one of the most important works on the political history of ancient India. R.D. Banerji

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[10] Jayaswal, K.P., *History of India, A.D. 150 to A.D. 350*, Lahore, 1933, p. 204.

[11] Bhandarkar, R.G., *A Peep into the Early History of India*, D.B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay, 1920.

[12] Raychaudhari, H.C., *Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*, with a *Commentary* by B.N. Mukherjee, Delhi, 1997; Majumdar, R.C., *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1922; Majumdar, R.C. and Altekar, A.S. (eds.), *A New History of the Indian People, Vol. VI: The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age (Circa 200-550 A.D.)*, Bhartiya Itihas Parishad, Lahore, 1946; Basak, R.G., *History of North-East India from the Founding of the Gupta Empire to the Rise of the Pāla Dynasty of Bengal, 320-760 A.D.*, Sambodhi Publications, Calcutta, 1934; Aiyangar, S.K., *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture*, Poona Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1941; Mookerji, R.K., *The Gupta Empire*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1989; Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983; Dandekar, R.N., *The Age of the Guptas and other Essays*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1982; Mirashi, V.V., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. V, Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Archeological Department of India, Ootacamund, 1963; Salatore, R.N., *Life in the Gupta Age*, The Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1943; Sinha, B.P., *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Patna, 1954; Chattopadhyaya, S., *Early History of North India*, Academic Publishers, Calcutta, 1958; Altekar, A.S., *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in The Bayana Hoard*, Numismatic Society of India, Bombay, 1954.

published his *The Age of the Imperial Guptas* in 1933. R.G. Basak brought out the *History of North-East India from the Founding of the Gupta Empire to the Rise of the Pāla Dynasty of Bengal, 320-760 A.D.* in 1934, which he revised in 1967. R.N. Dandekar's *A History of the Guptas* was published in 1941. R.S.Tripathi's *History of Ancient India* was published in 1942 and R.N. Salatore's, *Life in the Gupta Age* in 1943. *A New History of the Indian People, Vol. VI (The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age Circa 200-550 A.D.)* was prepared by the Bhartiya Itihas Parishad under the general editorship of R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar and was published in 1946. It contained a detailed account of the history of the imperial Guptas, written strictly on traditional pattern with the golden age model. R.K. Mookerji wrote his *The Gupta Empire* in 1947 and edited the *Vikrama Volume* in 1948 to celeberate the 2,000th year of the Vikrama Era. This volume contained articles written by many distinguished scholars on topics connected with the Vikrama Era, king Vikramāditya, his 'Nine Jewels' and his capital Ujjain. The culmination of the nationalist interpretation of the Gupta age as the classical age of India was reached in the early fifties with the publication of the *Gupta Polity* by V.R.R. Dikshitar in 1952. *The Glamour About the Guptas* by K.M. Shembavanakar was published in 1953 and *The Classical Age* was edited by R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalkar in 1954. The year 1954 also saw the publication of *The Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard* and the *Guptakālīna Mudrāyeṅ* by A.S. Altekar and *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha* of B.P. Sinha. Despite the assumed indifference to a stated ideological position, these were the works of nationalist historians who were writing for their own countrymen at a time when nationalist feeling in India was at its peak. After 1955, there came a sort of lull in the field of Gupta historiography for more than a decade.

In 1967, S.R. Goyal's *A History of the Imperial Guptas* was published. In this book the author not only offered a fresh framework for the study of the political history of the Guptas, but also advocated the adoption of an integrated approach to the subject. Among other important monographs on Gupta history are P.L. Gupta's *The Imperial Guptas* in two volumes (1974 and 1979), S.K. Maity's *Gupta Civilization* (1974) and *The Imperial Guptas and Their Times* (1975) and T.R. Sharma's *A Political History of the Imperial Guptas* (1989). Special mention should also be made to the revised edition

of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Volume III, which was updated and edited by D.R. Bhandarkar, B. Ch. Chhabra and G.S. Ghai published in 1981.

In the recent decades, some historians became disillusioned with the traditional mode of political history and adopted the Marxist interpretation of early Indian history. Some of its finest practitioners are D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, D.N. Jha and B.N.S. Yadava who began to present Gupta history from the point of view of the inter-related problems and rise of feudalism, urban decay, economic decline and the classicism of the Gupta age. The integrated or holistic approach to history did not place too much emphasis on the economic socio-political aspects of life. This approach studies political developments against the background of the interplay of various factors operating in society such as geographical factors, economic factors, socio-cultural factors and so on. S.R.Goyal, K.D. Bajpai, B.P. Sinha, Lallanji Gopal, B.N. Mukherjee are some of the historians who have followed or expressed their agreement with this approach.

1.1.2 Historiography on Kingship with Special Reference to the Gupta Period

Many historians have written on the institution of kingship that prevailed in ancient India and in the Gupta period in particular. *State and Government in Ancient India,* written by A.S. Altekar[13] and published in 1949 dealt with the ancient brahmanical political ideas and described the different features of ancient Indian administration. The importance of this book lies in the fact that no previous work on the subject had attempted to provide such a comprehensive synthesis of the divergent data contained in the literary works on the one hand and in inscriptions and such other materials on the other. In 1952, V.R.R. Dikshitar published *Gupta Polity,* which has been mentioned earlier.[14] This work discussed the nature of polity and the various aspects of administration under the Guptas with a strong nationalist bias.

[13] Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Benaras, 1949.
[14] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952.

The year 1959 saw the publication of *A History of Indian Political Ideas* by U.N. Ghoshal.[15] The book by Ghoshal was much enlarged edition of a short work called *A History of Hindu Political Theories* published by the author in 1923, which was initially revised in 1927. In this edition, the author has made extensive and intensive use of the material belonging not only to the brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina sacred literature, and the treatises on the technical science of polity, but also the works of classical Sanskrit and Tamil literature as well as relevant epigraphic material. This book contains the author's revised judgement on topics discussed in the older versions and a fuller treatment of concepts of the law of social order, state law and justice, the principles and policies of government and inter-state relations. Altogether, this book provides a complete historical survey as well as critical analysis of the political ideas of the Indian people during ancient times. Another important work, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, by R.S. Sharma, was published in the same year.[16] This book dealt with the various stages in the evolution of ancient Indian political theories and practices. The author believes that the development of political ideas and institutions cannot be separated from the larger social and economic processes which condition the forms of government and their underlying assumptions. This book has been subsequently revised several times.

Kingship and Community in Early India, written by Charles Drekmeier, was published in 1962.[17] This book concentrated on the values that legitimized or disguised the use of coercive power in ancient India, the manner in which these values assumed symbolic expression, the various attitudes toward political life and the different approaches to questions of justice and freedom. This book also explained the methods employed by those in positions of authority in resolving conflicts and creating consensus and the ways actions were explained and made consistent with religious values and the requirements of society. In 1964, J.W. Spellman published his *Political Theory of*

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[15] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959.
[16] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959.
[17] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962.

Ancient India.[18] This book discussed the institution of kingship, as this was the regular and dominant form of government in ancient India.

These were some of the important works dealing with the Gupta polity and the institution of kingship in the Gupta period. Now, I will present below the summary of some of the important issues related to kingship during the Gupta period, as discussed by these historians.

Legitimation of the King's Authority:

The kings of ancient India sought legitimation of their powers through association with divinity. Altekar[19] states that the doctrine of divinity of the king, which became so popular in India in the first millennium of the Christian era, was unknown in the Vedic period. Kingship at that time was a secular institution. The king in his official or public capacity was not required to perform any sacrifice for the promotion of public weal or removal of tribal or calamity. The growing sway of brahmanical religious ideas produced an atmosphere from the early centuries of the Christian era which became favourable to the notion of the divinity of the king. The brāhmaṇas began to claim divinity (*bhūdevatva*) for themselves and were, therefore, not disposed to deny it to the king, who was expected to uphold their privileges. He argued that the political thinkers began to advocate that the age of anarchy came to an end when, at the request of the suffering community, the creator made a "Code of Law" and appointed a king to administer it. This view about the origin of the state conceded quasi-divine status to the king. The author further stated that a small number of the *Smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas* mention that the king was a deity incarnate. But a vast number of them merely content themselves by drawing attention to the functional resemblance between the king on the one hand and the various deities on the other. They do not declare that the king is himself a god, but observe that his functions are similar to those of some gods. The author therefore argues that most "Hindu writers" have thus advocated the divinity not of the person of the king but of his office. *Varnāśramadharma,* which the king was

[18] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964.
[19] Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Benaras, 1949, pp. 89-96.

expected to enforce, was also regarded as divine and it was probably felt that the idea of divinity of the king would enable him to discharge his duties better. But when the question of the duties and responsibilities of the king was at issue, his divinity did not offer him any immunity or privilege. The brahmanical law-givers believed that if the king was bad in character and remiss in performing his duties, he ceased to be divine and became demoniac.

Dikshitar,[20] while discussing the divine nature of Gupta kingship stated that once the king had been consecrated, he was expected to be regarded by the public with a certain degree of veneration. But this veneration was due to the position he occupied and not to the person or the individual king, whoever he might be. This is why, the king is frequently mentioned as *paramabhaṭṭāraka* and *parameśvara* in the inscriptions. Only the kings who walked the righteous path of *dharma* were supposed to be looked upon with veneration. And this had nothing to do with the divine theory of kings as promulgated by the law-books. The author argued that the Gupta inscriptions do not indicate that these kings regarded themselves as divine by birth. It was a moral obligation on them to respect the law. In the same way, people were morally bound to respect the administrator and the final arbiter of law. There is nothing beyond this which could be seen as divine or of divine nature in the Gupta monarchs.

Drekmeier[21] stated that the *Mahābhārata*, the *Smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas* refer to a functional similarity of the kings to the gods. The sacrifice infused the king with the vitality of Indra and made him like the gods. As a consequence of the ritual, the ruler acquired divine qualities, but this was not meant to imply that he became a god or even that his office necessarily received divine sanction. The author distinguished between the theory of divine origin and that of divine right and stated that the two were distinct in brahmanical political philosophy. Never was a king vested with divine right by virtue of his merely being the king. Only when he was virtuous, self-restrained, provided protection to his people and attended to their welfare, he was compared with the gods. The author asserted that usually the concept of divinity was employed metaphorically in ancient India to describe the functions of the royal office. Only those kings who

[20] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 113-114.
[21] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 251.

fulfilled their duties could claim divine stature and the deposition of unjust kings was encouraged.

R.S. Sharma[22] stated that a qualitative change was noticeable in the Gupta kingship which related to its divine associations. The Gupta kings were repeatedly compared to different gods such as Yama, Varuna, Indra and Kubera. The author found it striking that they were called *deva,* which clearly represent them as god, but he stated that the Gupta kings did not claim divine descent. They were called *deva* in the same manner as teachers, parents and brāhmaṇas were called gods in early times.

U.N. Ghoshal[23] opined that the imperial Guptas pushed hard the idea of the divine nature of the king. The Gupta kings usually figured with a nimbus around the head on their coins, which was evidently borrowed from the coin-types of their predecessors, the Kushāṇas. The author also pointed out that the epithets and titles of the imperial Guptas and some of their successors reflect the influence of the later *Smṛtis* ideas that claimed that the kings were created by gods and were therefore divine by association.

Spellman[24] suggested that in ancient India divinity was claimed for the king only in relation to other men and that too very rarely in complete and absolute terms. The king was both a special concern of the gods and, aided by the gods, was endowed with superhuman qualities. The author mentioned that through performance of sacrifices and consecration ceremonies, the king was invested with divine powers. Another method through which the king could arrogate divinity to himself was by claiming to rule as the regent or representative of a god or gods.

Thus, most historians argued that the kings in ancient India did not claim themselves to be god. Instead they pointed towards the functional similarity between the kings and the gods which gave the kings the strongest legitimacy to rule. At best, they advocated divinity not of the person of the king but of his office.

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[22] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959, p. 323.
[23] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, pp. 397-398.
[24] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pp. 26-42.

The Eligibility of the King to Rule:

The second important issue concerning king's authority relates to the eligibility of the ruler and qualifications to kingship. The kingly ideal in ancient India ideal was almost superhuman: "Born of a high family, godly, possessed of valour, seeing through the medium of aged persons, virtuous, truthful, not of a contradictory nature, grateful, having large aims, highly enthusiastic, not addicted to procrastination, powerful to control his neighbouring kings, of resolute mind, having an assembly of ministers of no mean quality, and possessed of a taste for discipline."[25] These, according to Kauṭilya, were the ideal qualifications of a king. Indeed, while discussing the qualifications of a king, nearly all authors refer to either Kauṭilya or Kāmandaka, the 'authors' of *Arthaśāstra* and *Nītisāra* respectively.

Spellman[26] stated that the eligibility to kingship included physical prowess, virtuous qualities and the appropriate caste of being a kṣatriya. Drekmeier[27] agreed to this and added that while discussing the traits of character indispensible to the king, Kauṭilya mentions that the king must possess qualities of energy, among which he lists valour, impetuosity, agility, and dexterity. Kauṭilya calls on the ruler to utilize "opportunities afforded by the proper place, time and personal energy, skill in discriminating between conditions which require conclusion of a treaty and manifestation of valour, and waiting under the pretext of some mutual understanding and taking advantage of the enemy's weak points".[28]

According to Ghoshal[29] states that Kāmandaka reproduces in general outline Kauṭilya's integrated scheme of education for the development of the prince's intellect and character. The authors of various *Smritis* and the *Arthaśāstra* inculcate upon the king the lessons of benevolent rule over his subjects involving the conception of the king's paternal relation with his subjects, and his complete identification with their interests. With this they combine lessons relating to a mixed policy of forbearance and force.

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[25] Arthaśāstra, VI, 1, cited in Spellman's *Political Theory of Ancient India,* Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 43.
[26] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 43.
[27] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 204.
[28] *Arthaśāstra*, VI, 1, cited in Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India,* Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 204.
[29] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 402.

Dikshitar[30] also referred to Kāmandaka and stated that a king should get himself taught in four branches of learning- *ānvīkṣiki* (knowledge of self), *trayī* (three Vedas), *vārtā* (economics and wealth) and *daṇḍanīti* (study of principles of politics). Proficiency in these branches was a prime requisite of the king so that he could use his discretionary powers. Only a king equipped with these could realise the *caturvarga- dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa*. In addition to this, the king had to learn the use of handling weapons. A prince's education was not considered complete if he had not mastered the science of archery and the use of different weapons of offence and defence. They had to be proficient in various arts as well.

Duties and Obligations of the Kings:

All historians agree on this issue that the principle duty of a king was the protection of his subjects and the maintenance of *varṇāśramadharma*. Drekmeier[31] argued that the central duty of a king was to ensure that all men performed their prescribed duties. Protection received the same emphasis in the *Kāmandakīya* as it did in the Śāntiparvan of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Arthaśāstra*. The rod of punishment had to be wielded in accordance with the offense and without prejudice.

Ghoshal,[32] while discussing the king's obligations towards his subjects, quoted from Nārada that the king shall protect with attention all orders (*āśrama*) in accordance with the rules prescribed by the canons and the four political expedients. He should constant cherish the good and punish the wicked. The author added that the later *Smritis* repeat the early *Smriti* principle of the king's obligations towards his subjects in its threefold aspects: the divine, the ethicoreligious, and the quasi-contractual. The threefold basis of the king's authority and the triple aspect of the king's obligations are repeated by the early *Puranās* in their formal statements as well as their stories of individual kings.

Discussing the duties of the Gupta kings, Sharma[33] observed that the Gupta inscriptions indicate that maintenance of *varnāśramadharma* was the most important royal duty. Protection of his subjects was another major obligation that was imposed upon the king.

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[30] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 117- 118.
[31] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 185.
[32] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 317.
[33] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959, p. 322.

The author stated that the old theory that the king was entitled to taxes in lieu of protection, was repeated in the Gupta texts, but it was no longer emphasized. The author pointed a new trend and observed that according to Kātyāyana, the king was entitled to taxes because he was the owner of the land. This assumption suggests feudal character of the state and enables it to make land grants, although in actual transactions parties having interest in the land needed to be consulted and informed.

Dikshitar's[34] nationalist bias is evident in his views about the duties of the Gupta kings. He stated that the Gupta kings had many privileges but they never misused them. Being fully conscious of their responsibilities to the state and their subjects, they conducted themselves in such a way as to earn their gratitude. They followed the instructions laid in the *Dharmaśāstras* and acted according to the theory and practice of law. *Varṇāsramadharma* was the basis of 'Hindu polity'. It was the duty of the king to ensure that each caste pursued its occupation and did not compete with other professions. The king was to promote the righteous practices of non-injury, good speech, truthfulness, purity of mind and body, and mercy and forbearance among his subjects. Although he stated that the Gupta kings observed and endeavoured to promote *dharma* among their subjects, he did not cite any evidence in support of his contention.

Powers and Privileges of the King:

The king not only had obligations towards his subjects, but also unique powers and privileges. The chief among these were his right to levy taxes and impose punishment. The brahmanical law-books have disproportionately emphasised the latter. They argued that this world is brought to righteousness through the use of *daṇḍa*. Hence, the science of punishment is called *daṇḍanīti* and it is stated that after creating the king for the protection of the world, the creator brought forth *daṇḍa* so that the king might punish the wicked.

Drekmeier[35] quoted Kauṭilya who declared that without the sanction of *daṇḍa* "all would be upside down". Therefore, the king must wield the rod. Ghoshal[36] cited the

[34] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 126-129.
[35] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 239.

Purāṇas which held that *daṇḍa* had its origin in men's sin and was the divine remedy for the same. He added that Kāmandaka similarly argued that *daṇḍa* was the only preventive against anarchy, and justified this by referring to the innate evil tendencies in human nature. Spellman quoted Manu who declared that a king who inflicts *daṇḍa* justly will prosper, but if he is partial and deceitful, he will be destroyed by the very *daṇḍa* he inflicts. The highest merit that a king can acquire is acquaintance with *daṇḍanīti* and the proper administration of justice.[37]

Taxation was the other significant privilege of the king. Spellman observed that according to the brahmanical law-books, the king was entitled to taxes by virtue of his being the protector of the people. *Gautama Dharmasutra, Yājñavalkya Smṛti* and *Bṛhaspati Smṛti*, repeatedly make the point that the king imposes taxation in return for the protection he extends to his subjects. Protection of the subjects has been declared superior to all other gifts. The basic tax rate approved by authors like *Vasiṣṭa, Baudhāyana,* and *Gautama* is one-sixth of the produce. Ghoshal[38] stated that the principle of the king's obligation of protection in return for taxation is also mentioned in creative works such as those by Kālidāsa, Viśākhadatta and others.

Limitations of the Power of the King:

However, theoretically, kings in ancient India did not enjoy unlimited powers. He was bound by checks and balances. The most important among them was *dharma* and the threat of rejection by the people. Since the Vedic times, the king had been regarded as the supporter and upholder of the law. The essence of rulership lied in *dharma*. It was laid down that the king should realise that there was nothing other than *dharma* and he must abide by it. The king was the first citizen and his subjects were prone to follow his example. His conduct, therefore, should always be exemplary. Unhappiness, misery and pestilence among his subjects were attributed to failure of the king in performing his duties.

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[36] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 401.
[37] Sukthankar, V.S. (ed.), *The Mahābhārata, Śānti Parvan*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1961, 70.31.
[38] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 401.

Altekar,[39]however, observed that no constitutional checks in the modern sense of the term were devised by the ancient law-givers to curtail the oppression of an unjust king. It was likely that the *samiti* of the Vedic age functioned as a restraint upon the king. But when the powers of these assemblies declined and finally disappeared by *c.* 500 B.C., no other similar body took its place. He, therefore, argued that the *Smṛti* texts had to make use of religious sanctions to curb the tyrannical tendencies of the king. The king who oppressed his subjects or misappropriated funds, was guilty of dereliction of duty and Varuṇa, the chastiser of kings, would punish him severely. The threat of hell also served as a deterrent. The king was considered divine, but even he was subject to the established laws and customs. The king was required to take a vow at his coronation that he would scrupulously respect them. He had no power to change them at his will. The law-books did not recommend unconditional obedience to wicked and tyrannical rulers. But, Altekar admitted that the Smṛtis do not offer systematic exposition of the philosophy of resistance and define the circumstances that would justify people's action against the king.

Sharma,[40] however, observed that there were several effective checks on the powers of the Gupta kings. The brāhmaṇas acted as the chief custodians and interpreters of the law and exercised restraint on royal power. The king also shared power with the guilds and corporate bodies, whose decisions he had to approve and whose usages he had to enforce. The king had to reckon with the beneficiaries and feudatories who enjoyed great power. The ministers might also have restrained the despotic activities of the king, although the inscriptions provide very little information on their functions and almost no idea of their corporate existence. The author stated that in the Gupta times the royal power was more circumscribed than in any other period.

Dikshitar[41] also mentioned the limitations of the powers of the Gupta kings. One of these, according to him, was the *mantri pariṣad* or simply the *pariṣad*, which advised the king on matters of administrative importance. Another check was the *sabhā* or assembly, which was an organ of public opinion. The king was supposed to listen to

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[39]Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Benaras, 1949, pp. 89-96.
[40] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959, p. 323.
[41] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Moltilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 115-117.

them and act accordingly. But, as pointed earlier, he does not cite evidence for the existence of these *pariṣads* and *sabhās* in the Gupta period.

Spellman[42] pointed towards the Ratnins[43] or jewels-bearers of the king as being one such group which exercised influence on the king's power. He referred to A.S. Altekar[44] and R.C. Majumdar[45] who asserted that the Ratnins were a council of the king, who were called upon to give advice, especially since they were some of the leading figures of the body politic. These functionaries did in fact have important duties during the consecration ceremonies of the king. If the king had ultimate control over the ministers, they very often had considerable control over the administration. They also acted as a check on the king's authority as, according to the religious law, if the king failed to carry out the *dharma* prescribed by the *purohita* and the learned brāhmaṇas, they had the power to destroy him. Spellman[46] went to the extent of justifying a people's revolution if the king did not conform to *dharma*. He stated that the law-books compared a useless king who did not protect with a wooden elephant, a eunuch, a barren field, or a cloud that gives no rain.[47] They allowed people to abandon such a king, or even kill him.[48] Spellman, however, also cited *Nārada's* view that revolution against the king was not justified under any circumstances. He quotes from *Nārada*, 'It is Indra himself who moves about on the earth as king.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the existing literature on kingship in ancient India and on the Gupta kings in particular depended primarily on the normative texts. We hope to present a fuller image of king on the basis of utilising materials from a variety of other categories of sources.

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[42] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 69.
[43] Lists of ratnins can be found in the following texts: *Taittirīya Samhita* I,8.9ff; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* I, 7.3.Iff; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* V, 3.1,1ff.
[44] Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Varanasi, 1949, pp. 144-146.
[45] Majumdar, R.C., *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1922, p. 40.
[46] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pp. 234-236.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[48] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

Inscriptions

Epigraphic records are one of the most important sources for the reconstruction of early Indian history. The efforts of Charles Wilkins, Captain Troyer and W.H. Mill helped in the decipherment and interpretation of the Gupta records. But the most notable success was achieved by James Princep. He played a major role in the decipherment of the early Brāhmī script and successfully read a number of inscriptions of the Gupta period which led to the publication of a table of the Gupta alphabet in 1871.

Though conventionally regarded as a branch of archaeology, epigraphy is in fact much closer to the literary genre. It, therefore, cannot be properly evaluated without taking into consideration the nature and purpose of the document and the prejudices and predilections of its author. The authors of these royal documents, like the authors of the *itihāsas*, *ākhyāyikās*, *kāvyas* and other literary works, were also influenced by contemporary ideas. Therefore, care needs to be taken while using the inscriptions as a source of history. This chapter deals with the position of the king as reflected in the Gupta epigraphs. The inscriptions provide information on the activities and attributes of the Gupta kings and on the principles of kingship prevalent in Gupta period.

Apart from the inscriptions, a section of this chapter is devoted to the numismatic evidence as well. Coins, as a source-material of history, stand midway between archaeological antiquities and epigraphs. They are by nature antiquities but, as they usually contain a legend and sometimes a date, they are not altogether devoid of the features of epigraphs. The evidence of both the coins and the inscriptions is helpful in constructing a clear picture of the ideals of kingship during the Gupta times. It is for this reason that coins are included in this chapter which, however, is primarily devoted to the study of the inscriptions of the Guptas.

Ancient Indian epigraphs may broadly be classified into two categories. The first comprises of those which were engraved on behalf of the ruling kings. The second category consists of those which were incised for private individuals. The epigraphs of

the first category are further divided into (i) *praśastis* or *pūrvās*, and (ii) *tāmra-śāsanas*. The epigraphs commemorating particular achievements or *kīrti* of a king were called *praśastis* or *pūrvās*.[1] The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta and the undated Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman, which are entirely devoted to the recitation of the glory and conquests of the kings mentioned in them, belong to this category. The *tāmra-śāsanas*, on the other hand, record the grant of land made in favour of learned brāhmaṇas, religious institutions or deserving individuals and officials. These were official documents and were composed in strictly legal language. From the religious point of view also, complete performance of ritualistic formalities was deemed necessary to record the grant. Therefore, more and more emphasis was laid on the strict observance of the rules laid down in the *dharmaśāstras* regarding their composition.

The epigraphs of the second category, namely those incised for private individuals, record donations in favour of religious establishments or installations of images for worship by those who did not belong to the royal household. They sometimes refer to the king during whose reign the grant was made or the installation took place. We also come across eulogistic compositions engraved on stone tablets or pillars to commemorate public works, such as the excavation of a tank, by a private individual or a group of people. Such works sometimes mention the ruler of the country and occasionally describe his achievements. Private records, therefore, often provided valuable material for the reconstruction of the political history of the period. These records were not 'official' and were not drafted with the same care with which 'official' documents were composed. For example, the use of the title *mahārāja* for Kumāragupta I in the Mankuwar Buddhist image inscription led Fleet to conjecture that "it may indicate an actual historical fact, the reduction of Kumāragupta, towards the close of his life, to feudal rank by Pushyamitras and the Hūṇas, whose attacks on the Gupta power are so pointedly alluded to in the Bhitari inscription of Skandagupta."[2] But a proper differentiation in the nature of private and official records makes such a conjecture totally unwarranted. For our purpose, the *praśastis* or the *pūrvās* are the most important source of information for they contain a comparatively detailed account of the

[1] *Epigraphia Indica,* Vol. XXX (1953-54), ed. by Rao, N.L., and Sircar, D.C., Archeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1987, p. 123. D.C. Sircar does not believe that *pūrvā* and *praśasti* are synonymous terms (*Indian Epigraphy,* Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1965, p. 3, fn. 5)

[2] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors)*, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 46.

achievements of the kings mentioned in them. The Prayāga *praśastī* of Samudragupta is one such example.

However, even though inscriptions deal with historical events and personages, history is often shrouded in them by poetical, eulogistic and conventional elements. Since the authors of the *praśastis* were mostly attached to royal courts, they were eager to exaggerate the achievements of their patrons and the latters' ancestors. These authors were also reluctant to give details of the defeats and discomfiture of their patrons and their ancestors. Such facts were therefore suppressed or only vaguely and euphemistically referred to. The powerful feudatories were sometimes deliberately described in ambiguous terms that can be interpreted as applicable to both a paramount sovereign and to a subordinate ruler.

The study of Gupta coins started even earlier than that of the inscriptions.[3] The first hoard of Gupta gold coins, which probably consisted of the issues of the later Gupta emperors, was discovered as early as 1783 at Kalighat,[4] in Calcutta. But when this hoard was discovered, the interest of the scholars was mainly centred on ancient literature. Further, due to the ignorance of the Gupta alphabet, the legends on the Gupta coins could not be read. These were, therefore, treated as just antiquities. But after the decipherment of the Gupta script, it became possible to connect the kings known from Gupta coins with the kings mentioned in the Gupta records.

The evidence of a coin-series helps us not only in the study of economic history but also in the reconstruction of the history of the rulers who issued it in many ways. The distinctive types issued by a king may inform us of some important events of his reign not known from other sources. For example, the *Aśvamedha* type coins of Kumāragupta I prove that he performed an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. At times, they emphasise the importance of particular political event. For example, the Candragupta I- Kumāradevī type of coins underscore the significance the Guptas attached to their matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis. They also provide insight into the religious feelings and

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[3] For the progress of Gupta numismatography see Goyal, S.R, 'Historiography of Gupta Numismatics', *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, Vols. XXXI-XXXII, Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1993-94, pp. 361-66; idem, *Ancient Indian Numismatics: A Historiographical Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 1998, pp. 152-75.

[4] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa (in the British Museum)*, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1975, pp. cxxiv ff.

personal idiosyncrasies of the issuer and may thus help us to obtain an idea of the general atmosphere in his court. The coins also contained the personal epithets (*birudas*) of the Gupta kings such as *Parākrama*, *Vikrama* and *Mahendra*. But they rarely announced their full titles on their coins. There are only a few coin-types on which the titles *Mahārājādhirāja*, *Rājādhirāja* or *Rājā* occur.

Coming to the main aspect of this chapter i.e. the representation of the king in the Gupta inscriptions, we can say that through the Gupta inscriptions we can get numerous examples which would help us in getting an idea about the image of the king in the Gupta times. The inscriptions highlight nearly all the attributes of kingship. They contain a picture of the principles of kingship prevalent in the Gupta period. These are discussed under separate heads below. Before we discuss the issues relating to Gupta kingship, let us present this, a table of important inscriptions belonging to the major Guptas rulers.

Name of the Gupta kings	Total Inscriptions	Places where inscriptions are found[5]
Samudragupta	4	Allahabad, Eran, Nalanda and Gaya.[6]
Candragupta II	6	Mathura, Sanchi, Udayagiri, Gadhwa, Mehrauli.[7]
Kumāragupta	14	Bilsad, Gadhwa, Udayagiri, Mathura, Dhanaidah, Tumain, Karamdanda, Kulaikuri, Mankuwar, Mandasor.
Skandagupta	5	Junagarh, Kahaum, Supia, Indore, Bhitari.
Buddhagupta	8	Sarnath, Paharpur, Rajghat, Nandanpur, Dāmodarpur, Eran.

[5] Gupta, P.L., *The Imperial Guptas*, Vol.I, Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1974, pp. 5-47.

[6] The Nālandā and Gayā inscriptions of Samudragupta have been claimed to be spurious by some historians. Fleet (*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 254ff) was the first scholar to edit the Gayā record and declare it spurious. He suggested that there were differences in some of the characters and that the seal was genuine while the inscription was spurious. The same thing applied to the Nālandā record which was also declared as a forged document by D.C. Sircar (*Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983, pp. 270ff). The mention of the title *Paramabhāgavata* for Samudragupta and the reference to the performance of the horse-sacrifice by him further created doubt in their genuineness. According to the scholars, though the two records are separated from each other by at least more than a century but there were striking similarities between their language, style and the contents and, if forged, they were prepared by the same person or persons. S.R. Goyal (*The Imperial Guptas*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 132) suggests that these grants were prepared at two different times to replace the genuine records of Samudragupta. The upper portions of the original document, containing the genealogy and epithets of Samudragupta, were damaged, and therefore, were restored with the help of the similar copper plate grant of his successors. This explains the variations between their characters and script. He also states that the dates given in these grants should be regarded as the regnal years of Samudragupta and not the dates of the Gupta era.

[7] The Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription belongs to Gupta period, but it has not been possible to identify king Candra of this inscription with Candragupta II. This inscription describes the achievements of a king named Candra. It neither contains the genealogy nor gives the date for king Candra, even his full name has not been given. This inscription is usually identified with Candragupta II by most scholars. But S.R. Goyal (*The Imperial Guptas*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 144) believes that Candra was another name of Samudragupta and this record was incised after his death by Candragupta II, his son and successor.

Apart from these inscriptions, we have the Mandasor inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman of the Mālava years 453 and 529, the Eran posthumous pillar inscription of Goparāja and some other inscriptions of contemporary rulers like the Vākāṭakas, the Kadambas and the Parivrājaka Mahārājas, the Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman and some later inscriptions containing traditions or references about the Guptas, namely the Sanjan and Cambay copper plates of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.[8] These were some of the important inscriptions of the imperial Guptas and of their contemporaries which contained references to the Guptas. These inscriptions present a view of Gupta kingship which is discussed below.

2.1 Succession

The Gupta empire was ruled by a hereditary ruling dynasty, but the law of primogeniture was not firmly applied and sometimes the crown was passed over in favour of the younger son. J.W. Spellman[9] in his *Political Theory of Ancient India* states that though in ancient India the normal method of succession to the throne was by primogeniture, but other methods of succession were also considered valid. Similarly, R.S. Sharma[10] in his *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* and V.R.R. Dikshitar[11] in his *Gupta Polity* state that in the case of succession of the Gupta kings the norm of primogeniture was sometimes violated. The greatest example of this is found in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta which states that Samudragupta declared Candragupta II to be his successor in the open council.

The crowned *Yuvarāja* was installed emperor either after the death of the reigning king or after the abdication, if it so happened. In accordance with this practice, Candragupta

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[8] Gupta, P.L., *The Imperial Guptas*, Vol.I, Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1974, pp. 50-56; Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors)*,Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 79-299; Upadhyaya, V, *Gupta Abhilekha*, Bihar Hindi Grantha Academy, Patna, 1974, pp. 121-234.

[9] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pp. 57-58.

[10] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959, p. 322.

[11] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 109-111.

I hailed his son Samudragupta as *Yuvarāja*. Dikshitar argues that although the selection of the successor might have been left to the king, but the final approval rested with the court and the people.[12] He states that the opening lines of the Allahabad pillar inscription (ll. 7-8) present us with a vivid picture of the selection of *Yuvarāja* by Candragupta I. The inscription says that the Mahārāja embraced Samudragupta in the open court with tears of love and affection and exclaimed him worthy of the place of the crown prince which created envy and jealousy in his other sons.

In the Mathura and Bhitari stone pillar inscriptions, we come across the epithet *tatparigṛhīta* (accepted by him), used in case of Candragupta II. This phrase describes the relationship of Candragupta II with his father Samudragupta.[13] Significantly, apart from Samudragupta, Candragupta II is the only other Gupta emperor who felt the necessity of justifying his accession by a reference to the desire of his royal father. All the other Gupta kings who mentioned their respective fathers in their inscriptions were usually content with the use of the phrase *tatpādānudhyāta* (meditating on the feet of), which merely indicates their own filial devotion. This phrase was not a technical expression denoting a legal or legitimate right to the throne, as some scholars have suggested.[14] It was even used by feudatory kings to show their devotion to their overlords. For example, the Udayagiri inscription of the Gupta year 82 describes the Sanakānīka Maharaja as the *pādānudhyāta* of Candragupta II.[15] Candragupta II employed the term *tatparigṛhīta* to show that he was the favourite son of Samudragupta, who had chosen him as his successor out of his many sons. This was a repetition of the supposed earlier nomination of Samudragupta by his father Candragupta I. Therefore, we can infer from these two cases, that in some cases perhaps the claim of the eldest son was overlooked.

The reason cited for this was that the nominations were made on merits. Both Dikshitar[16] and Spellman[17] state that the king could ignore the tradition and select his younger son in preference to the eldest if the former was more capable and worthy of

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[12] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, p.110.

[13] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983, pp. 313, 318, 321.

[14] For example Sinha, B.P., *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Patna, 1954, p. 25.

[15] Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983, p. 271.

[16] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, p. 110.

[17] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 58.

ruling the empire. Therefore, in cases where the eldest son was perceived not to have the requisite qualification for shouldering the responsibilities of administering the empire, he was superseded in favour of a more worthy son. According to Dikshitar, the Gupta kings naturally looked to the greater interest of the state than that of the family.[18] However, it should be argued that although Dikshitar mentions that the choice of the king was to be ratified by the people and the court through the ceremony of *Yuvarājya abhisecana*, he does not provide any evidence in support of his claim.

2.2 The Titles of the Kings

The Gupta kings were not only the kings of their administered dominion but also the overlord of numerous subordinate kingdoms and tribal republics. And, therefore, the simple title of *rāja* was not sufficient to represent the situation. In the Mauryan times, titles such as *Rājan*, *Mahārāja* and *Kumāra* were applied to the kings and princes. But in the Gupta period these titles were found inadequate. The early kings of the imperial line like Śri Gupta were described as *mahārāja*. But soon it became an official title that was applied to the feudatories and not to the paramount rulers. And, therefore, to distinguish themselves from the feudatories, the imperial Guptas adopted the title *mahārājādhirāja*, which was indicative of their imperial power and position.[19]

The Allahabad pillar inscription tells us that Candragupta I was the first king of the Gupta dynasty who was raised to the status of *mahārājādhirāja,* while his father and grandfather, Ghaṭotkacha and Śri Gupta, were simply called *mahārāja*. Sinha[20] states that the title *mahārājādhirāja*, was adopted by the Gupta emperors in imitation of the titles of the Bactrian and Śaka-Kushāṇa kings such as Basieos Basileon, *Mahārājasa rājātirājasa mahatasa, rājadhirāja*. There are numerous instances to support the view that the imperial Guptas adopted various Śaka-Kushāṇa models and the imperial titles were only one of these. But the Guptas were also supporters of the brahmanical order and traditions which might have made them seek inspiration from the Vedic literature.

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[18] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, p. 111.

[19] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors)*, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 59.

[20] Sinha, B.P., *Twilight of the Imperial Guptas*, National Centre for Oriental Studies, Delhi, 1993, pp. 239-240.

The term *adhirāja*, denoting overlord among king or princes, occurs in the *Ṛgveda*, the *Atharva Veda* and the later *Saṁhitās*. The term *Mahārāja* is found in many places in the *Brāhmaṇas*. The term *rājadhirāja*, meaning king of kings, also occurs in the late *Taittirīya Āranyaka*, which denotes a title of paramount sovereignty.[21]

In the Allahabad pillar inscription, Samudragupta calls himself *Lichchhavi-dauhitra*, the daughter's son of the Lichchhavi (king). The Guptas were very proud of their alliance with the Lichchhavis. They even took the trouble to publicize this relationship by issuing a particular type of gold coins which had the names and figures of Candragupta I and his Lichchhavi wife Kumāradevī on the obverse and the figure of a goddess seated on a lion along with the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* on the reverse. As both the inscriptions and the coins, from which we learn that the Guptas were proud of their association with the Lichchhavis, are political in nature, it is usually accepted that the advantage which they derived from it was also political in nature. According to Smith,[22] Aiyangar,[23] Altekar,[24] Majumdar[25] and many others, the alliance of the Guptas with the Lichchhavis resulted in the amalgamation of the two states which enabled Candragupta I to assume the imperial title *mahārājādhirāja*.[26] This view was modified by Goyal.[27] He states that this view was based on the assumption that Kumāradevī was 'the heiress of the territory of the Lichchhavis',[28] 'a queen in her own right.'[29] As is well known, in

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[21] Sinha, B.P., *Twilight of the Imperial Guptas*, National Centre for Oriental Studies, Delhi, 1993, p. 240.

[22] Smith, V.A., *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1924, p. 295 cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 118.

[23] Aiyangar, S.K., *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture*, Vol. I, Poona Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1941, pp. 182-83.

[24] Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, 1957, p. 2.

[25] Majumdar, R.C. and Altekar, A.S. (eds.), *A New History of Indian People*, Vol. VI: *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age (Circa 200-550 A.D.)*, Bhartiya Itihas Parishad, Lahore, 1946, p. 129.

[26] According to Allan, the 'kingdom of Vaiśālī was one of his (Candragupta I's) earliest conquests and his marriage with Kumāradevī was one of the terms of the treaty of peace' (*op. cit.*, p. xix). Basak also believed that Candragupta I helped his father Ghaṭotkacha "by making a conquest of the northern state of Vaiśālī" and by compelling "the Lichchhavi chief or chiefs to please him by entering into a *santāna-sandhi*" (*History of North-Eastern India*, p. 7; cf. *JNSI*, V, p. 40). But the pride which the Guptas have displayed in their Lichchhavi blood clearly suggests that the Lichchhavis were not conquered subjects (cf. Altekar, *JNSI*, V, p. 145; *Bayana Hoard*, p. xliii, fn.1).

[27] Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 118.

[28] Aiyangar, S.K., *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture*, Vol. I, Poona Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1941, p. 181.

ancient India daughters did not have immediate right of inheritance. If this was so, Kumāradevī could not have been a queen in her own right. Goyal states that the problem can be solved by the interpretation of the term *Lichchhavi-dauhitra* used for Samudragupta in the Gupta official genealogy. It would mean that "Samudragupta was a *dvyāmushyāyaṇa*. He was the natural son of Candragupta I and the subsidiary son (of the *dauhitra* category) of his Lichchhavi maternal grandfather. He, therefore, introduces himself as *Candraguptasya Lichchhavidauhitrasya Mahādevyām = Kumāradevyām-utpannasya*."[30] If this was so, it may be reasonably assumed that at least technically it was Samudragupta, and not Kumāradevī or, through her, Candragupta I, who inherited the Lichchhavi state, though it may be conceded that since the father of Kumāradevī did not have a male issue and, probably died before the demise of Candragupta I, the latter may have acquired the actual control of the Lichchhavi state. This means that Candragupta I was not the *de jure* sovereign of the Lichchhavi state. The Guptas acquired *de jure* sovereignty of the state only after the accession of Samudragupta.

In the Udayagiri cave inscription of Candragupta II,[31] he is addressed as *paramabhaṭṭāraka* and *mahārājādhirāja*. Candragupta II was the first Gupta king to be called *paramabhaṭṭāraka*. The Gadhwa stone inscription[32] and some other inscriptions of Candragupta II, add another appellation– *paramabhāgvata*. The latter title was also given to Kumāragupta, which is evident from the opening lines of the Gadhwa stone inscription of him. In the Damodarpur copper plates, the Gupta emperors from Kumāragupta I began to be described as *paramadaivata* and from Devagupta onwards *parameśvara*– the highest god. These are some of the various titles adopted by the Gupta kings in their inscriptions.

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[29] Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, 1957, p. 28.

[30] *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, XIX, Pt. ii, p. 141.

[31] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors)*, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 25.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 37,38.

2.3 Divine Nature of Kingship

This was one of the most important issues associated with kingship in ancient India. Altekar[33] states that the doctrine of the divinity of the king was unknown in the Vedic period. Kingship at that time was a purely secular institution. The king in his official capacity was not required to perform any sacrifices for the promotion of the public weal or for the removal of the tribal or national calamity. It was the growing sway of the brahmanical religious ideas and notions in the first millennium *A.D.* that produced an atmosphere which proved favourable to the notion of the divinity of the king. The brāhmaṇas were claiming divinity (*bhūdevatā*) for themselves and were, therefore, not disposed to deny it to the king, who was expected to uphold their privileges.

Spellman[34] suggests that if we view kingship merely as a human institution, we would ignore the many passages in various texts which suggest otherwise. It is, however, possible to see various stages of transformation in the development of the idea of the divinity of kingship. According to him, divinity was claimed for the king in relation to other men. Divinity was claimed very rarely in complete and absolute terms for any human being. The king was both a special concern of the gods and, aided by the gods, was endowed with superhuman qualities. Even then, the king had divine status, although he not could be called a god.

Drekmeier[35] cites examples from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas* and states that all these texts refer to a functional similarity of the king to the gods. The sacrifice infused the king with the vitality of Indra and made him like the gods. As a consequence of the ritual, the ruler acquired divine qualities, but this was not meant to imply that he became a god or even that his office necessarily received divine sanction. The author distinguishes between the theory of divine origin and that of the divine right and states that in brahmanical political philosophy the two are distinct. A Hindu king was never vested with divine right. Only when he was virtuous and self-restrained, provided protection to his people and attended to their welfare, that he was compared with the gods. The author asserts that usually the concept of divinity was used metaphorically in ancient India to describe the functions of the royal office.

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[33] Altekar, *A.S., State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Benaras, 1949, p. 89.

[34] Spellman, J.W., *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 26.

[35] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 251.

Several scholars have commented on the question of the divinity attached to the Gupta kings. R.S. Sharma[36] states that compared to the previous ruling dynasties, a qualitative change is noticeable in the Gupta kingship, which relates to its divine associations. The Gupta kings were repeatedly compared to gods such as Yama, Varuṇa, Indra, Kubera, etc. He finds it striking that they are called *deva* which clearly represent them as god. However, he states that the Gupta kings did not claim divine descent. They were called *deva* in the same manner as teachers, parents and brāhmaṇas were called gods in early times.

Ghoshal[37] has argued that judging from the evidence of the coins and inscriptions of the Guptas, it seems that compared to their indigenous predecessors the imperial Guptas had pushed further the idea of divine kingship. The Gupta kings usually figure with a nimbus around their head on their coins, which was evidently borrowed from the coin-types of the Kushāṇas. This fact bears witness to the influence exercised by the ideas of the king's divinity imported into the Indian soil for the first time by the Indo-Greek kings. On the other hand, the epithets and titles of the imperial Guptas and some of their successors reflect the influence of the later *Smṛti* ideas of the king's equivalence to the "Regents of the Quarters" (and the gods generally), by virtue of his divine origin.

Dikshitar[38] however suggested a modification. He pointed out that once the king had been consecrated to the exalted position of kingship, he was to be regarded by the public with a certain degree of veneration. But this veneration was offered to the office and not to the person. And, only those kings who walked the righteous path of *dharma* were considered worthy of veneration. This had nothing to do with the divine theory of kingship promulgated by the law-books. A panegyrist may, in his enthusiasm, refer to them as *acintya puruṣa* or *paramadaivata*, but there is hardly a phrase in the Gupta inscriptions that suggests that kings were regarded divine by birth. It was a moral obligation on them to respect the law. In the same way, people were morally bound to respect the administrator and the final arbiter of law. There was nothing beyond this which could be seen as divine or of divine nature in the Gupta monarchs.

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[36] Sharma, R.S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1959, p. 312.

[37] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, pp. 397-398.

[38] Dikshitar, V.R.R., *Gupta Polity*, Motilal Banarasidass, Madras, 1952, pp. 113-114.

Nevertheless, there are many Gupta inscriptions in which the Gupta kings are compared to the gods. For example, the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta describes him as 'a human being only in the performance of the rites and established practices of the world, but variably as god with the world as his residence (*lokadhāmno devasya*).'[39] Samudragupta is also mentioned as equal to Kubera, Varuṇa, Indra and Yama (*Dhanada-Varuṇendrāntakasama*). That this comparison meant exact possession of the specific qualities (*guṇa*) of the gods concerned is made clear when he is referred to as equal in pleasure and anger respectively of Kubera and Yama (*Dhanadāntaka-tushti-kopa-tulyaḥ*). This special relationship with gods in case of Samudragupta is further emphasized by his being called *kṛtānta-paraśu*. This attribute was given only to Samudragupta, highlighting his irresistible power of final punishment. We also find the use of appellations, such as *apratiratha* and *acintya*, used for Samudragupta in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

Apratiratha and *acintya* may be translated as an unparalleled hero-(charioteer) and incomprehensible, as Fleet[40] had done. But there is force in the argument of Goyal[41] that both these titles are names of Vishṇu. On the Archer type and Battle Axe types of coins of Samudragupta, he is called *apratiratha* and *kṛtānta-paraśu*.[42] Candragupta I is referred to as *svayam apratiratha*. This tendency to attribute specific qualities of divinity to the Gupta emperors was further buttressed by the title *paramadaivata* assumed by Kumaragupta I and his successors. Terms such as *apratiratha*, *acintya* and *paramadaivata* distinctly suggested analogy with divinity. In the Lion-slayer type of coins of Kumaragupta I, part of the legend is *sākshādiva Narasiṁha*. Skandagupta is called *rāmatulya* in the Supia inscription.[43]

Thus, there are numerous instances in the inscriptions and coins where we find the Gupta kings have been compared to gods. The basic foundation of the theory of divinity of king lay in the near resemblance of functions between the two. The emphasis was more on analogy than on actual identity. It was to impress the king that like the gods he

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[39] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 15.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[41] Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas, A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, pp. 169- 170.

[42] Sinha, B.P., *Twilight of the Imperial Guptas*, National Centre for Oriental Studies, Delhi, 1993, p. 245.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

was to act boldly, impartially, fairly and fearlessly and to enforce the law and social order as ordained by the gods, who followed the cosmic laws. Altekar has rightly observed that "Hindu writers have thus advocated the divinity, not of the person of the king but of his office, because of the resemblance between his functions and those of some deities."[44]

2.4 The Duties of the King

It can be perceived from a study of the inscriptions of this period that the Gupta kings did not assert their sovereignty in the sense that they arrogated to themselves all the privileges due to a monarch to the detriment of their duties and responsibilities. They seem to have been fully conscious of their responsibilities to the state and their subjects and conducted themselves in such a way so as to earn their gratitude. The kings of ancient India, by and large, considered it their divine duty (*dharma)* to uphold righteousness, which by the time of the Guptas had come to mean the established social order with network of rules, rights and duties assigned to various classes of the people under the code or laws or rules, not framed by the king, but by the law-givers and religious teachers.

It was the king's duty to protect and enforce the prescribed divinely sanctioned social order or organisation (*varṇavyāvasthā*), maintain peace, enforce protection and punish the defaulters who sought to break the law. Protection of the subjects was the king's main duty for which he received taxes, which were looked upon as his wage for the duty done. The king was required to promote the welfare of the people by looking after their economic and social interests. Instead of being arbitrary and overbearing in his relations with his subjects, the Gupta king was said to have behaved as a benevolent ruler, conscious of his divinely ordained duties of rulership.

Samudragupta was the supporter of the real truth of the scriptures (*śastnatattvārtthabharttuḥ*), whose mind busied itself with the support and initiation of the miserable, the poor, the helpless and the afflicted and who was the glorified personification of kindness to mankind, (*kṛpaṇa – dīnānāthāturajānoddharaṇa –*

[44] Altekar, A.S., *State and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Benaras, 1949, p. 61.

samantradikshādyupagata manasaḥ samiddhasya vigrahavato lokānugrahasys).[45] It is claimed about Skandagupta that during his reign, verily no man among his subjects fell away from religion and there was no one who was distressed, or in poverty, or in misery or avaricious, and whoever worthy of punishment was put to much torture. Skandagupta was particularly referred to as *parahitakāri* (helpful to others) in his coins.[46]

2.5 Military and Political Achievements of the Gupta kings

Inscriptions also throw light on the achievements of the Gupta kings. The greatest example of this is the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. It provides a wealth of details on the military and political achievements of Samudragupta. This document is a pure *praśasti*. It describes Samudragupta's fame as 'caused by his conquest of the whole world' and gives him the credit of 'binding together the whole world by means of the amplitude of the vigour of his arm'. After describing his selection as the next king in verse 4, probably a war against the Nāga kings in verse 7 and some aspects of his personality in verse 8, Hariseṇa provides a relatively detailed account of the conquests of his royal master. There are altogether four lists which mention the names of the kings, states and tribes that were conquered and brought under varying degrees of subjugation. These included the i) the twelve states of Dakshiṇāpatha, ii) the eight kings of Āryāvarta, iii) the rulers of forest (*āṭavika*) and borther states, and iv) the Daivaputrashāhi Shāhānushāhi, Śaka Muruṇḍas and the dwellers of Siṁhala and other islands.[47]

From the Prayāga *praśasti* it is clear that while in the case of the states of the first three lists the policies adopted towards them were dictated by imperial interests, in the case of the fourth list it were the foreign potentates who adopted a particular policy themselves to please the Gupta emperor in order to avoid a confrontation with them. Apart from this inscription, the Eran inscription[48] also informs us that by Samudragupta

[45] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 6-8.

[46] Allan,J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa (in the British Museum*), Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1975, p. cxxi.

[47] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 8.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

'the whole tribe of kings upon the earth was overthrown and reduced to the loss of the wealth of their sovereignty.'

The Tumain stone inscription of GE 116 (= 435 *A.D.*) of Candragupta II mentions that he conquered the earth upto the ocean (*Rājā Śrī Candraguptas-tadanujayati yo medinīm sāgarantām*).[49] Another inscription that alludes to the military activities of Candragupta II in western India is the Udayagiri inscription of his Minister Vīrasena. It states that Vīrasena had accompanied his royal master to Udayagiri while the latter was 'seeking to conquer the whole world' which possibly refers to his conquest of the Śaka kingdom.[50]

The inscriptions also mention the difficulties which the Guptas had to face towards the close of the reign of Kumaragupta I and in the initial years of the reign of Skandagupta. The Bhitari record of Skandagupta[51] refers to two of his enemies, namely, the Pushyamitras and the Hūṇas. We learn that the Pushyamitras were very powerful and had threatened the very existence of the empire. It also states that they had accumulated great resources in 'men and money' and in the course of fighting against them, Skandagupta had to pass a whole night on bare earth. It adds that the heroic achievements of Skandagupta were sung in every region 'by happy men, even down to the children'. Furthermore, in four successive verses, the author of this document refers no less than three times to the 'ruined fortunes of the Gupta family' and their restoration by Skandagupta. The Junagarh *praśasti* of Skandagupta refers to his wars against the hostile kings "who were so many serpents lifting their hoods in pride and arrogance", the Mlechchhas whose pride "was broken down to the very root", and to the fact that "Lakshmī of her own accord selected (him) as her husband... having discarded all other sons of the king.[52]"

[49] Goyal, S.R., *Guptakālīna Abhilekha*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerut, 1984, p. 157.

[50] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 35-36; Goyal, S.R., *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-56.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

2.6 The Vaishnava Cakravartī Ideal of the Gupta kings

In the Gupta period, the concept of the *cakravartī* ruler performing *digvijaya* became popular and was given a Vaishṇavite orientation. The Guptas invoked Vishṇu, the king amongst the gods, whose emblem is *cakra* – the symbol of imperial dominion – and who is the lord of prosperity and growth. The adoption of this cult by a galaxy of great rulers was bound to affect, in turn, the political thinking of this period. The author of the *Vāyu-purāṇa*[53] writes that "the *cakravartīs* are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. They have lived in the ages past and will come again in future.... Strength, dharma, happiness and wealth, these wondrous blessings shall characterise these rulers. They will enjoy wealth, plenty, dharma, ambition, fame and victory in undisturbed harmony. They will excel the Ṛishis in their power to achieve results, by their lordliness, by providing plenty and by discipline. And they will excel the gods, demons and men by their strength and self-discipline." The author of these lines, who appears to be a Bhāgavata, wanted to bring the ideal of *cakravartī* rulers in tune with the polity of the times.

Samudragupta was a great devotee of Vishnu and was responsible for the adoption of Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Vishṇu, as the emblem of his dynasty and therefore promoted this new ideology. He aspired to be a Vaishṇava *cakravartī* ruler. The lists of kings who were uprooted or subjugated by him make it obvious that with the exception of western Deccan and perhaps the western part of south India, he brought almost the whole of the traditional *Cakravartī kshetra* under his control. His fame has been mentioned as 'caused by his conquest of the whole world' (*sarvapṛthivi-vijaya-janita*) and he is given the credit of 'binding together of the whole world, by means of the amplitude of the vigour of his arm' (*bāhu-vīrga-prasara-dharaṇi-bandhasya*). His comparison with Dhanada, Varuṇa, Indra, and Antaka is apposite and possibly refers to his conquests in the four directions (*digvijaya*).

The Vaishṇava political ideology of Samudragupta becomes even more explicit in the epithets used for him in the Prayāga *praśasti*, such as *Pṛthivyāmapratirathaḥ. Apratiratha* figures as one of the thousand names of Vishṇu. Therefore, the epithet, *Pṛthivyāmapratirathaḥ,* may also be rendered as "(the veriest) *Apratiratha* (moving) on

[53] Tagare, G.V. (trans.), The *Vāyu-purāṇa*, XLVII (*Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology*, Vol. 38, edited by G.P. Bhatt), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1988, pp. 72-76.

earth. It can be said that the personality of *Apratiratha* (Vishṇu) was superimposed (*adhyāropita*, as it may be termed in Sanskrit poetics) on Samudragupta, who was thus presented to us as an embodiment of Vishṇu... Harisheṇa, the author of the inscription, seems to have inlaid his elaborate composition with astute hints that would indeed make his master appear as the very Vishṇu on earth."

The connection of the early Gupta emperors with the new Vaishṇavite interpretation of the *cakravartī* ideal is almost conclusively established by the unique Cakravikrama type of coin of Candragupta II. The obverse of this coins shows a big *cakra,* and standing within it a two-armed male figure conferring three round balls on a haloed royal figure in front of him. The reverse shows the figure of Lakshmī standing on a lotus and the legend *cakravikrama.* It is believed that the figure inside the *cakra* represents the *Cakrapurusha* or Vishṇu who is bestowing on Candragupta II the three symbols of royal power, namely, *prabha-śaktī*, *utsāha-śaktī* and *mantra-śaktī*, i.e., the kingly virtues of authority, energy and counsel.[54]

The inscriptions are replete with evidence which suggest that the Gupta kings followed the Vaishṇava *chakravartī* ideal. It is thus obvious that Samudragupta not only claimed *cakravartī* status by virtue of being a performer of the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice as the Vedic *chakravartīns* did, but also claimed this status by projecting himself as *Apratiratha* (Vishṇu) moving on earth. In a way, he was fulfilling the promise made in the *Purāṇas* that *cakravartīs* are born in each age as the essence of Vishṇu. Candragupta II claimed the same status of a *cakravartī* when he projected himself as *Apratiratha* (Vishṇu) incarnate. His son Kumāragupta I also performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice and on the Lion-slayer type of his gold coins declared himself to be *sākshāt Narasiṁha*, i.e. Vishṇu in his man-lion form.

[54]Altekar, A.S., *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire,* Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, 1957, p. 146 ; Sivaramamurti, C., *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India,* XIII, pp. 180-82; Agrawala, V.S., *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India,* XVI, pp. 97-101.

2.7 The Gupta kings as Benefactors

Inscriptions yield information on the Gupta kings as benefactors of land to deserving persons and institutions. Two copper plate grants have been found which supposedly belong to Samudragupta. They were discovered from Nalanda and Gaya and belong respectively to his 5th and 9th regnal year. The Nalanda grant[55] records the gift of a village that Samudragupta granted to a brāhmaṇa named Jayabhaṭṭasvāmī. The Gaya copper plate records the grant of a village as an *agrahāra* by Samudragupta from his royal camp at Ayodhyā to a brāhmaṇa named Gopadevasvāmī of the village Revatikā in Gaya Vishaya, for the religious merit of his parents and himself.[56]

The Mathura pillar inscription of Candragupta II mentions the installation of a couple of Śiva-liṅgas, styled Kapileśvara and Upamiteśvara, after the names of two teachers of the Lakuliśa sect.[57] The Udayagiri cave inscription refers to the religious gift (*deyadharma*) of a Sanakānika vassal of Candragupta II and it was engraved in the honour of Vishṇu and a twelve-armed goddess. Another Udayagiri inscription records the excavation of a cave sanctuary of Śambhu under the orders of Sāba Vīrasena, Candragupta II's minister of peace and war.[58]

Another epigraph in the neighbourhood of Sanchi, reports the grant, by Āmrakārdava, of twenty-five dīnāras and a village to the Ārya-saṅgha of the vihāra of Kākanādabota for feeding Buddhist monks, for burning lamps in the *ratnagṛha* (the jewel-house), and for the increase of his own merit and that of Candragupta II. Āmrakārdava, probably a Buddhist, had an exalted military rank under Candragupta II. It is important to note that in the epigraphs recording gifts to non-brahmanical institutions, even those issued by the officers of the king, *Paramabhāgavata,* the sectarian title of Candragupta II, was omitted.[59] This indicates that people did not consider it obligatory to refer to the religious affiliations of the king, and that such omissions did not incur the displeasure

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[55]Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, 2nd ed., University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1965, Vol. I, pp. 270-271. These plates may be later forgeries.

[56]*Ibid.*, pp. 272-74.

[57]*Ibid.*, pp. 277-79.

[58]*Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

[59]*Ibid.*, pp. 280-82.

of the king.[60] Several other inscriptions of the Gupta kings record both religious and non-religious endowments.

2.8 Religious Affiliation and Policy of Toleration Under the Guptas

According to A.K. Narain, "The Gupta age presents a religious canvas of complex vertical and horizontal relationships. One segment of this shows the Vedic rituals and gods standing at the vertex of diverse brahmanical religious systems which run in horizontal relationship with one another. The non- brahmanical systems are similarly shown in horizontal relationship with one another, but devoid of the Vedic vertex, and running competitively parallel to the brahmanical ones sharing in the new options provided by the popular elements of folk and local cults involving the Yakṣas, the worship of sacred trees and rivers etc."[61]

The kings and the chiefs of the Gupta age, by and large, acted on three levels. For legitimation of their authority they used the mystique of the Vedic rituals and symbolism on the one hand and appropriated some elements of divinity to their person on the other. But for their personal goals, they subscribed to one or the other of popular faiths, mostly of Brāhmaṇic origin. In their public role, they assumed a liberal disposition, allowing freedom as well as, at times, promotion of religious beliefs and practices other than their own.

All the scholars who have written on the history of the imperial Guptas believed that the early Guptas were followers of the Vaiṣṇava school and had implicit faith in Vaiṣṇavism. This view was based on the evidence found in the inscriptions and coins. Firstly, they styled themselves as *paramabhāgavatas* meaning a devotee of Viṣṇu, which points towards their Vaiṣṇavite affiliation. Secondly, the goddess of wealth and the consort of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, figures in several Gupta coins. Thirdly, the *garuḍa* which is supposed to be the vehicle of Viṣṇu is portrayed on the seals of this period. Fourthly, some inscriptions such as the Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta open with an invocation to Viṣṇu which leads us to believe that the king was an ardent worshipper of

[60] Smith, B.L. (ed.), *Essays in Gupta Culture*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983, p. 39.

[61] Narain, A.K., "Religious policy and Toleration in Ancient India with particular reference to the Gupta Age", in Smith, B.L. (ed.), *Essays in Gupta Culture*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1983, p. 34.

Viṣṇu. The Mehrauli pillar is called *viṣṇudhvaja*, which also indicates the Vaiṣṇava character of the inscription.

Besides Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism was also the accepted religion of both the royalty and the common folk. This is evident from three facts. Firstly, the architecture of the Gupta period points towards this affiliation. Secondly, the coins warrant this assumption. And lastly, there is evidence from the inscriptions. We shall consider only the last two facts here. The Gupta coins contained figures of Garuḍa, Lakṣmī, Nandi and so on.[62] The silver coins of Skandagupta had three different types on the obverse- Garuḍa, Nandi and Altar. From these coins it can be said that his religion was catholic in outlook and he was a follower of the orthodox Hindu religion.[63] The inscriptions give more reliable information in this regard. The first important evidence is the use of epithet, *Kṛtāntaparaśah*, which appears in almost all the inscriptions of the imperial Guptas. This epithet means the destroyer of Yama, who was none other than Śiva. The undated Udayagiri cave inscription of Candragupta II is remarked as a Śaiva inscription[64] whose purpose was to record the consecration of the cave temple to God Śambhu which is one of the appellations of lord Śiva. The Karamdanda inscription, dated 437 *A.D.*, mentions that Pṛthviṣeṇa, the son of Śikharasvāmin who was a notable minister of Candragupta II, got constructed a temple dedicated to Śiva.[65]

From among the other deities belonging to the Śaiva pantheon, Kārttikeya, son of Śiva and the Commander-in-chief of the gods, seems to have been particularly popular with the Guptas. Kumāra and Skanda, were the two other names of this god borne by the Gupta emperors. The Bilsad pillar inscription,[66] dated 415 *A.D.*, speaks of the construction of a temple of Kārttikeya. Besides this several sub-sects of Śaivism were also flourishing in Gupta period. The prominent among them was the Pāśupata sect which was founded by Lakulīśa. Mathura was the centre of the philosophical Śaivism taught by him. Parāśara, Upamita, Kapila, and Udita were the names of the Pāśupata

[62] Allan, J., *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, King of Gauḍa (in the British Museum)*, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1975, p. 119.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

[64] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p. 35.

[65] *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. X (1919-20), ed. by Thomas, F.W., Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1982, p. 71.

[66] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, p.10

teachers who flourished in the Gupta period.[67] The Mathura Pillar inscription of Candragupta II dated in Gupta year 61, records that Uditācārya who was living at this time installed two images known as Kapileśvara and Upamiteśvara in the Gurvvāyatana. This inscription shows that the images which were installed were *lingas*.

The cult of goddess Durgā and Lakṣmī was also popular with the Guptas, which is evident from the coins of Candragupta II and Kumāragupta. The early Guptas worshipped Lakṣmī for plenty of riches to place the kingdom on sound basis and worshipped Durgā to remove their difficulties and offer them success in battles. The cult of Sūrya also finds elaborate mention in the Gupta times. The Indore copper-plate inscription[68] of Skandagupta dated in Gupta Era 146 speaks of the worship of Sun god. The Mandasor stone inscription[69] of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman contains an interesting datum about the solar form of worship.

Besides these, Buddhism and Jainism were also flourishing in Gupta period. The Sanchi pillar inscription[70] of Candragupta II shows that Sanchi continued to be a centre of attraction for Buddhists not only in India but also from abroad. This inscription mentions that an official of the emperor endowed a Buddhist vihāra at a place (Sanchi) for maintaining not only Bhikṣus but also for the burning of a lamp. In the Mathura stone image inscription[71] dated about *A.D.* 550 there is mention of a monastery called Yaśovihāra to which was presented a standing figure of the Buddha by a Śākya lady by name Jayabhaṭṭa.[72] This clearly shows that Buddhism continued to flourish during the days of the early Gupta who did not interfere with the faith or its tenets.

Jainism was, however, not as prominent as Buddhism. There are only two or three inscriptions which mention the images of Jaina installed by the pious benefactions of private individuals. There is no inscription either of the period of the early king Samudragupta or even Candragupta II which may be called Jaina. The Udayagiri Cave

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[67] *Epigraphia* Indica, Vol. XXI (1931-32), ed. by Shastri, H., Dikshit, K.N. and Chakravarti, N.P., Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1984, p. 8.

[68] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 70-71

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[70] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

inscription of Kumāragupta I[73] records how a devotee installed the image of the Jaina which represented the Tīrthankara Pārśvanātha near the cave. The Kahaum stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta dated in 460-61 *A.D.* records that one Madra was responsible for installing five images of the Jīna in a column in the village of Kahaum to increase his religious merit and augment the welfare of all.[74] This inscription gives us a real insight into the conditions of various religions which prevailed at this time. This shows that the Guptas were tolerant towards Buddhism and Jainism.

2.9 The Gupta Kings as Patrons of Art and Education

The Gupta kings patronised the arts, education, music and culture. The Guptas kings promoted Sanskrit which resulted in an efflorescence of this language during the Gupta period. All the Gupta inscriptions were written in Sanskrit and had a literary flavour to them. The greatest example of this is the Allahabad *praśasti* of Samudragupta. Sanskrit *kāvya* reached its acme in the Gupta period. The Junagarh rock inscription points to the prevalence of wide knowledge of the science of poetics. The Allahabad *praśasti* tells us that Samudragupta's "poetry outdistances the glory of the genius of the poets" and tells that his "title of *Kavirāja* was established through many poetic compositions which would be a source of living to the literate class."

The Gupta coins, unlike those of many other Indian dynasties, are exquisite works of art. The most important among the coin-series minted by the Guptas are the Standard type, the Archer type, the Lyrist type, the *Aśvamedha* type, the Horseman type, the Tiger-slayer, the Chhatra type, the Couch type, the Lion-slayer type. These coin-types portray various attributes of the Gupta kings. Some coins depict the physical prowess of the kings, such as those belonging to the category of Tiger and Lion slayer type, while others, like the Lyrist type, the king is represented as playing an Indian lute or lyre (*vīṇā*). The gold coins of Samudragupta in particular throw interesting light on his personality, tastes, religious inclinations, cultural predilections and also some events of political importance.

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[73] Fleet, J.F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, (*Inscriptions of the Early Gupta kings and their Successors*), Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970, pp. 259-60.

[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

CHAPTER 3

Creative literature

The Gupta period is often described as the classical age of Sanskrit literature as it represented the attainment of a high watermark and set standards for later ages. Sanskrit was the hieratic language of the *Brāhmaṇa* priests from the Vedic times. From the second century A.D., it was also the status language of royal administration and poetry. During the Gupta period, it was promoted as the courtly language of literature and official communications. The political unity and prosperity of India under the Guptas, combined with the staunch patronage that was extended to Sanskrit learning, resulted in the flourishing of Sanskrit literature in all its branches. The most important development of this period was in the field of secular literature. This period produced some of the best authors in almost all branches of literature. In this period Sanskrit acquired its classical form, both in prose and poetry.

It was earlier held by some scholars that there was a revival or renaissance of Sanskrit literature during the Gupta age.[1] This theory, however, is no longer regarded as technically correct. Sanskrit was never altogether eclipsed and its influence continued through the centuries preceding the Gupta age. This was proved by the writings of Aśvaghoṣa (1st century *CE*), who was the first known writer to use Sanskrit for non-religious compositions. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta and the Mandasor Inscription of Vatsbhaṭṭi (A.D. 437) also clearly indicate that the high-flown *kāvya* style was already in a mature state as early as the fourth or fifth century A.D. Therefore, we can undoubtedly speak of an efflorescence and not of renaissance of Sanskrit literature in the Gupta age.

Kālidāsa is counted among the most brilliant poets and playwrights of this period. His works have enjoyed a high reputation and popularity ever since. Though it is not yet conclusively proved that the great dramatist-poet flourished in the Gupta age, most

[1] Majumdar, R.C., (ed.), *The Classical Age*, Vol. III, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1954, p. 291.

scholars like R.C. Majumdar[2], A.B. Keith[3] and many others[4] seem to believe so that he belonged to Gupta period and probably adorned the court of Candragupta II. In the literature ascribed to the Gupta period, we come across idealized figures of kings who are said to rival the gods in their physical and spiritual prowess and skill in arts. This points to a pattern of patronage involving a lineage of kings and the Sanskrit poets. It also provides a perspective on the process of patronage which is different from that between an individual ruler and a poet.

The scarcity of historical documents relating to ancient literary figures, and even kings, makes it difficult to confirm the patronage relations that are frequently alluded to in literary legends. Same is the case with Kālidāsa and Vikramāditya. Candragupta II adopted the title Vikramāditya, meaning one who is like the sun in valour. The poet and the king are associated with each other in popular stories that emphasize the quality of the poetry of Kālidāsa and the political prowess attributed to Vikramāditya. These stories do not provide us with any biographical details, but the legends do provide the basis for exploring other clues to their character and historical context.

The earliest account connecting Kālidāsa with Vikramāditya is told in the monumental work on Sanskrit poetics entitled *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, attributed to Bhoja, the eleventh-century royal patron and writer.[5] The author, Bhoja, reproduces a verse which, he believes, refers to an embassy of Kālidāsa from Vikramāditya to a neighbouring king.[6] Inscriptions document that Candragupta's daughter Prabhāvatīgupta married the crown prince of the neighbouring Vākāṭaka state. Literary accounts, like the one mentioned above, relate various stories about Kālidāsa as an ambassador and poet at the Vākāṭaka

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[2] Majumdar, R.C., (ed.), *The Classical Age*, Vol. III, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1954, p. 303.

[3] Keith, A.B., *The Sanskrit Drama*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1998, pp. 143-47.

[4] Macdonell, A.A., *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, William Heinemann Pvt., London, 1900, pp. 320-27; Dasgupta, S.N. and De, S.C., *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1947, pp. 118-26; Winternitz, M., *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. III, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1985, p. 23; Smith, V.A., *Early History of India*, Oxford, 1984, p. 321.

[5] Raghavan, V., *Bhoja's Śṛṅgārā Prakāśā*, 3rd ed., Madras: Punarvasu, 1978, pp. 858-80, cited in Miller, B.S., (ed.), *The Powers of Art- Patronage in Indian Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 55.

[6] Miller, B.S., *Theater of Memory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1984, note 22, pp. 316-317.

court. It is possible that Kālidāsa was the Gupta emperor's envoy to his daughter's court who was ruling as the regent after the death of the husband, as her son was a minor.[7]

S.R.Goyal[8] suggests that Kālidāsa flourished in the second half of the fourth century A.D., and not in the first half of fifth century A.D. as is generally believed. According to him, Kālidāsa was the contemporary of Samudragupta, who assumed the title *Vikrama*, along with his usual title *Parākrama*. He states "It is now generally accepted that the cycles of legends concerning the king Vikramāditya refer not only to Candragupta II, but to Samudragupta and Skandagupta also.[9] If this is so, it may also be easily conceded that the legend that the kingVikramāditya conquered almost the whole of India refers to Samudragupta, and not to Candragupta II or Skandagupta. The presence of Kālidāsa in the court of both, Samudragupta and Candragupta II, was perhaps one of the several factors which led to the amalgamation of the achievements of these two kings in the popular memory and gave rise to the Vikramāditya legend." So, we find that there are historians who believe in the contemporaneity of Kālidāsa with Samudragupta and not Candragupta II, as is generally believed.

Several allusions in Kālidāsa's works also point to his connection with Candragupta II. The word *vikrama* in the title of the play *Vikramorvaśiyam* probably refers to Candragupta II, since *vikrama* (valour) is a royal signature that occurs in all of his epithets. The desire to honour a royal patron may explain why Vikrama was substituted for the mythical hero Pururavas in the title. In some other works of Kālidāsa such as the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, which refers to the horse sacrifice and in the *Raghuvaṁśam*, which describes the legendary king Raghu's world conquest (*digvijaya*), this connection is apparent. The description of world conquest in the fourth canto of the *Raghuvaṁśam* parallels the account of Samudragupta's victories.[10]The name Kumāra in the *Kumārasaṁbhavam* and acts four and five of the *Vikramorvaśiyam* hint at the young

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[7] Fleet, J.F., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* (Reprint of 1888 edition, Banaras: Indological Book House, 1963), Chammak and Siwani copper-plate inscription of Pravarasena II; text, p. 237, 1.15; p. 246, II. 15-16.

[8] Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas: A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, pp. 254, 255.

[9] Majumdar, R.C. and Altekar, A.S. (ed.), *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol. VI: *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age (Circa 200-550 A.D.)*, Bhartiya Itihas Parishad, Lahore, 1946, pp. 170-71; Raychaudhari, H.C., *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 483-511 cited in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas : A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 255.

[10] Kale, M.R., (ed. and trans.), *The Raghuvaṁśam of Kālidāsa,* Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1972, p. xvii.

Kumāragupta, the heir-apparent to the throne after Candragupta II. Act five ends in a rite consecrating Vikrama's son as the crown prince and the association of him with Kumāra, the son of Śiva, is made explicit by the divine sage Nārada. In this case there was an implied identification between Śiva and the king. The early Gupta kings were worshippers of Viṣṇu, but Śaivism was well established throughout the region of their empire and the rulers were ecumenical in their patronage. Candragupta II also styled himself as *paramabhāgavata.* Kālidāsa might well have woven events of the life of Samudragupta into his epic narrative, in order to please Candragupta II.

Candragupta II is more obviously the subject of another play, the *Devīcandraguptam* (The Queen and Candragupta) by Viśākhadatta.[11] It is known only from fragments preserved in the manuscripts of Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* and Ramachandra and Gunachandra's *Nātya-darpaṇa*, but the basic plot is clear.[12] It revolves around prince Candragupta's heroic rescue, in the guise of a female, of his impotent elder brother Rāmagupta's wife, queen Dhruvādevī, who had been abducted by a Śaka king. After killing the Śaka ruler, Candragupta had his brother murdered, ascended the throne and married Dhruvādevī. We know from inscriptions that Dhruvādevī was the name of Candragupta II's wife, but there is no historical evidence of her prior marriage to Rāmagupta. The abduction and rescue scene with which the *Vikramorvaśiyam* begins may well have its sources in the same events on which the *Devicandraguptam* was based. S.R.Goyal[13] mentions the various dramas which contained references to the Guptas in their *bharata-vākyas*, introductory verses or elsewhere. *Mudrārākshasa* of Viśākhadatta is one among them, which probably mentions Candragupta II in its *bharata-vākya. Harshacharita* of Bāṇa refers to the murder of a Śaka king by Candargupta to save Dhruvādevī in the guise of a female and the *Kāvya-mīmāṅsa* of Rājaśekhara, alludes to the Dhruvādevī episode.

Kālidāsa's complete acceptance of the brahmanical values and social order, the sense of sharing in a world of prosperity and power and the mention of instances belonging to

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[11] The evidence relating to *Devīcandraguptam* is analyzed by Raghavan, V., in *Bhoja's Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, pp. 843-65 and in Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas : A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 62.

[12] Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India From the Stone Age to the 12th c.*, Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2008, p. 474, 479.

[13] Goyal, S.R., *The Imperial Guptas : A Multidisciplinary Political Study*, Kusumanjali Book World, Jodhpur, 2005, p. 62.

the history of the Gupta ruler in his dramas, appear to be the result of his enjoyment of the protection of a great Gupta ruler, Candragupta II, who described himself as Vikramāditya and with whose name tradition consistently connected him. Therefore, it is difficult to dissociate Kālidāsa from the great moments of Gupta power.

Although Kālidāsa is the acknowledged master-poet of Sanskrit, yet we have almost negligible historical evidence of his life. The earliest historical reference to Kālidāsa is in an inscription on the shrine of Aihole, dated A.D. 634, in which he is praised as a great poet.[14] Tibetan Lama Tāranātha, in his *History of Buddhism in India* written in the seventeenth century, included the legendary Kālidāsa among the spiritual adepts of India.[15] He recounts the tale of Kālidāsa's transformation from a fool to a poet through a series of events that brought him the grace of the goddess Kāli, an obvious deduction from his name, slave of Kāli. He is also alleged to have shown remarkable skill in the ready manufacture of verses to order, either to describe a situation or to complete an imperfect sentence.

Kālidāsa's literary reputation is based on six surviving works that are generally attributed to him by modern critics and commentators.[16] It has been argued that the coherent language, poetic technique, style and sentiments of these works suggest that they were the product of a single mind. The poems include a lyric monologue of nature, *Meghadūtam* (The Cloud Messenger), and two long lyric narratives, *Raghuvaṁśam* (The Lineage of Raghu) and *Kumārasaṁbhavam* (The Birth of Siva's son). There are three dramas, all of which begin with prologues that refer to Kālidāsa as the author. The title of each play is a composite word that includes the name of the play's heroine combined with the name of the hero or a central idea in her story: *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Mālavikā and Agnimitra), *Vikramorvaśiyam* (Urvaśi Won by Valour), and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (Śakuntalā and the Ring of Recollection). The last is often

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[14] *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXVII (1900-1901) ed. by Ghai, G.S., Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1981, p. 65. Majumdar, R.C., *History and Culture of the Indian People*, 3:234-37. It has been argued by Majumdar that the poet Vatsabhaṭṭi was indebted to Kālidāsa's *Meghadūtam* in two verses (10, 11) of his Mandasor inscription of A.D. 472, thus offering an even earlier evidence of Kālidāsa's work.

[15] Cited in Miller, B.S., *The Plays of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1999, p. 3.

[16] Subbanna, N.R., *Kālidāsa Citations*, Meharchand Lachhmandas, Delhi, 1973. The most recent comprehensive bibliography of texts, translations, and critical studies on Kālidāsa in Narang, S.P., *Kālidāsa Bibliography*; an annotated selection of primary and secondary sources on Kālidāsa is in Krishnamoorthy, K., *Kālidāsa*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 147-52.

referred to in critical literature by the abbreviated title Śākuntala and popularly as Śakuntalā, after the heroine's name. A seventh work, a collection of lyric verses called *Ṛtusaṁhāra* (Cycle of the Seasons) is also attributed to Kālidāsa, but some authorities doubt his authorship on grounds of style.[17]

Two works of Kālidāsa have been taken into consideration for this dissertation. These are *Raghuvaṁśam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The king, who was the fountain-head of the activities of the state, is represented in various ways in these works of Kālidāsa. According to Miller, the hero in each play is a king whose character is shaped by the poet's view of kingship in accordance with the norms of classical society and dramatic theory and the king's relation to the cosmic order.[18] We come across the duties, functions, privileges and authority of the king in these two works. In short, they portray the leading characteristics of an ideal king of the Gupta period.

3.1 *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*

Abhijñānaśākuntalam, is perhaps the best known work of Kālidāsa. This play is based on the story of Śakuntalā as found in the *Mahābhārata*. But Kālidāsa has breathed a new and vital spirit into it by introducing many minor but effective changes and also by adding to it some altogether new characters and incidents of high dramatic power. Therefore, in this play by Kālidāsa, we not only have the context and the story changed but, more pertinently, the character of Śakuntalā is a contrast to the women in the epic. According to Thapar[19], Kālidāsa's version has a realm of delicacy and romance, anguish and imminent tragedy, pathos and finally happiness. Kālidāsa takes the theme from the epic but fills it out with sub-plots involving a curse and a signet ring. In adapting a known theme, Kālidāsa was following the theoretical rules relating to heroic comedies in which earlier stories from the epics were frequently reworked.

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[17] Dasgupta, S.N., and De, S.K., *A History of Sanskrit Literature: Classical Period*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1947, pp. 122-23.
[18] Miller, B.S., *The Plays of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1999, p. 8.
[19] Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 44.

The Śakuntalā story occurs in the narrative section of the *Ādiparvan* in the *Mahābhārata.*[20] "*Rājā* Duḥṣanta, with the title of *goptā*, a protector of cows, has conquered widely. On day he goes out on a hunt accompanied by a large entourage of soldiers. The hunt turns into a fierce killing of tigers and deer, the wounding of elephants, the uprooting of trees and a general devastation of nature. Duḥṣanta follows a deer deep into the forest which brings him to the lush and secluded *āśrama* of Kaṇva. On calling out, a young woman answers and performs the ritual of welcome for the guest. She introduces herself as Śakuntalā, the daughter of the *ṛṣi* Kaṇva. On Duḥṣanta asking her how a *ṛṣi* could have daughter, she explains her parentage in detail. Indra, disturbed by the powers which the *ṛṣi* Viśvāmitra was accumulating through *tapasyā*, sent the *apsarā* Menakā to seduce him. Śakuntalā was born but discarded by Menakā and brought up as a foundling by Kaṇva in his *āśrama.*

Duḥṣanta, deeply attracted by what he calls 'the flawless girl of the beautiful hips', proposes a *gāndharva* marriage. This was a marriage by mutual consent, appropriate it is said, to *kṣatriyas.* Śakuntalā agrees but sets a condition that she will only marry him if the son born of this marriage is declared his successor. After that she gives birth to a boy, Bharata. She takes him at a young age to Hastināpura from where Duḥṣanta rules, and demands that Duḥṣanta recognize him as his heir. Duḥṣanta pretends not to recognize her and rejects them both. Śakuntalā in extreme anger, explains why a wife and son are necessary to him, particularly a son to continue the lineage. The exchange is heated with much down-to-earth abuse. Menakā is called a slut, Viśvāmitra a lecher and Śakuntalā a whore. Śakuntalā stands her ground and insists that the boy be given his status and to that end she decides to leave him with Duḥṣanta. As she is about to return to the āśrama, a disembodied celestial voice proclaims that the boy is indeed Duḥṣanta's son. Duḥṣanta explains that he remembered his meeting with her and had no doubt about the veracity of Śakuntalā's claim, but was waiting for this public legitimation of the relationship. Subsequently he accepts them both. Bharata, when he comes to rule, is acclaimed as a great ruler."

[20] Buitenen, J.A.B. Van, (trans.), *The Mahābhārata*, Vol.I, *The Book of the Beginning, Ādi parvan* (Chs. 62-69), 1973, cited in Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 65.

The story in the epic is the origin myth of Bharata and therefore is also tied into the ancestry of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, who are central to the events in the *Mahābhārata*. Divine proclamation establishes status and legitimacy because the relationship has also to be accepted by the clansmen. It is a society of clans and heroes, a lineage-based society, where ancestry, genealogy and origins are vital.[21] It is also a cattle keeping society requiring grazing grounds. Hence we find the respect for the title of *goptā*. The clearing of land and of the forest for agriculture was recognized as a source of wealth. The hunt is a surrogate raid, a war against nature but also a means of establishing claims to territory. So dominance over the forest is beginning to assume importance.

V.S. Sukthankar states that the period of the composition of the epic remains controversial, but generally it is thought that the composition and the interpolations can be placed between 400 B.C. and A.D. 400, the narrative sections possibly being earlier than the didactic sections.[22] The epic continued to have an audience well into the centuries A.D. It was a part of ancestral mythology and provided links with the heroes of ancient times.

The play, the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* of Kālidāsa, reflected a different historical sense. It was written subsequently to the story in the epic and is generally dated to about the fourth century A.D. although the date is controversial. Kālidāsa had selected a fragment from the epic and converted the narrative into the play (*nāṭaka*), which is a different genre of literature from the poetry of the epic. To the original narrative he added other subthemes. One was the story of the ring as a token of recognition which seemed to have come from the Buddhist *Kaṭṭahāri Jātaka*.[23] The other was the theme of the curse which was frequent in folk literature. As a result, there was the creation of a new tradition. An item, selected from the past, was moulded to suit the cultural expression of later times. It was actually a contestation with the epic version, the norms of which underwent changes in the play.

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[21] Thapar, Romila, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984, p. 96.

[22] Sukthankar, V.S., *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, Motilal Banarasidass, Bombay, 1964.

[23] Cowell, E.B., (ed. and trans.), *The Jātakas*, Pāli Text Society, Luzec and Co., London, 1969, Vol. I, pp. 28-29; Miller, B.S.,(ed.), *Theater of Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984, cited in Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 56-58.

The changes introduced by Kālidāsa were significant from the point of view of the story-line. "Duṣyanta leaves his ring with Śakuntalā as a token of his promise to send for her on his return to Hastināpura. Deep in thought one day, Śakuntalā neglects to receive with appropriate ceremony an irascible *ṛṣi* Durvāsas who therefore spews out a curse that the person she is thinking of will not remember her. Her friends plead for at least a modification of the curse and the *ṛṣi* then says that the ring will provide the remembrance. Śakuntalā leaves for the court and on the way loses the ring. On arriving there, she is not recognized by Duṣyanta and no amount of persuasion convinces him that she is legally wedded wife bearing his son. Śakuntalā in despair calls upon Mother Earth and there is a flash of lightening and she is whisked away to the *āśrama* of Marīca. Here she gives birth to her son Bharata. Meanwhile the ring is found in the belly of a fish, and since it is his signet ring, it was brought to Duṣyanta. On seeing it he recollects his relationship with Śakuntalā. He is now full of remorse at having lost both a wife and a son. The eventual happy outcome occurs when the king is called to Indra's aid in a campaign against the demons. On his return he stops at the *āśrama* of Mārīca where he is united with his wife and son." [24]

Thapar[25] says that Kālidāsa's play did not seem to be concerned with lineage-based societies and clans but carried the rhetoric of the political power of monarchical states. These monarchical states were well established, legitimizing the concentration of power in a single family and the authority of upper caste society. The state had its appurtenances of administration, revenue, coercive agencies and such like. There is also the visibility of brahmanical high culture which was dominant in the construction of classicism and therefore familiar to Kālidāsa. It is evident in the use of language and in the nuanced relationship between the characters. Kingship was considered approximate to deity and kings and gods intermingled. The *āśrama* of the Kaṇvas carried traces of a new incipient institution which was to develop into the *agrahāras* of post-Gupta times, institutions which changed the socio-economic landscape. Tax-free land was donated by the king for settlement by *brāhmaṇas* which could be in areas already under

[24] Miller, B.S., (ed.), *Theater of Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984, pp. 85-176 cited in Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1999, p. 83.

[25] Thapar, Romila, "Creating Traditions through Narration, The Case of Śakuntalā" in Federico Squarcini's *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, Firenze University Press, 2005, pp. 159-172.

cultivation or newly opened to cultivation. These were to become powerful nuclei and networks of brahmanical culture.

The story of the play is an elaboration of the skeleton story in the epic. This play was intended for performance at the court before a small, sophisticated, urban audience and not as part of a popular recitation. It reflected the values of upper caste society. Courtly drama requires a romantic mood and dramatic effects. The teasing out of the narrative was done through the sub-plots of the curse and the ring. There was a contrapuntal relationship between the two. The curse impeded the action and was a barrier; the ring resolved the barrier so that the action could move.

This play spotlighted the sport of kings- hunting, both literally and symbolically and romantic love, set in a courtly background. This hunt can also be viewed as a metaphor of courtly love: pursuit, contesting emotions and ultimately, submission. The play also focussed on the tension between *kāma* and *dharma*, desire and duty, where the former has to be controlled and the latter exercised. This was also seen as a part of the scheme of *puruṣārtha,* where the balance between *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, are said to bring about *moksa*/liberation from rebirth. But the focus was not on a canvas as broad as that of *puruṣārtha*. It can be argued that there were other tensions too. Hunting, or the alternative of going into battle, provided the opportunity for heroic acts. The play was set in an earlier period but Kālidāsa introduces features from his own times, particularly when he indirectly endorses requirements stated in the *dharmaśāstras* like *Nārada* and *Bṛhaspati,* as, for example, in references to the behaviour of a wife in her husband's home or the duties of the king.

We find kingly authority expressed in various ways at the court of Hastināpura. One such way was in the taking of impressive titles such as *mahārāja-adhirāja*. This was in contrast to the epic, where Duḥṣanta was referred to as the *goptā* and the *rājā.* The duties of the king exceed from that of protecting the subjects to being responsible for their welfare and maintaining equilibrium in the society. The latter was accomplished through a hierarchy of administration in which the court was central and was provisioned through taxes. The centrality of succession based on birth remained necessary to dynastic rule, and the legitimacy of succession continued to be a major concern.

A feature common of many literary works of this time was the upgrading of monarchy suggested in the closeness of kings to deities. We find Duṣyanta being called upon for assistance by Indra when the latter was threatened by *asuras*. (Act VI, Verse 26-32).[26] The association between *rājās* and gods was earlier said to derive in the *Manusmṛti*, from the king being constituted of divine particles- a step towards his being seen as the human parallel to a deity. We also find claims to kings being the incarnation of deity, frequently Viṣṇu, in the *smṛtis*, particularly Manu. This however, did not mean creating an icon of the king to be worshipped as a deity but such "incarnations" were rather attempts at manipulating the power of the king. The king is also shown as the protector of the *varṇāśramadharma*. In the play Duṣyanta has to enquire into the *varṇa* status of Śakuntalā, as he was the protector of *varṇāśramadharma,* and it would be inappropriate if he himself broke the social code. After finding out that she was Viśvāmitra's daughter and was therefore a *kṣatriya* by birth, that the king is relieved. (Act I, Verse 22,23).[27] Kālidāsa also avoids the moral issue of condemning Duṣyanta's action in rejecting Śakuntalā by stating that he was under a spell and thus paints the picture of the king's character with bright colours.

Thapar says that there were other claims made too apart from the closeness of the king with the deity. The alternative authority of the ṛṣi was also drawn upon in the term *rājaṛṣi*, by which his control over his domain was seen to the discipline of the *ṛṣi*, as indeed the authority of the *ṛṣi* would enhance kingship.[28] Apart from this, the visibility of brahmanical high culture was evident and was a dominant part of the classicism with which Kālidāsa was associated. The *āśrama* was an incipient *agrahāra* – a settlement of *brāhmaṇas* on land donated by the king. In earlier times, the former was a clearing in the forest where the *ṛṣis* settled, whereas the latter had the legal status of being a grant from a government authority. In the post-Gupta period settlements such as the *agrahāras* became powerful nuclei and networks of upper caste culture and learning. There was a consciousness of elite behaviour being conditioned, at least in theory, by

[26] Kale, M.R., (trans.), *The Abhijñānaśākuntalam of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1969, p. 119.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 34- 43.
[28] Thapar, Romila, "Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-culture?" in *Ancient Indian Social History*, Orient Longman, New Delhi: 1978. pp. 63-104, cited in Thapar's *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 49.

the norms of the *dharmaśāstras*, and the play reflects the values of elite society, largely conditioned by upper caste mores.[29]

The play also reflects the distance between the king and those living in the *āśrama* of Kaṇva. The kings were making donations of land to learned *brāhmaṇas*. The donation also consisted of waste land so that the *brāhmaṇa* settlement on that land would help in bringing the land under cultivation and thereby open it to Sanskritic culture. The *āśrama* with its self-contained activities was considered parallel with an *agrahāra*. These *āśramas* were exempt from taxation because their pious activities would accumulate merit, part of which accrued to the king who could also be called upon to protect them. In the play, the king rebukes *vidūṣaka* who says that the rice growing in the *āśrama* of Kaṇva should be taxed and says that the revenue from the *āśrama* lies in the merit gained from the activities of those who live there. (Act II). It can be inferred here that the *āśrama* , although protected by the king, was in some ways outside his realm, since those who live in it do not pay taxes to the state nor do they observe the requisite social obligations.

Subsequent to the Kālidāsa play there are now two versions of the story in circulation. Briefly narrated in the *Purāṇas* as an ancestral myth of the Purus it was important for the legitimation of dynasties of the post-Gupta period (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 9.20.7-32; *Matsyapurāṇa*, 49.11-15). The recitations of the *paurāṇikas* and the *kathākāras* kept these stories alive among audiences more comfortable with the oral tradition. That it became something of a folk stereotype is evident from the *Kathāsarītasāgara*[30] which includes a charming story using the same theme but replete with folk motifs. Interpretations of visual forms as pictorial representations of the story have also been suggested.[31]

Duṣyanta is represented in the play as possessed of almost all the qualities which form the connotation of such a hero. He is youthful, handsome, majestic, and of sweet

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[29] Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999, p. 49.
[30] Tawney, C.H., (ed., tr.), *The Kathāsarītasāgara*, Vol. II, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1968, pp. 306-390.
[31] Agrawala, V.S., "Vāsavadattā and Śakuntalā: Scenes in the Ranigumpha cave in Orissa", in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 14, 1946, p. 102-109; J.H. Marshall [1911-1912], "Excavations at Bhita", in *ASIAR*, Calcutta, pp. 29-49 cited in Thapar, Romila, "Creating Traditions through Narration, The Case of Śakuntalā" in Federico Squarcini's *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, Firenze University Press, 2005, p. 166.

address. We find the presence of extreme nobility of his mind in his character. He was fully imbued with the high principles of moral conduct, and he never manifests any-time the least symptom of illicit and lewd passion. It was quite natural for him to be struck with the beauty of Śakuntalā (Act I. 16, 17). But as a man of honour he wished to ascertain whether she was already married or even betrothed. It was only after knowing the real parentage of Śakuntalā, and further that she was not married, that he allows his mind to harbour the feeling of love (Act I. 25). Another feature of his character was his utmost respect for the sages and great solicitude for their comfort. The king, though himself commanding universal respect, feels unbounded reverence for the sages and his conduct is marked by a proper sense of what their austere lives deserve at the hands of worldly men. His regard for his mother is also to be noted (Act II).

His lofty sense of regal duties does the highest credit to the greatness of his mind. He thinks about the welfare of his subjects. His order to his minister about the disposal of Dhanamitra's property bears testimony to his anxiety not to enrich his treasury by unjust means (Act V. Verses 5, 7, 8, 9 and Act. VI). Several incidents in the drama point towards his high martial power. He was the bravest of the brave. Even Indra, the lord of the gods, sought his help (Act II. Verse 15, Act VI. Verse 29, 30). The King was highly cultured. His remarks are so thoughtful and weighty that they bespeak a very high degree of refinement (Acts. I, II). His acquaintance with many of the fine arts is thorough. He appreciates music and is sensible to its impressions. He also had a deep knowledge of painting (Act. VI, Verse 14,15). In short, the hero was depicted in such colours as to make him quite worthy of the honour. He was a typical sovereign and the various traits of his character were shown in bold relief by the poet.

Kalidasa's characterization of Duṣyanta also reflects some of the ideas of government. In the opening lines of Act V, a sympathetic chamberlain, thus, commiserates with his master on his self- imposed toil for the benefit of others. Just as the sun has his horses yoked only once, just as the wind blows day and night, so is the duty of one who lives by one-sixth (of the produce paid by his subjects). The fulfilment of his ends, says the king in the following lines, brings to the ruler pain and not happiness, as in the case of all other beings. In the case of the ruler, success merely puts an end to anarchy, while the task of preserving what has been acquired gives pain. The above speech is followed

by the address of two heralds to the king from behind the curtain. The first compliments the king on his daily undergoing pain in disregard to his own happiness for the sake of his subjects, and beautifully compares him to a tree which by drawing the fierce heat of the sun upon its head allays with its shade those resorting to it. The second herald, after stating that the king checks by his punishment those given to persons who are evil, solves their quarrels and gives them protection, says that the obligation of men's relations have thereby found consummation in him.

The above passages involve a number of important principles. The author, in the first place, expresses in the language of elegant poetry an old *Smṛti* principle of the king's imperative obligation of protection in return for taxation. In the second place, the author emphasizes the psychological effect of the *Arthaśāstra-Smṛti* plea for the king's constant exertion, so as to involve him in constant care and anxiety for the acquisition and preservation of his kingdom. And finally, the author applies a twofold standard of the king's government after the best *Arthaśāstra-Smṛti* traditions, namely, that of the king's complete merger of his own interests in those of his subjects and his treatment of them in the spirit of a near relative. Reference is made to this last principle in a later passage (Act VI) of the same work, where we are told that how the king, after foregoing his claim to the property of a childless merchant who has just died, issues a general order to the effect that he would thenceforth supply the place of an affectionate relation towards his subjects.

Therefore, it can be rightly said that Kālidāsa created a magnificent edifice out of the brick and mortar supplied by the *Mahābhārata*. He has succeeded, not only in rescuing the hero and the heroine of the play from the crudities under which they labour in the original and bestowing on them the vital qualities required in the hero or a heroine worth the name, but also in giving us a very fine portrait of an ideal king in Duṣyanta, and a bewitchingly transporting picture of the life of a truly Indian maiden in all the three important stages. The dramatic power and poetic beauties of this unique work have elicited the highest praise and admiration from scholars all over the world.

3.2 *Raghuvaṁśam*

The *Raghuvaṁśam* is different from Śakuntalā, which is basically a love story and a story of *dharmic* duty. The subject-matter of *Raghuvaṁśam* is *purāṇic*-epic. This poem is divided into nineteen cantos. It deals literally with the line, but primarily with the descendants of Raghu, an old mythical king of the city of Ayodhyā in the northern Ganges valley. The poem deals with as many as twenty-nine kings. The first king from whom the kings descended was Manu, the son of the Sun. The famous descendant of this dynasty, the so-called sun family, famous in epics and in the *Purāṇas*, was Rāma, hero of the *Rāmāyana* and the god Viṣṇu in human form. It is thus a Vaiśnava subject elaborated by a Śaiva poet and this fact makes this work important.

R.D. Karmarkar[32] explains why the poet named his poem after Raghu and not after any one of the many kings mentioned by him. According to him, the poet does not intend to describe all the kings of solar race right from the Sun. He wanted to describe only the immediate predecessors of Rāma, and the first important king described was Raghu, Dilīpa was secondary in importance. Therefore, the poem was called *Raghuvaṁśam.* The first three cantos deal with Dilīpa, cantos three to eight deal with Raghu, and Aja is described in cantos five to eight. It seems obvious that the personality of Raghu dominates all the first eight cantos. The description of Dilīpa and Sudakṣiṇā in the first two cantos has for its purpose the glorification of Raghu himself. They both are described not for their own sake but because they happen to be the parents of Raghu. Even though Aja plays an important role in cantos VI-VIII, the poet never loses sight of Raghu, but takes every possible opportunity to pay a handsome compliment to him. The whole poem is dominated by two personalities- Raghu and Rāma. Even Rāma himself fades into insignificance when compared to Raghu, who remained untouched by a single scandal throughout his life. Therefore the poet was tempted to call his poem after Raghu, the most dominating personality of all the kings described and hence the poem was named *Raghuvaṁśam.*

The contents of the *Raghuvaṁśam* have been gathered from various sources. It tells the story of the solar dynasty that ruled from Ayodhyā. There were four great kings in this

[32] Karmarkar, R.D., *Kālidāsa*, Karnatak University, Dharwar, 1971, p. 71.

line- Dilīpa, Raghu, Aja and Daśaratha. After these came Rāma, the greatest of all and the incarnation of divine Viṣṇu. After him, there came 24 kings, the last being Agnivarṇa, who died without issue. This account of solar race must have been a matter of common knowledge in Kālidāsa's times. M.R. Kale[33] suggests that *Raghuvaṁśam* was presented in narrative form with certain embellishments by the authors of the various *Purāṇas* and particularly by Vālmīki, the author of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa.* Kālidāsa was acquainted with this epic and derived his details from it, thereby choosing and discarding matters that suited his purpose. Kālidāsa also shows his profound respect for Vālmīki by calling him *Kavi* (the poet par excellence) and mentioning him and his *Rāmāyaṇa* with deep reverence in his poem (Act. XV, Verse 64). Kālidāsa refers to other accounts of the solar race, but rather vaguely, when he speaks of it as having been described before by "former writers" (Act. I, Verse 4). These were probably compilers of the early *Purāṇas*. The poet might have taken out some episodes from these *Purāṇas* for the requirements of his *Mahākāvya.*[34] The description of *rājanīti* in Canto XVIII was based on that given in ancient treatises like Kauṭilyā's *Arthaśāstra*, a work which Kālidāsa appears to have studied closely.

The *Raghuvaṁśam* appears to end abruptly. The line of kings mentioned by the poet is not complete. The reason could be that either the poet did not finish his work, or if he did, it has not come to us in its entirety. Another feature which needs mention is lack of unity of plot. This may be because the poet did not choose a single episode, nor even the life of a single hero, but the lives of a number of famous kings. It is therefore unfair to expect unity of plot in a work of such character. However, a unity of plot of a certain kind does exist, if we remember that the incidents mentioned in the poem are all to be interpreted as part of a central idea running through the poem, *viz.* the portraying of the leading characteristics of an ideal king, and not so much the complete life-history of each king mentioned in the work.

After an invocation to Śiva and Pārvatī and an eulogy of the 'virtues of the kings' of the race of Raghu, whose history the poet proposes to describe, the poem starts with King Dilīpa, the father of Raghu. He is an ideal king, being a most efficient, benign and

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[33] Kale, M.R., (ed. and trans.), *The Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1972, p. xxiv.
[34] *Ibid.*

virtuous ruler (Canto I, Verses 13-29).[35] He has a queen called Sudakṣiṇa but they have no issue. They consult their family priest, Vasiṣṭha, who explains that a curse has been pronounced on the king by the divine cow Surabhi. He is told to propitiate the cow's daughter Nandini. Dilīpa stands the test and the cow confers on him the wished- for blessing. A son is then born to Dilīpa, named Raghu. He is brought up and educated with due care and installed as heir-apparent (*yuvarāja*). After this, Dilīpa, who had already performed 99 horse-sacrifices, wishes to perform the hundredth to complete the list. Indra, lord of the gods, becomes jealous and steals the sacrificial horse. Therefore, Raghu is entrusted with the duty to bring back the horse. Raghu fights with Indra most gallantly. Indra triumphs over Raghu, but, being pleased with him, bestows upon his father the entire merit obtainable from the sacrifice. After a short while, Dilīpa installs Raghu on the throne as king, and retires with his queen to the forest.

King Raghu now begins to rule. He decides to start upon an expedition of conquest (*Digvijaya*), which he finally completes and returns to his capital laden with glory and wealth. He then performs the *Viśvajit* sacrifice (indicative of universal conquest), in which he gives away to *brāhmaṇas*, by way of *dakṣiṇa*, everything he possessed. While Raghu has thus practically beggared himself in this sacrifice, an ascetic called Kautsa comes to him. He wants money as much as fourteen crores to pay his tuition fees to his guru. In order to satisfy Kautsa's demand, Raghu plans an expedition against Kubera, the Lord of wealth. Divining this intention Kubera fills Raghu's treasury with gold, which he gives to Kautsa. The latter, departing, blesses his benefactor that he would soon obtain a valiant son. His son is named Aja. He gets married to Indumati, the sister of king Bhoja of Vidarbha country. Aja begins to rule and Raghu starts living in secluded retirement, and then departs from the world. Aja gives him a suitable funeral.

Indumati gives birth to Daśaratha. Aja pleases all by his excellent rule. Meanwhile Indumati dies. Aja lives some eight years more after this, all the while mourning for his lost wife, whom he finally joins in the next world. After this, Daśaratha starts to rule from Ayodhyā as nobly as his predecessors. From here the story is almost the same, with little alterations, as we find in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Kālidāsa gives a fairly comprehensive summary of the whole story of Rāma, right from the birth of Rāma, his

[35] Kale, M.R., (ed. and trans.), *The Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1972, pp. 2-3.

marriage to Sītā, exile for fourteen years, abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, death of Rāvaṇa, formal crowning of Rāma as the king of Ayodhyā, Sītā's abandonment, birth of the twins- Kuśa and Lava and finally Rāma's death. Kuśa begins to rule after him. Atithi succeeds him. After Atithi, the poem enumerates without any detail, the various kings, twenty-one in all, that succeeded him. The last of these, Sudarśana, ascended the throne when he was six. He gets a son, Agnivarṇa, whom he installs as a king and retires in the forest. Agnivarṇa turns out to be voluptuous, pleasure-seeking sensualist. He pays the penalty for having a life of pleasure and falls a victim to consumption. At his death, his wife was pregnant. She ascended the throne as queen-regent, and looked after the affairs of state on behalf of her unborn child. And here the story somewhat abruptly ends.

Dilīpa's general virtues are described in *ślokās* 13-29 of Canto I.[36] It is a description applies in a great or less degree to all good and noble kings:

-Broad chested, stout-shouldered (*lit.* having shoulders like those of the bull), tall as the *śāla* tree, and massive armed, he looked like the military virtue (heroism) appearing in a corporeal frame fitted for the discharge of its duties. (Verse 13)

-(Though) without fear, he protected his body; unafflicted with disease, he performed religious rites; unavaricious he amassed wealth; and unaddicted he enjoyed pleasures. (Verse 21)

-He drained (collected tributes from) the earth for the performance of sacrifices, and Indra drained the heavens for (the growth of) crops; thus by an exchange of their wealth the two sustained the twin worlds. (Verse 26)

The moral may be given in the poet's own words- "The highest duty of the ruler is to look after the weak and to save them from the aggressive strong".[37]

Raghu was the most illustrious of his line. While yet a young man, Raghu was entrusted with the task of guarding his father's sacrificial horse, he had to fight with the redoubtable Indra, the chief of the immortals. His bravery won him Indra's admiration and his father's blessing.

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[36] Kale, M.R., (ed. and trans.), *The Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1972, pp. 2-3.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

-Even then, the slayer of Vṛitra (Indra) was pleased by the supreme valour of him who had long maintained a hostile position, cruel by the use of arms; for a foot is set (an impression is made) everywhere by merit. (Verse 62)

Raghu's merit as a ruler is found in *ślokās* 8-13 of Canto IV. Canto IV as a whole describes how Raghu built a large empire:

-As the moon by its power to delight is rightly called *candra*; the sun by its diffusing heat is correctly named *tapana*; so he, by pleasing his subjects, was justly styled *rājā*. (Verse 12)

Canto V describes the magnanimity of Raghu, who gave to the sage Kautsa wealth in excess of his demands. This was probably the most characteristic kingly trait. In the *Raghuvaṁśam*, the poet has set himself the onerous task of describing the varied incidents in the lives of several monarchs who, though possessed of some common characteristics, must need to have individuality of their own.

The poet's general description of these kings in *Raghuvaṁśam* is very impressive. In the Canto I, Verses 5-8, the poet describes that these kings were pure from their very birth who preserved in their works till these bore fruit. They were lords of the earth up to the Ocean's merge. The track of their cars lay as far as the celestial regions (Canto I, Verse 9,5). They offered oblations to the sacred fires in accordance with canonical injunctions. They honoured suppliants by gratifying their desires. They inflicted punishment in proportion to the crime. They waked at the proper hour (Canto I, Verse 6). They amassed wealth for the purpose of charity. They spoke briefly for the sake of truth. They desired conquest for the sake of fame and they consorted with their wives for the sake of offspring (Canto I, Verse 7). They learnt the sciences in their childhood. They desired enjoyments in their youth. They led the ascetic's life in their old age and they ended their lives with meditation on the supreme spirit (Canto I, Verse 8). U.N. Ghosal[38] states that the kings of this line were world-rulers, who possessed the familiar royal qualifications of purity, perseverance, self-restraint, vigilance, piety, charity and love of truth, while they regulated the successive stages of their lives after the *Smṛti* pattern. They observed a sense of proportion in the administration of the criminal law,

[38] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 355.

and they achieved world-conquest after the Kauṭilyan standard of the righteous conqueror (*dharmavijayī*).

Kālidāsa's outlook seems to be that of a strictly orthodox brāhmaṇa and he is inclined to stress virtue, *dharma* especially, and to dwell on the details of brahmanical rituals. Dilīpa is described at the outset as a rigorously brahmanical ruler, so much so that for him wealth and pleasure were merely part of virtue. He pursued them not because he liked them but because it was a part of his brahmanical duty to do so (Canto I, II). All the heroes of the solar race, whose careers and achievements have been sung by Kālidāsa, devote their childhood to the study of sciences, strive for worldly success in youth and in old age, like pious hermits, resort to sylvan life for the purpose of meditation. As rulers they extend the boundaries of their empire and administer a noble and honest government for the welfare of their subjects. They are of strictly brahmanical faith and solemnly observe all the religious ceremonies of the state, holding the arch-priest in the high esteem.

The central role that the figure of the king plays in Kālidāsa's dramas and in his epic *Raghuvaṁśam* strongly suggests that he enjoyed royal patronage. Ingalls argues that the sense of the world that one gets from Kālidāsa's works is consonant with historical, geographical, and linguistic factors supporting the Indian tradition that associates the poet with the Gupta monarch Candragupta II, who ruled most of the northern India from about A.D. 375 to A.D. 415.[39] It is notable that the description of the legendary Raghu's world conquest (*digvijaya*) in the fourth canto of the *Raghuvaṁśam* parallels the account of Samudragupta's victories. To please Candragupta II, Kālidāsa must have woven events in the life of Samudragupta into his epic narrative.

The heroes in many of his plays and poems are kings whose character is shaped by the poet's view of kingship. Kālidāsa shared with the Vedic *brāhmaṇas* a belief that nature's structure is constantly recreated by ritual sacrifice.[40] In the Vedic rites of royal consecration (*rājasūya*), the symbols of the ritual link all the elements of the world to the king, so that he stands at the centre of the universe. It is through the king that the

[39] Ingalls, Daniel H.H., "Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age" in the Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 96, No.i (Jan-Mar), 1976, pp. 15-26.
[40] *Ibid.*

natural, social, and divine worlds have unity and order.[41] The king's supernatural power is indicated by his intimate associations with the Vedic gods. According to Manu, a king is composed of eternal particles of eight divine powers, and because of them he surpasses all other created beings.[42] He is the human counterpart of Indra, king of the gods, and is his equal in many ways.[43]

The high qualities of kingship that Kālidāsa's heroes possess qualify them to be called royal sages. The epithet "royal sage" (*rājarṣi*) signifies that the king's spiritual power is equal to his martial strength and moral superiority. He is the sage (*ṛṣi*) by virtue of his discipline (*yoga*), austerity *(tapas*), and knowledge of sacred law (*dharma*). It is his religious duty to keep order in the cosmos by guarding his kingdom. In this he is like a sage guarding the realm of holy sacrifice. His responsibility to guide and protect those beneath him involves him in the acts of penance that place him in the highest position of the temporal and spiritual hierarchy.[44]

Miller[45] states that the ideal royal sage is a figure of enormous physical strength and energy who also has the power to control his senses.[46] The conflict between desire (*kāma*) and duty (*dharma*) that is enacted in each of Kālidāsa's dramas involves a tension between the energy of physical passion and the constraints of self-control. In *Śakuntalā,* the tension is resolved in the king's recognition of his son and heir. The boy is portrayed as a natural warrior despite of his birth in a hermitage and his education in religious practice. Royal power combined with religious discipline makes the prince destined to be "a king who turns the wheel of empire" (*cakravartin*), a universal emperor whose great spiritual and temporal conquests mark him with divinity.[47] Kālidāsa's heroes are thus royal sages whose characters are expressed according to the

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[41] Heesterman, J.C., *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, Mouton, 1957, pp. 224 ff.

[42] Buhler, G., (trans.), *The Laws of Manu', Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXV, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1964, 7.3-7; chapter 7 is devoted to the duties of kings.

[43] This is alluded to throughout Kālidāsa's play; it is made explicit in the dialogue between Duṣyanta and Indra's charioteer Mātali at the opening of Act Seven in Kale, M.R.,(trans.), *The Abhijñānaśākuntalam of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1969, pp. 243-265.

[44] Miller, B.S., (ed.), *The Plays of Kālidāsa*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1999, p. 8,9.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[46] Kālidāsa describes Raghu's son Aja in these terms in the opening verses of canto eight of the *Raghuvaṁśam. Rājādhirājarṣi* is the epithet of Candragupta II in the Udayagiri cave inscription composed by the court poet Vīrasena.

[47] Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That Was India*, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., London, 1954, pp. 83 ff.

norms of classical society and dramatic theory. They are not just kings and lovers, but connoisseurs of natural beauty and art.

In the works of Kālidāsa, we come across frequent references to the duties of the kings, the principal among them was the guardianship of *dharma* and the administration of justice. The king was expected to see that the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, prescribed by the *Smṛtis*, was not violated by his subjects. There is also ample evidence to show that the king was regarded as the highest tribunal and himself tried important legal suits. Apart from this, we also get information regarding the law of inheritance and the contemporary law in the days of Kālidāsa and the Guptas. In the plays and poems it was the physical and mental power combined with religious discipline that made the hero worthy of the title *cakravartin,* a universal ruler whose great spiritual and temporal conquests marked him with divinity. With these notions Kālidāsa's works placed before the Gupta kings an ideal to follow and therefore represented the image of king and kingship in the Gupta period.

CHAPTER 4

Normative texts

The *Dharmaśāstra* is a genre of Sanskrit texts and refers to a branch of learning, pertaining to the religious and legal duties of the Hindus. The voluminous textual corpus of the *Dharmaśāstra* is primarily a product of the brahmanism and represents the elaborate system of an expert tradition.[1] It was because of its sophisticated jurisprudence that the *Dharmaśāstra* was taken by early British colonial administrators to be the law of the land for Hindus in India.[2] Ever since, the *Dharmaśāstra* has been linked with Hindu law, despite the fact that its contents deal more with religious life than with law. In fact, a separation of religion and law within the *Dharmaśāstra* is artificial and has been repeatedly questioned.[3] Others have, however, argued for a distinction of religious and secular law within the *Dharmaśāstra.*[4] *Dharmaśāstra* is important within the Hindu tradition first as a source of religious law describing the life of an ideal householder, and second, as a symbol of the summation of Hindu knowledge about religion, law, ethics etc.

The most important and oldest among the *smṛtis* are the *Manusmṛti* and the Yājñavalkya *smṛti*, dating between *c.*200 B.C.-300 A.D. It is from these *smṛtis* that the later *smṛtis* derived their authority. This period of five centuries was marked by a crisis as well as turning point in the history of ancient India. In the political sphere the break-up of the Mauryan empire after a century and a half of brilliant existence was followed by a series of foreign invasions which succeeded in bringing large portions of northern

[1] Olivelle, Patrick, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Tradition of Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 64.

[2] For a good overview of the British attitudes toward and administration of Hindu law, see J. Duncan M.Derrett, "The Administration of Hindu Law by the British," in *Comparitive Studies in Society and History* 4:1, 1961, p. 10-52.

[3] Rocher, Ludo "Hindu Law and Religion: Where to draw the line?" in *Malik Ram Felicitation Volume*, ed. S.A.J. Zaidi, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 167- 194 and Richard W. Lariviere, "Law and Religion in India" in *Law, Morality and Religion: Global Perspectives*, ed. Alan Watson, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 75-94.

[4] On this distinction in relation to punishment, see Lubin,Timothy, "Punishment and Expiation: Overlapping Domains in Brahmanical law," in *Indologica Taurinensa* 33, 2007, p. 93-122.

and western India under their rule. This tide of conquests was stemmed and to a certain extent turned by the rise of new and powerful dynasties like the Śuṅgas, the Bhāraśivas and the Sātavāhanas. In the branch of social life, the mass settlements of foreigners with their unfamiliar social and cultural customs threatened to disrupt the indigenous society. The problem was partly solved with the foreigners getting absorbed in the Indian social system. In the sphere of religion, Buddhism got entrenched and was on its way to become a world-religion. Jainism was also achieving an all-India spread. Brahmanism responded to this challenge by an intellectual effort. The entire body of its social and religious laws was developed and systematized in the *smṛti* works of Manu and Yājñavalkya, and its extensive cycle of traditions, myths and legends, together with its whole code of individual and social ethics, were woven into the texture of the epic tale, the *Mahābhārata*. During the age of the imperial Guptas, brahmanism began to receive large scale royal patronage.

All the *Dharmaśāstras* derive their authority from the *Vedas*, though the contents of most of the *Dharmaśāstra* texts can be directly linked with the extant Vedic texts.[5] Traditionally, the *Dharmaśāstra* has, since the time of the Yājñavalkya *smṛti* been divided into three major topics: *Ācāra* or rules pertaining to daily rituals, life-cycle rites, and other duties of the four *varṇas*, *Vyavahāra* or rules pertaining to the procedures for resolving doubts about *dharma* and rules of substantive law categorized according the standard 18 titles of brahmanic law, and lastly, *Prāyaścitta* or rules about expiations and penances for violations of the rules of *dharma*.

The works of Manu and Yājñavalkya are attributed to well known sages and seers of the old Vedic tradition and they claim to lay down the law for all classes and sections of the brahmanical society. The political ideas of *Manu* and *Yājñavalkya* were dominated by the influence of their two-fold inheritance, namely, that of the early brāhmaṇical *smṛtis* and the technical *Arthaśāstra*. Through the centuries, as the Vedic hymns and ritual injunctions became difficult to comprehend and to relate current practices, the *Smṛti* ordinances achieved a stature comparable to that of the *Vedas*. They were closer to the everyday life of society and were more sensitive to popular needs and usages.

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[5] Lingat, Robert, *The Classical Law of India*, trans. J. D. M. Derrett, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973, p. 7-8.

The *Dharmaśāstra* combines the practical with the hypothetical, and it is questionable whether any of the law codes were deliberately employed as regulations backed by coercive sanctions. How closely the *smṛtis* reflect the actual laws and rules of the society cannot be precisely determined, but as commentaries on the Vedas and as a valid aspect of tradition in their own right they are accepted as authoritative in the administration of justice and the prescription of duty.

There exists a conflict between different law books in their treatment of law and polity. There are incongruities in emphasis and doctrine and these are often important. Moreover, at the time the early *Smrits* were compiled, the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Dharmaśāstra* schools were not yet clearly distinguished, and Manu and Yājñavalkya may be characterized as combinations of the two. But they leaned to the latter. Yājñavalkya was sufficiently conscious of the doctrinal differences between the two schools to insist that in case of conflict, *Dharmaśāstra* must be held as the final authority.[6]

The period *c.* 300-600 CE saw the composition of some of the major Sanskrit law-books. These codes expanded and systematized the social and religious regulations of the orthodox brahmanical culture. The *Nārada* and the *Bṛihaspati Smṛtis* were composed in this period and they enlarged the provisions put forth in the *Manusmṛti*. In their broad treatment of law and polity, there is actually little variation among the law books. But their legal codes are not always consistent in detail, and a number of glaring contradictions are apparent in the texts. The later authors asserted that in case of conflict between the different law books, emphasis must be given on the argument most beneficial to the community. This rule therefore elevated the recent *Dharmaśāstra* works to a position of great authority among the *Smṛti* writings, although they could never enjoy the same prestige as that of Manu *Dharmaśāstra.*

As this dissertation covers only the Gupta period and deals with the representation of the king in the records contemporary to the Guptas, emphasis is given on the normative texts which were composed in this period. It is for this purpose that the texts *Nārada*

[6] Mahamahopadhyaya and Ganapati Sastri, T., (ed.), *The Yājñavalkyasmṛti* II, 21, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982; Ghoshal, U.N., (*A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959, pp. 161f.) states that this is the first instance in the *Smṛti* literature of the recognition of *Dharmaśāstra* and *Arthaśāstra* as the two sources of law.

and *Bṛihaspati Smṛtis* are chosen. These texts throw light on the position of the king in the Gupta period delineating his duties, functions, authority, privileges and checks on his power. While dealing with these two law books, references are made to the *Manusmṛti* and some other *Smṛtis*. Some differences as well as similarities exist on certain issues related to kingship between these texts. This chapter provides an overview of how the king has been represented in these texts and what are his functions, powers, duties towards his subjects and the state.

Before dealing with the legal texts, a few facts should be kept in mind. One of the most important characteristic of these late *Smṛtis* was that they predominantly or even exclusively occupied themselves with the development of the branch of law and justice (*vyavahāra*). This is especially the case with the *Nārada* and *Bṛhaspati Smṛtis*. Drekmeier[7] states that *Nārada* provides the first legal commentary that is not encumbered with moralization. The text is confined to the matter of law, almost ignoring precepts of religion and morality. The author does, however, like Kauṭilya before him, base judicial procedure on the foundation of *dharma*, rational law and royal decree. *Nārada* considers the last of these to be legitimate in its own right.

The compiler of *Nārada-smṛti*, whoever he was, must have been acquainted with a work closely akin to the extant *Manusmṛti* but he did not offer a mere reproduction of its doctrines in his own work. *Nārada* differs from *Manu* on many important points, such as the names and order of several titles of law, the legitimacy of *niyoga*, etc. It is the only *Smṛti* completely preserved in the manuscript, in which law, properly so called, is treated by itself, without any reference to rules of penance, diet and other religious subjects. It also throws a new light on the political and social institutions of ancient India at the time of its composition. The composition of the *Nārada-smṛti* cannot be referred to a more recent period than the fifth century A.D., or the sixth century at the very latest.[8]

The close association of *Bṛhaspati* with *Manu* gives it a special claim to consideration. The close connection between the *Manu* and the *Bṛihaspati smṛtis* are borne out by the

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[7] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 232.
[8] Jolly, J (trans.), *The Minor Law Books*, Part- I (*Nārada* XVIII), (*Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIII, edited by F.Max Müller), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1965, pp. xi-xxiii.

fact that *Bṛhaspati* mentions the name of *Manu* with great veneration and quotes from the *Manusmṛti* very frequently. There are a number of instances where the laws of *Manu*, though not appealed to by name, were nevertheless distinctly referred to by *Bṛhaspati*. We also find that in a number of cases, *Bṛhaspati*, even when not expressly referring to *Manu*, presupposes throughout an acquaintance with his code, and a very large portion of his *smṛti* is devoted to the interpretation of technical terms or to the elucidation or amplification of the somewhat laconic enunciations of Manu. *Bṛhaspati* goes on to say that any *Smṛti* text opposed to the teachings of *Manu* has no validity (XXVII, 4). Though *Nārada-smṛti* differs from *Manusmṛti* on many points, there is similarity between *Nārada* and *Bṛhaspati*. They both agree particularly in the use of many technical terms.

Bṛhaspati was considered an inspired writer by the very earliest commentators of law-books, such as Medhātithi who belonged to the ninth century. This suggests that *Bṛhaspati* preceded those commentators by a few centuries. Further, a comparison between the laws of *Bṛhaspati* and the Burmese *Dhammathats*, whose Buddhist Indian originals were composed in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, shows that there were many similarities between the two. Even the judicial proceedings described in the drama *Mṛichchhakaṭika* of Śūdraka corresponds to the rules laid down by *Bṛhaspati*. It is for all these reasons that the composition of the *Bṛhaspati-smṛti* cannot be referred to a period later than the sixth or seventh century A.D.[9]

These *Smṛtis* outline the three executive branches of government, namely the king, the cabinet and the civil service.[10] In the *Smṛtis* the monarch is asked to personally supervise diplomacy, civil affairs, and the administration of finance and law. For him public life was as rigorous as it was for Kauṭalya's sovereign, and again the protection

[9] Jolly, J (trans.), *The Minor Law Books*, Part- II (*Bṛhaspati*), (*Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIII, edited by F.Max Müller), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1965, pp. 275, 276.

[10] The *Dharmaśāstras* suggest that the attempt on the part of the brāhmaṇas was not to undermine and destroy the bureaucracy, but to utilize it where possible for their own purposes. Such acceptance of the administrative framework with the objective of exploiting it is more often not the aim of different groups with actual or potential power in ancient empires. *Vide* S.N. Eisenstadt," Political Struggle in Bureaucratic Societies," *World Politics*, IX (October 1956), p. 24.

of the people was the prime justification for his rule.[11] Without the sanction of *daṇḍa* "all would be upside down." The king must learn the threefold wisdom of the *Vedas*: the art of policy, logic and self-knowledge.[12] He can maintain order only if he is able to control himself.[13] His morning was to be devoted to medication, worship, study matters involving legal decisions, and consultation with ministers, ambassadors, spies, and the commander in chief on civil, external, and military affairs. The remaining part of the day was to be devoted to prayer and personal matters, inspection of military forces, deliberation with secret service and rest.[14] In addition to supervising the administrative machinery and ensuring the protection of the people, the king must safeguard his subjects against corrupt officials. When the king could not personally direct the functions of the government, the *purohita,* the crown prince, or the premier served as his administrative agent.[15]

The description of *Dharmaśāstra* polity, given above, is of a general nature. The account given below discusses in detail the principles of kingship, presumably more closely associated with the Gupta period. While discussing these principles given especially in the *Nārada* and the *Bṛhaspati Smṛtis*, reference has also been made to the other important *Smṛtis,* such as the *Manu* and the *Yājñavalkya.* But before starting with the principles of kingship given in these normative texts, a brief introduction needs to be given regarding the origin of political institutions in ancient India. This is important because the brahmanical conception of the institution of kingship had its origin in these theories.

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[11] Buhler, G., *The Laws of Manu* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv, edited by F. Max Muller), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1964, Chapter VII, 2f. and 144; VIII, 307f. ; Mahamahopadhyaya and T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *The Yājñavalkyasmṛti* I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 119.

[12] Buhler, G., *The Laws of Manu* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv, edited by F. Max Muller), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1964, Chapter VII, 26-28.

[13] Buhler, G., *The Laws of Manu* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv, edited by F. Max Muller), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1964, 43f. ; Mahamahopadhyaya and Ganapati Sastri, T., (ed.), *The Yājñavalkyasmṛti XIII*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 309-11 (cf. *Arthaśāstra* I, 7).

[14] *Ibid*; *Ibid*, pp. 327-31 (cf. *Arthaśāstra* I, 19).

[15] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, pp. 239, 240.

4.1 Origin of Political Institutions

Brahmanical theories of state hold that the institution of kingship originated as a response to hostile pressures. These did not view political authority as the natural consequence of the interdependence of men. The state was rationalized in terms suggesting a compact, or was said to have been established through the intervention of gods. These ideas were inevitably linked with the justification of coercive institutions. In brahmanical political thought, the sinful nature of man legitimates compulsion. The state is indeed the *sine qua non* of existence. *Daṇḍa* is the necessary result of man's fall and the instrument for ensuring sufficient order to make a decent life possible. But, at the same time, the state had the more positive function of providing the conditions of salvation.[16]

Manu (VII 3-13) says that when the people being without the king, dispersed through fear in all directions, the Lord (of creatures) created the king for the protection of this whole (creation) : He took for this purpose the external particles of Indra, the Wind-god, Yama, the Sun, the Fire-god, Varuṇa, the Moon, and the Kubera : since the king was created out of the particles of these gods, he surpasses all created beings in lustre.

The later *Smṛtis* contain some speculations on the theory of the origin of the state and its institutions. *Nārada* says (Introduction, 1-2), that in the days of yore, when the patriarch Manu exercised sovereignty, the people were wholly devoted to virtue and were speakers of truth. But when virtue (*dharma*) disappeared among men, law and legal procedure (*vyavahāra*) were instituted, and the king was created for their administration as well as for wielding the rod of chastisement (*daṇḍa*). However, *Bṛhaspati*, mentions a shorter version of this theory. It says that, formerly the people were predominantly virtuous and averse to injuring creatures, but afterwards when they were overpowered by greed, hatred and so forth, law and legal procedures were instituted. Therefore, we find that originally human society was ruled by a patriarch with highly virtuous subjects and no laws. Humans became corrupt and the state with a legal apparatus appeared under a human ruler.

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[16] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 245.

4.2 Authority of the King's Executive Edict

The principle of the king's executive edict was introduced into the *Smṛti* literature by Manu and Yājñavalkya apparently after Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra.*[17] This principle refers to the quasi-legislative authority of the king. Before discussing the prescriptions of *Nārada* and *Bṛhaspati* on this issue, a summary of *Manu* and *Yājñavalkya* needs to given, so that the differences, if any, between them can be pointed out.

Manu (VII 13) says that one should not transgress the righteous edict (*dharma*) which the king decrees in respect of his favourites, nor that which inflicts pain upon his enemies. Manu (IX 275) prescribes capital punishment for those who oppose the king's commands. *Yājñavalkya* (II 186) observes that the king's edict (*dharma*) must be carefully obeyed. In the above extracts, the king's executive edict was held to be invested with the force of law. This dictum was however subject to the limitations imposed upon the king's authority by the early *Smṛtis* which were followed by *Manu* and *Yājñavalkya.* Therefore, in the first place, the fundamental *Smṛti* conception of *rājadharma* implied that the king was subject to the canonical law of his order which was itself part and parcel of the law of the entire social system. Both *Manu* (VIII 38-40 ; IX 189) and *Yājñavalkya* (II 34-6) repeated the early *Smṛti* clause of the state law requiring the king to restore the stolen property to its owner, as well as those restricting his property-rights in various ways. They both also introduced new penal clauses into the old *Smṛti* law recalling those of Kauṭilya, which made the king liable to exceptionally heavy fines for his offences. These extracts were important because they implied that the legal validity of the king's edict was contingent upon its compliance with the fundamental law of the social order, and that the scope of the king's edict was limited by the rules of the state law in the branch of his internal administration.

Nārada's view is more authoritative in this regard. The chapter entitled 'Miscellaneous' in *Nārada-smṛti* lays down this principle in detail. Perhaps the most authoritarian of Hindu writers, he demands that the king should be obeyed irrespective of whether he is right or wrong in his actions. It says that the command of the king which represents his might, be it right or wrong, is the law (*dharma*) for litigants. As the king moves on earth

[17] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 162.

like a visible Indra, his subjects should never violate his command. Whatever the king does is authoritative, such is the accepted rule, for the king is entrusted with the protection of his subjects, he is their lord, and he is found to benefit creatures. *Nārada* asks the subjects afresh to abide by the king's command, for the king became their lord by purchasing them with his austerities, and their occupations depend upon him. After declaring the king equivalent to a group of five deities by parity of functions, the author warns the subjects against insulting or reviling or discriminating against the king. He asks the subjects to abide by the king's command for otherwise they would perish.[18]

According to Ghoshal,[19] what is important here is that we find an extreme development of the old *Smṛti* principle relating to the authority of the king's edict. The later authors like *Nārada* not only confer the force of law upon the king's command irrespective of its justice or otherwise, but also inculcate unquestioned obedience to his authority regardless of his worth. This is justified by a number of *Smṛti* principles. Such are the doctrines of divinity of the king in a physical as well as in a metaphorical sense on the ground of his creation out of divine particles and his divine equivalence through his attributes respectively, the conception of the king's function as the guarantee of public security and that of his office as the safeguard of social order and of individual happiness as well as the idea of his authority based upon overwhelming force. To this *Nārada* adds a principle based upon the law of *karma*, namely, that the king's authority is derived from his merits acquired in a previous birth.

The authors of these law-books also suggest limitations to the authority of the king's executive edict after the earlier *smṛti* standards. *Nārada* (XVIII 8-9) says that the king should not establish anything that is contrary to the *Veda* and the *Smṛti* and is harmful to the people, and he should not abrogate any such that has been established. If any another king, in his arrogance, has established something contrary to reason (*nyāya*), he should give up such inequitable practice and direct it afresh along the path of reason. *Kātyāyana* also says that when the king's edict has been issued without conflict with one's duty (*dharma*), it should alone be obeyed in accordance with the king's order. Here we find that while *Kātyāyana* limits the application of the king's edict by the

[18] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 313.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

principle of the supremacy of the sacred law, *Nārada* adds to this the limitations imposed by reason and the public good.

Regarding the authority of the king's judicial decree, it should be mentioned that the juristic formula of Kauṭilya about the four modes of the judicial decision with its accompanying order of priority was introduced in the *Smṛti* literature with slight verbal changes by *Nārada* (Introduction, 10-11). These modes, without reference to their technical title, were repeated and explained by *Bṛhaspati* (I 1. 18-21; ibid. I 9. 1-7) and by *Kātyāyana* (35-43). What needs mention here is the fact that, as in Kauṭilya, the king's decree has the final authority over the three modes of judicial decision, namely, solemn affirmation, examination of witnesses, and the customs and practices of men. The definitions of the king's decree by the authors of the *smṛtis* clarify the somewhat vague and general ideas of their predecessors. To sum up the arguments of different authors, it can be said that the king's decree was applicable only when the evidence was equally balanced (Bṛhaspati), or is altogether wanting (Vyāsa and Pitāmaha), while its validity is subject to conformity with the canon and the verdict of the assessors (Bṛhaspati), or else reason and usage (Kātyāyana).[20]

4.3 Authority and Obligations of the King

Before going into the details of the later *Smṛtis* on this principle, a summary of information in *Manu* and *Yājñavalkya* needs mention. Manu's theory of kingship involved a remarkable development of the two mutually complementary principles of the old *Smṛtis,* namely, those of the king's authority and his obligation with a decided tendency in favour of the former. The author based his view of the authority of the king upon the characteristically dogmatic interpretation of the older theories of the king's origin, office and functions. *Manu* (VII 3-13) says that when the people being without the king, dispersed through fear in all directions, the Lord (of creatures) created the king for the protection of this whole (creation). For the fulfilment of *dharma*, the king assumed many forms according to the requirements of his purpose and power and the

[20] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, pp. 314 - 315.

conditions of time and place. From this view of the origin of kingship follows as a corollary the author's idea of the political obligation of the subjects towards their ruler. Even an infant king must not be despised from an idea that he is a mere mortal, for he is a great deity in human form. The author concludes by solemnly warning the subjects against transgressing the righteous edict (*dharma*) which the king decrees with respect to his favourites, and that which he inflicts upon his enemies.

Manu (IV 135-6) includes the king with a snake and a learned brāhmaṇa in the list of those who should not be despised, even if they are feeble. If they are treated with disrespect they would completely destroy the offender. He further says that kings occupy the position of Indra and are like the brāhmaṇa free from all taint. This is because the king becomes immediately pure when he occupies the seat of authority and the reason for which he is seated there is for the protection of his subjects. The king is an incarnation of eight guardians of the quarters, and is free from purity and impurity since he is pervaded by those deities.

In another passage (IX 301-11) *Manu* gives an exaggerated estimate of the quantum of the king's influence upon the time-spirit. He says that the *Kṛita*, the *Tretā*, the *Dvāpara* and the *Kali* ages, reflect the king's behaviour, and therefore the king is synonymous with the age-cycle. The king is the *Kali* age when he sleeps, *Dvāpara* when he rises from sleep, *Tretā* when he exerts himself, and *Kṛita* when he moves. The author concludes with an equally exaggerated account of the king's functions. The king should adopt the energetic behaviour (*tejovṛittam*) of eight deities. He should shower benefits upon his kingdom as Indra showers rain; he should collect taxes as the Sun extracts water with his rays; he should penetrate everywhere through his spies as wind moves about everywhere; he should control his subjects as Yama brings all under subjection at the proper time; he should punish the wicked as Varuṇa binds sinners with his rope; he should gladden his subjects as the full Moon gladdens men; he should treat criminals with his anger and destroy wicked vassals as Fire burns all and lastly, support all his subjects as the Earth supports all created beings.

In contrast with *Manu's* ideas of the authority and obligation of the ruler, those of *Yājñavalkya* are slight and superficial. On the one hand, he includes (I 153) after *Manu* (IV 135) the kṣatriya along with the snake and the brāhmaṇa in a list of those who

should not be despised. On the other hand, the author mentions (I 119) in an enumeration of the duties of castes that the principal occupation (*karma*) of the kṣatriya is the protection of the subjects. Among the two highest duties (*dharma*) of kings he includes elsewhere (I 323) the gift of immunity from fear of his subjects. He further observes (I 335; *ibid.* 337) that the king who justly protects his subjects earns one-sixth of their spiritual merit, for protection is the greatest of all gifts, while the king takes one-half of whatever sin is committed by the subjects for want of protection. *Yājñavalkya* (I 340-41) also observes that the king who unjustly fills his treasury with the wealth of his subjects swiftly loses his fortune and is destroyed together with his friends.

These two mutually complementary principles of authority and obligation of the ruler were repeated and developed by the authors of the later *Smṛtis*. Beginning with the statements having a bearing upon the authority of the king, *Nārada* (XVIII 13) says that as the king is endowed with splendour and purity, he is among mortals the being without beginning and without end. The important qualification attached by the author to this doctrine was that the king must not swerve from his duties. According to the author (XVIII 24-9) the kings of unparalleled might assume five divine forms, those of Fire, the Moon, Yama, Indra, and Kubera. The king is called Fire when being subdued by anger with or without cause, he 'burns' his subjects. He is called Indra when acquiring might he marches forth with uplifted weapons against his enemies with a will to conquer. He is called the Moon when, shedding his anger and cheerful in aspect he is seen by his subjects. He becomes Yama when, seated on the throne of justice, he wields the rod of punishment with impartiality towards all creatures. He is called Kubera when he favours guests, preceptors and learned men as well as servants and so forth with gifts.

On this topic, *Bṛhaspati* (I 1. 6-8) says that the king's person was created by appropriating portions of the lustre of the deities, namely, the Moon, Fire, the Sun, Wind, Indra, Kubera, and Yama. All creatures both movable and immovable yield themselves for enjoyment and swerve not from their duties through the fear of the king. In a country without a king the occupations of agriculture, trade and money-lending do not exist, and therefore the king was created in former times as the leader of the castes

and the orders. *Kātyāyana* (8) says that the king of the gods, Indra, having fallen from heaven appears (before the people) in the form of the king. Apart from these, there are other law-givers who also base the authority of the king over his subjects upon a number of early *Smṛti* principles relating to the king's origin, office and functions. The king's functions were held to be equivalent to those of the deities, and alternatively with those of the preceptor, so as to identify his personality with their own. The king's office, lastly, was held to be the guarantee of the fulfilment of individual duties as well as occupations.[21]

Turning to the king's obligation towards his subjects, *Nārada* (XVIII 5 and 17) says that the king shall protect with attention all orders (*āśrama*) in accordance with the rules prescribed by the canon and the four political expedients. Constantly cherishing the good and punishing the wicked constitute for kings their end of virtue (*dharma*), while refraining from oppression of his subjects constitutes their end of wealth (*artha*). *Nārada* refers to the tax (*bali*) of one-sixth arising out of land as the king's fee (*vetana*) which has been prescribed for the protection of the people. Since the chief of the gods falling from heaven appears as king among men, says *Kātyāyana* (8 and 15), the king was created for a threefold purpose, namely, constant protection of the people, eradication of thorns and honouring the brāhmaṇas.[22]

Following the precedent of *Manu* and *Yājñavalkya* the later *Smṛtis* repeat and develop the clauses of the state law bearing upon the king's authority and his obligations, with a distinct bias in favour of the king's authority. The former group of clauses deals principally with offences against the king's person as well as his authority. *Nārada* (XV-XVI, 27-8) under the head of law called 'Abuse and Assault' prescribes punishments of atrocious severity for abusing a just king and for striking a king even though at fault, the latter offence being emphatically declared to be a hundred times worse than brāhmaṇa-murder. In another passage (XVIII 10), *Nārada,* prescribes the penalties of imprisonment and death for disobedience to the king's executive edict. Giving a short list of penalties for different offences, *Bṛhaspati* (I 9. 12) prescribed the punishment of imprisonment for treason. Corporal punishment was prescribed by

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[21] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 316.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Kātyāyana (955-6) for indulgence in the king's sports, adopting his occupation, speaking what is distasteful to him, and stealing his wealth.

The later *Smṛtis* introduced for the first time into the *Smṛti* literature a special procedure for dealing with a large number of offences including those against the authority of the king. *Nārada* (XVIII 1) and *Bṛhaspati* (I 29.1) observed that the law suits stated therein depend upon the king, evidently in the sense that he starts as well as investigates them. What is important here is the fact that unlike other suits which could be instituted only at the instance of the party concerned, they were instituted by the king *suo moto*. In other words it was the state and not the individual that was the protector here. What concerns us here is that the above list included various offences against the authority and dignity of the king.

The authors also give the complementary clauses of the state law relating to the obligation of the ruler towards his subjects. *Nārada* (XIV 26) says, when the thieves cannot be caught, the king should give the equivalent of the stolen property to its owner out of his own wealth. If the king neglects this, he would be tainted with sin and would lose the two ends of life, virtue (*dharma*) and wealth (*artha*). *Kātyāyana* (816) says that the king should carefully restore the very article stolen by thieves, failing which he had to pay its price to the owner. Otherwise he would incur sin.

4.4 Theory of the Coercive Authority of the King

Before going into the details of what the later *Smṛtis* have to say about this theory, let us examine what *Manu* has to say on this. *Manu's* theory of the coercive authority (*daṇḍa*) of the ruler repeats and develops that of the old *Arthaśāstra* thinkers along several lines.[23] In the first and the most important passage (VII 14-31) following immediately after the author's description of divine creation of the king, he explains his view of the origin and status as well as function of *daṇḍa*. *Manu* says that for the king's sake, the Lord created in the days of yore his own son *Daṇḍa*, the protector of all creatures, law (*dharma*), formed of Brahmā's lustre. *Daṇḍa* was the king, the male, the

[23] Ghoshal, U.N., *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 167.

director, and the ruler as well as the surety of observance of their duties (*dharma*) by the four orders (*āśrama*). The whole world was kept in order by *daṇḍa*, good men were rare and it was through the fear of *daṇḍa* that the whole world yielded the enjoyment which it owed. The author describes the vital importance of the king's attitude towards *daṇḍa* from the standpoint of the individual and the community. When *daṇḍa* was applied after due consideration, it made everyone happy. But when it was applied without consideration it destroyed everything. The author concludes with an account of the essential qualifications of the ruler for the successful application of *daṇḍa*. The king was a just inflictor of *daṇḍa*, who was truthful, who acted with due consideration, who was wise and conversant with virtue, pleasure and wealth. The king who was voluptuous, partial and deceitful, would be destroyed by the same *daṇḍa* which he inflicted. Regarding the ruler's qualification, the author says that it should be justly inflicted by the one who is pure and truthful, who acts according to the canon and has good assistants and is wise. Yājñavalkya's theory of *daṇḍa* (I 354-8) involved a repetition of some of the basic ideas of *Manu* mentioned above.

Coming to the later *Smṛti's* theories of coercive authority of the king, *Nārada* (XVIII 14-16) says that if the king does not constantly apply *daṇḍa* against all who have fallen from their duties, the people will perish. The brāhmaṇa would slay his fellow brāhmaṇa, the kṣatriya would abandon his fellow kṣatriya, the vaiśya would give up his occupation and the śūdra would overpower all in the absence of *daṇḍa*. If the king did not wield *daṇḍa*, the strong would roast the weak like fish on a spit. *Bṛhaspati* (I 9. 15-16) says that anyone who has strayed from his duties, be this person father, preceptor or friend or mother, wife, son or domestic chaplain, should be punished and banished from the town. According to *Kātyāyana* (481), on the other hand, punishment was not at all prescribed by the sacred texts for the preceptor, the father, the mother and relatives, when they are found guilty of offence. *Nārada* (XVIII 14-16) repeats the old *Arthaśāstra* principle that *daṇḍa* was the safeguard of individual security and stability of the social order after the canonical standards. While *Bṛhaspati* (I 9. 15-16) repeats after Manu the principle of the king's unlimited application of *daṇḍa, Kātyāyana* (481) modifies it to the extent of immunity of the king's respected connexions.

Another source of information, though it does not belong to the category of law books, are the *Purāṇas*. In many respects the major *Purāṇas* were similar to the law books both in substance and form. They were 18 in total number and dealt with the creation of the world. The great ages (*yugas*) through which it had passed, each with its characteristic *dharma*, reflected the retrograde condition of man. They contained the genealogies of gods, sages, and dynasties and the transcendent goals most worthy of men. The genealogical lists of the *Purāṇas* were prepare by the authors to establish the high antiquity of the principal ruling dynasties by claiming for them an unbroken continuity dating back to the patriarch renowned since Vedic times as the father of the human race. We find the presence of strong monotheistic note in the books, supplemented by a rich infusion of *Sānkhya* doctrine. The *Purāṇas* had a wide appeal and served as authoritative sources for popular Hinduism.[24] The early *Purāṇas* contain echoes of the conception of kingship as it possibly prevailed during the Gupta period.

To conclude, it can be said that the *dharmaśāstra* literature contains a good deal of information on the principles of kingship in the Gupta period. The *Smṛtis* of this period laid down the norms of kingship. These codes systematized the social and religious regulations of the orthodox brahmanical culture and were supposedly accepted as authentic guides to law, custom and duty. The theorists of kingship and law conceived the authority of the king like that of a father, whose duty symbolised sacrifice for the well-being of those who were dependent on him for their protection. In theory the monarch could know happiness only as his subjects prospered and realised themselves in the *dharmic* order. He was continually reminded that his character must provide an example for his people. The king's chief duty was to protect his subjects and this involved more that law enforcement. The king was obliged to promote education, religion, arts, charitable services and agricultural and commercial development. The normative texts therefore laid down these norms and codes of conduct before the Gupta kings.

[24] Drekmeier, C., *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962, p. 243.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The Gupta period offers a variety of contemporary sources which are replete with ideas of kingship. These ideas were not wholly the innovations of this period but were culmination of processes which began in the preceding centuries.

In the heart of the Gupta polity was the general instruction that the king was to uphold the *dharma* which meant the enforcement of *varṇāśrama*, the divinely ordained hierarchical social order. Protection and promotion of the interests of the brāhmaṇas was a religious duty that was imposed on the rulers, and the Gupta kings were particularly called upon to fulfil this duty in their own material and spiritual interests.

The Gupta kings were compared with the gods and the foundation of the theory of the divinity of kings lay in the near resemblance of their functions. The emphasis was on analogy rather than actual identity with the gods. The king, like the gods, was supposed to act boldly, impartially, fairly and fearlessly and to enforce the law and social order as ordained by gods who follow the cosmic laws.

Both the epigraphs and the creative literature suggest that the Gupta kings followed the ideal of the *cakravarti* ruler. They performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice and undertook successful campaigns. The sources represent the Gupta king primarily as a hero who took delight in hunting and fighting wars.

The kings were also expected to patronise art, letters and learning. They were literate and often devoted their leisure to listening to the recitations of their court poets. Some were competent writers themselves. The king's qualifications included the integrated scheme of education for the development of his intellect and character.

On the whole, the image of the king that we gather from the sources is a complex one. He was expected to uphold the heroic ideal of the world conqueror and be a romantic hero of classical plays, support the brahmanical principles of society and polity and be

tolerant of other religions and peoples, patronise arts and letters and be stern in enforcing the law. In many ways, the Gupta kings formed a watershed that marked the maturity of traditions of previous centuries and the beginning of new trends that characterised the ideals of kingship of a later period.

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