

# THE HISTORY OF NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

Extending from the foundation of the Gupta Empire  
to the rise of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal,  
(c. A.D. 320-760)

By

**RADHAGOVINDA BASAK, M.A., Ph. D., Vidyāvāchaspati.**



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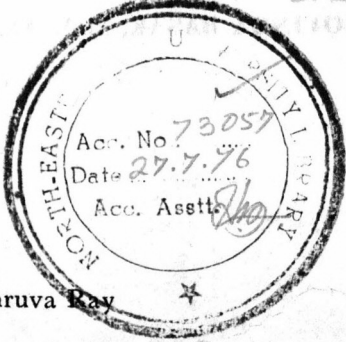
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To  
The Sacred Memory  
Of  
My Revered Parents.

### *Preface to the Second Edition*

The first edition of this book was published in January, 1934. No printed copy of the book is now available in the market. The first edition of the book was prescribed in certain universities of Northern India for the post-graduate Studies of the Students. Requests come from some educated quarters for preparing and publishing a second revised edition of the work. On account of some physical incapacity due to my old age (I being now 82 years old) I felt difficult to take up a revision of the book. But two of my very esteemed and learned friends and pupils, Dr. B. N. Mukherjee, M.A., Ph.D. (London), now Honorary Associate Research Professor, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, and Dr. K. K. Das Gupta, M.A., D.Phil., Lecturer in the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture of the Calcutta University ungrudgingly lent their helping hands and restored my own self-confidence in preparing this revised and somewhat enlarged edition. I have no hesitation in recording here my deep gratitude to both these scholars, without whose kind assistance the book would not have gone through this second edition.

Since the publication of the first edition in 1934, many documents, epigraphic and numismatic, have been discovered in India. So I had to study them to enable myself to undertake this second edition of the book. The new changes made by me occur generally in chapters IV, IX and XI. In Chapter IV of the first edition of this book, I propounded a view that after Skandagupta's death, perhaps there ruled somewhere in Magadha a branch line of the Imperial Guptas through Purugupta. But after the discovery of the Nalanda Seals I have abandoned in this edition my former views and shown that the Guptas headed by Purugupta continued to rule yet for about half a century in an unbroken line of succession. In point I have in this revised edition in Chapter VII drawn also a pointed attention of scholars

to the two Introductory verses of chapter VI of the *Harshacharita*, the historical significance of which is very important for discussing the murder of Rājyavardhana brought about treacherously by Śaśānka, the king of Bengal. Again in chapter IX some new additional matters have been introduced and discussed regarding the rulers of the kingdom of Vaṅga-Samatata. But a very thorough revision has been made by me for readjusting the contents of chapter XI on the kingdom of Nepal and this chapter in the second edition has somewhat been enlarged. The revision and enlargement of this chapter has been necessitated because of scholars being now in possession of new materials of new history which can be obtained by study of the very important and valuable edition of "the Nepalese Inscriptions in Guṇṭa characters" Part I, edited so admirably and in so scholarly a manner, by Dr. Raniero Gnoli from Rome in 1956. I have utilised Dr. Gnoli's book with a grateful heart and inserted in this chapter several new historical facts that I could collect from my study of this treatise of the Italian scholar. In this connection I have also derived some help from D. R. Regmi's recent book, 'Ancient Nepal' (Calcutta, 1960). I have, however, stuck to my own former views as put forth in the first edition of my book on the Nepal chronology resulting from the use of eras and dates in the Nepalese epigraphs.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not mention here my gratefulness to the proprietors of the "Sambodhi publications, Private Limited, Calcutta" looked after by Sri R. N. Mukherjee, for their kindly bearing all expenses for the publication of this edition of my book. I am also thankful to the Pooran Press, Calcutta, for their executing so neatly the heavy printing work.

69, Ballygunge Gardens,  
CALCUTTA-19.  
December 12, 1966.

**Radhagovinda Basak**

## *Preface to the First Edition*

This modest book is an attempt to write a connected history of North-Eastern India during the period falling approximately between 320 A.D. and 760 A.D. Discoveries of new materials of Indian history, specially epigraphic records, during the last quarter of a century throughout which I had the good fortune to work as a student of Indian epigraphy; and the learned contributions of eminent scholars on them in India and outside, have rendered it possible for me to undertake such a connected narrative. In this work I have, to some extent, drawn from some of my own earlier contributions, specially on the Gupta history, and embodied portions of them in some of the chapters. Experience as a Professor of Sanskrit and Sanskritic languages has extremely helped me in offering new interpretation, where deemed necessary, to many words and passages in some of the epigraphic documents studied for gathering materials this work, and this has been indicated at the proper places. The idea of getting this work tested by eminent scholars, as suggested by some friends in superior position in life, encouraged me recently to offer it as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Dacca, so that I may have the satisfaction of knowing from the remarks of my examiners how far my own views on and interpretation of historical facts, expressed clearly or hinted covertly in epigraphic records, and also some of my suggestions for the solution of controversial points, may be placed before the scholarly world. This work was, I am glad to say, approved as a thesis for that degree by my examiners, Professor F. W. Thomas of Oxford and Dr. L. D. Barnett and Mr. J. Allan of the British Museum, London, to whom I am deeply grateful for their kind adjudgment.

In my attempt to construct a history of North-Eastern India during the period under notice, I have mostly based my views on the results obtained from my prolonged study of the original inscriptional documents, though other sources, e.g. numismatic and literary, have also been utilised. It is evident that in a work like this, which largely concerns piecing together the stray and often fragmentary materials obtained here and there, I am bound to reinvestigate the results of the researches of previous and contemporary workers in the same field and to criticise their views, either for endorsement or rejection, partial or full, or to expound entirely new ones.

The plan of this book, as is evident from the contents and the synchronistic table attached hereto, will show that I have ventured to write in the first four chapters a connected history of the imperial Gupta rule which, although a trodden path, required in my opinion a thorough revision in the light of the new knowledge obtained from such discoveries, as the five Damodarpur copper-plate grants of the Gupta period (already edited by me), the new Baigram (Bogra, more correctly, Dinajpur) copper-plate of the Gupta year 128 (edited and just published by me in the *Epigraphia Indica*), the Dhanaidaha copper-plate (re-deciphered by me) and Mr. K. N. Dikshit's Paharpur copper-plate grant of the same type.

I should acknowledge here that I am fully conscious of my omission to discuss, rightly at page 34 of this book, the important question of Rāmagupta, who is now being thought by some of my Indian colleagues, e.g. the late Professor R. D. Banerji and Professor A. S. Altekar of the Benares Hindu University, as belonging to the imperial Gupta family and as a son and successor of emperor Samudragupta. They think that his reign, though it might have been a short one, intervened between that of his father

and his younger brother Chandragupta II. But I regret to note here that Rāmagupta problem is a yet controversial one. It is indeed difficult, with the present stock of our knowledge on the point, to tie up Rāmagupta with the reigning sovereigns of the imperial Gupta dynasty. I felt it unfair to myself to accept Rāmagupta, at the present moment, as a reigning emperor of the Gupta house, chiefly on the evidence of the extracts from an old drama, named *Devīchandraguptam*, which, itself however, has not yet been discovered and published in full. These extracts from the drama have been pointed out by M. Sylvain Lévi as occurring in a newly-discovered treatise on dramaturgy, the *Nāṭya-darpaṇa*, belonging to a late period of history, in which also Rāmagupta is mentioned simply as a king (*rājā*) without any of titles in vogue in the Gupta period for indicating lord-paramountcy, and Dhruvadevī is also styled simply as a *devī* and not a *mahādevī* that she really was. Want of full conviction in the theory, so far advanced, that Rāmagupta was a ruling Gupta monarch, whose wife Dhruvadevī (alleged to have been offered by this imbecile king to a contemporary Śaka king) was later married by his younger brother, the emperor Chandragupta II himself, by bringing about the death of his elder brother, has led me to omit reference in the main body of my book, to this hitherto unknown figure in Gupta history. We shall have yet to wait for the discovery of new epigraphic and numismatic evidence to corroborate such a theory before it can be accepted as a historical fact. I have not also referred to Kācha as being a member of the imperial Gupta family, although numismatic evidence is clear to ascertain the existence of a person of that name, whose relationship however, either with Samudragupta or his father Chandragupta I, is yet a matter of mere conjecture amongst historians.

The following are some of the chief points in the book to which attention of scholars may here be drawn, viz., (1) my interpretation of the Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription and identification of King Chandra mentioned therein with Chandragupta I, and (2) my establishment, from my first decipherment of the peculiar land-sale documents discovered in North Bengal, of the important historical facts, (i) that the entire province of Puṇḍravardhana formed an integral part of the imperial Gupta empire, (ii) that Budhagupta's reign was a long one and also not confined to the western portion of India alone, but included a large part of North-Eastern India, (iii) that the imperial Gupta dynasty continued to rule in full glory at least upto the first quarter of the sixth century A.D. through a succession of three or four more monarchs after Skandagupta, and (iv) that the district officer (*vishayapatis*), under the provincial governors, themselves appointed directly by the imperial Gupta sovereigns, had an excellent administrative machinery at the head-quarters, viz. an Advisory Board representing the various important interests of those days. I may add that I have also dealt with some controversial subjects in Gupta history and tried to offer new suggestions for their solution which will be evident to the readers at their proper places in the book.

Then with regard to the next few chapters in which I have dealt with the post-Gupta kingdoms in North-Eastern India, limiting myself to the rise of the Pāla kings of Bengal, it may be submitted that a new solution has been offered to the most vexed question of the chronology of the Śailodbhava dynasty of Orissa and that of the early Lichchhavi kings of Nepal. In trying to establish my own theories on these two important chronologies I was compelled to refute the views of some of the most eminent writers on the subject with due deference to their vast erudition. A word of apology is necessary here for the lengthy treatment of

the early history of Nepal in Chapter XI. I have felt that the history of this most interesting country was long neglected in India and excepting the admirable treatise of that great savant, M. Sylvain Lévi, no detailed narrative of the early history of Nepal, so far as I know, has been given in any work written in English (M. Sylvain Lévi's book, the *Le Népal*, being written in French). I have attempted to construct a connected history of this kingdom in its very early days, by culling materials from the vast mass of its epigraphic records. I only regret that the summary of some these records, which I have laid down in the body of the chapter itself, has not separately formed an appendix to it.

I have refrained from dealing separately and in detail with the history of king Harshavardhana, as the geographical area adopted for treatment in this work precludes its possibility, and it is already too well-known a topic. But most of the chief events in that monarch's life and career have been mentioned in the chapters on Śaśānka the king of Bengal and the Kāmarūpa kings. Other minor contributions to the knowledge of historical truths may be marked here and there in the different chapters, e.g. the identification of king Susthitaravarman, mentioned in the Apshad inscription of Ādityasena, with the Kāmarūpa king of that name and not with any imaginary king of the same name belonging to the Maukhari dynasty, and also the identification of king Devavarman of the Chinese records with King Devagupta of the Later Gupta dynasty of Magadha. In Chapter VII I have endeavoured to adjudge properly the career of King Śaśānka and incorporate some new facts about him as obtained from a study of the Buddhist treatise, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. The chapter on the kingdom of Vaṅga-Samataṭa is entirely a new addition to the early history of Bengal written in a connected form.

I quite feel that I could neither make the book solely a political history, nor a cultural one, but to some extent it may be taken as a blending of both. It was really not possible for me to treat the materials at my disposal for the particular period limited in this work, under separate headings, such as political, social, economic, religious, literary or otherwise, and to discuss fully all the cultural aspects of the people of North-Eastern India.

It may be stated here that the system of transliteration of Sanskrit and Prakrit words employed in this work is the one mostly adopted in the *Epigraphia Indica*. The abbreviations used in the references are too obvious to require any explanation.

In conclusion, I wish to record here a fact that the first inspiration and encouragement for attempting to undertake such works on ancient Indian history came to us from the illustrious trio, who founded the Varendra Research Society at Rajshahi (in the old *Puṇḍravardhanabhukti*), I mean, my friend Kumar Sarat Kumar Roy of Dighāpātiya, M.A., M.L.C., the late Mr. Akshaya Kumar Maitra, B.L., C.I.E., and Rai Rama Prasad Chanda Bahadur, B.A., to whom I take this opportunity to pay a tribute of high respects. My very hearty thanks are due to Mr. G. H. Langley, M.A., Vice-chancellor, Dacca University, and my erstwhile colleague in that university, Dr. S. K. De, M.A., D.Litt., for the great interest they have taken in this work which, on account of their very insistent exhortation, was submitted as a thesis for the doctorate of the Dacca University. Another friend who cannot be forgotten in this connection is Mr. N. K. Bhattasali, M.A., who never failed to keep me cheerful by words of encouragement during moments of despair while gathering together stray materials for this history. But the gratitude under which my friend and colleague, Dr. Basanta Kumar Roy, M.A., Ph.D., of the

Department of English of the Dacca University, has placed me is really very deep, as he ungrudgingly read through the whole manuscript and suggested corrections and improvements in the language which have been almost unhesitatingly adopted by me. Finally, I cannot let the opportunity here pass without making a thankful reference to my pupil, Mr. Sures Chandra Das M.A., for his undertaking the responsibility of printing this book in his press. I am sorry that despite all attempts to avoid typographical errors, some have crept in and I beg to draw the kind attention of my readers to the short list of corrections at the end of the book.

CALCUTTA,  
December 12, 1933.

**Radhagovinda Basak**

## *Radhagovinda Basak*

A renowned historian and epigraphist, Dr. Radhagovinda Basak was formerly Head of the Department of Sanskrit at the Presidency College, Calcutta, and a Lecturer in the Departments of Sanskrit and Ancient Indian History and Culture at the University of Calcutta as well. He also worked as a Lecturer in Sanskrit at the University of Dacca in the early part of his life. He is at present Chairman, Board of Editors for publication of Research books and bulletins of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta. The same College has honoured him with the title 'Vidyāvāchaspati'. He is also a recipient of President's Award of 'Certificate of Honour in Sanskrit'.

An eminent writer on Indological subjects, Dr. Radhagovinda Basak has to his credit a number of books which include : *Aśokan Inscriptions* and *Indian Life as Revealed in the Buddhist Sanskrit work, Mahāvastu-Avadāna*. He has edited and rendered into Bengali *Rāmācharitam* and *Gāthā-Saptaśatī* and published the Bengali version of the entire *Arthaśāstra*. He has edited the *Rāvaṇavaho* or the *Setubandha*, with a newly discovered Sanskrit commentary. The *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, edited and translated into Bengali by Dr. Basak, has been published by the Sanskrit College.

## CONTENTS

	Page
Preface to the Second Edition	v
Preface to the First Edition	vii
Life-Sketch of the author	xiv
Contents	xv
Abbreviations	xvii
I. Introductory	1
II. North-Eastern India under the Imperial Gupta emperors, Chandragupta I and Samudragupta	5
Appendix I : Samudragupta's accession and the problem of Kācha	38
Appendix II : The Problem of Rāmagupta	39
III. North-Eastern India under the Imperial Gupta emperors, Chandragupta II, Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta	43
IV. The successors of Skandagupta and the Decline and Downfall of the Imperial Gupta rule	88
V. The Maukhari dynasty	121
VI. The Later Guptas of Magadha	143
VII. The amalgamated Kingdom of Karṇasuvarṇa and Puṇḍravardhana under Gauḍādhīpa Śaśāṅka	156
VIII. The Kingdom of Orissa (Uḍra-Koṅgada-Kaliṅga)	196
IX. The Kingdom of Vaṅga-Samatata	221
X. The Kingdom of Kāmarūpa	263
XI. The Kingdom of Nepal	297
XII. Concluding remarks	391
Index	407
Addenda et Corrigenda	430

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

Ancient India witnessed several forms of constitutional government—monarchical, oligarchical, republican and tribal, working in different periods of her history, in different parts of the country. But the most prevailing form of Hindu constitution was monarchical. Generally speaking, in India, especially Northern India, there was a large number of small monarchical States which were ruled severally and independently by their own kings or chiefs, using such royal titles as *mahārāja*, *rājā*, *ṛiṣa* and the like, assisted by the necessary administrative machinery, viz., assembly of ministers and a body of State-officers in the various departments. Whenever any such local ruler of particular State, or any adventurer from a remote foreign land, having aspired, on account of the possession of adequate kingly virtues, to become a paramount suzerain—a *samrāt* or a *sārva-bhauma* emperor—succeeded in asserting his overlordship justly and legitimately on the several conterminous and distant States, that ruler or adventurer became the founder of some sort of an empire, keeping most of the kings and chiefs of the other States dependent on his imperial power either as feudal vassals or through other kinds of political alliances. Such

a great sovereign was generally the head of a great confederation of States having, however, reserved for himself some provinces under his own direct rule and placed some other under that of his own viceroys or governors. As long as such an emperor could hold his own superior position intact, by means of his exceptional ability as the executive head of the administration, the smaller local States or provinces could easily be kept under his sway and subjection. But when through causes, internal or external, such an empire once began to decay, the numerous States that had once formed its component parts tried to recover their own independence.

During such period of decadence of an empire, unity disappears for the time being, dissension prevails and anarchy plays havoc. Disorder, chaos and confusion rule supreme, for there remains no real *daṇḍadhara* (wielder of *daṇḍa*) for controlling the independent States and saving the whole country from the evils and perils of distemper. Cohesive political relation amongst the different States may again arise, if and when, suzerainty or overlordship can be enforced on them by a powerful ruler who can, as a veritable incarnation of kingly virtues of a high order, assume the title of an emperor and establish an empire by his supremacy. Such an anarchical period when, for the want of proper *daṇḍadhara* the weak are oppressed by the strong

and a struggle for supremacy amongst the various local rulers ensues, is called by the Hindu authors of the *Arthaśāstras*, *Nīti-śāstras* (sciences and treatises on polity) and the *Smṛitis* (law-books) the period of *mātsyanyāya*<sup>1</sup> (a term of political philosophy expressing a state of anarchy, derived from the well-known natural phenomenon that large fish devour the small ones in water). It is a misnomer to call any period of history a blank, for, even then local powers exist and strive, as political rivals to attain a higher position, even that of a suzerain, if possible.

Such a course of disruption befell the great empire of the Mauryas in the remote past. A similar condition awaited the Kushān empire some time later. From whatever cause or causes the fall of that empire might have taken place, a period of *mātsyanyāya* prevailed in Northern India, during which the kings or chiefs of the various local centres, e.g. Girinagara in Surāshṭra, Ujjayinī in Avanti, Vaiśālī in Videha, Pāṭaliputra in Magadha

1. अप्रचीतो हि मात्स्यन्यायमुद्भावयति । बलीयानवलं हि यसते दण्डधराभावे । Cf. *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, Bk. I, Chap. IV, p. 33, Trivandrum, Ed. 1924. Also compare—*Kām. Nīti*, Chap. II, v 40 ;—*Manu*, VII, 20 ;—*Rāmāyaṇa*, Ch. 67, v. 31 of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa.

The word *daṇḍa* may refer either to the royal sceptre or one of the four political expedients mentioned in ancient Indian political treatises.

etc. must have entered into a struggle amongst themselves for supremacy and overlordship. The downfall of the Kushān empire in Āryāvarta (Northern India) synchronised with that of the Andhra empire in Dakṣiṇāpatha (the Deccan). The disappearance of the rule of both these powerful dynasties from the stage of Indian history took place during the first half of the third century A.D. Then followed, except in the Panjab and the far North-West of India, a period of anarchy which continued for about one century, till all disorder settled down under the suzerain power of the Gupta monarchs, who succeeded in establishing a North Indian empire, which lasted in full glory for well-nigh two and a half centuries. During this long period—approximately from the first quarter of the fourth century A. D. to the second of the sixth—the Gupta emperors had under their unrivalled sway almost the whole of Northern India. The kings ruling during this period are styled the imperial Gupta rulers to distinguish them from those kings with 'Gupta' appendage to their names, who in a somewhat later period continued to reign in a circumscribed area in Magadha and the neighbouring countries even after the next period of *mātsyanyāya*, which followed the dissolution of Harshavardhana's empire and almost till the rise of the Pāla kings of Bengal who enjoyed supreme power in North-Eastern India.

## CHAPTER XII

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

We intend to bring the work to a close by making a few general remarks on some of the special administrative, economic, social and religious features of the period dealt with in the previous chapters. Much space, however, need not be devoted to this subject, for we have incidentally referred to the culture and mode of life of the people of North-Eastern India, in our treatment of the general political condition in the foregoing pages. A short reference to the Hindu (rather Brāhmanic) renaissance which was so clearly marked in the glorious period of the Imperial Gupta rule in India, the Periclean age of Indian history as some historians may call it, will be made in this connection. To put this matter in the briefest possible way, we may quote a line from the history<sup>1</sup> of India, written by the late Dr. Vincent Smith, who says that in India, during this period,—“Literature, art, and science flourished in a degree beyond the ordinary, and gradual changes in religion were effected without persecution.” There is ample evidence to show that in spite of the fact that the Imperial Gupta emperors embraced

1. *Oxford History of India*, 2nd edition, pp. 156-57.

Brahmanical Hinduism and styled themselves *parama-bhāgavatas* or *parama-daivatas*, they adopted a general policy of perfect religious toleration. They seem to have officially recognised the worship of gods and goddesses of other Brāhmanical sects, and also showed patronage even to the religious institutions of the non-Brahmanical sects viz. Buddhism and Jainism, which were still, of course, believed in by many families, under a somewhat modified form. The people of the period enjoyed full liberty of making perpetual endowments to temples or monasteries; and one could even, irrespective of his own religious persuasion, make donations to institutions belonging to other faiths. As an illustration<sup>2</sup> we may refer here to the donation of land, purchased from the Government by the Brahmin couple, Nāthaśarman and his wife Rāmī, for the worship of the Jinas (Arhats), in the great Jaina *vihāra* at Vaṭagohālī mentioned in the Paharpur inscription. This Jaina *vihāra* was an older institution existing probably in the same locality of Paharpur (in the Rajshahi district), situated in the old Puṇḍravardhana-*bhukti*. The Brahmanical temple excavated out of the mound at that place belonged to the late Gupta period and according to archaeologists its type is similar to that of Brahmanical temples of Java. Many "Brahmanical and Buddhist bas-reliefs and

2. *E. I.*, Vol. XX, pp. 61 ff.

terracotta plaques, dating from the late Gupta times" were also found at that place during the excavations. These North-Bengal relics speak of the prevalence of three different faiths in one and the same place, during the Gupta period, although we find that the influence of the non-orthodox religions was waning in this period on account of the growing renovation of Brahmanism under the patronage of the Guptas.

It may be noted here that during the four or five centuries before the rise of the Gupta dynasty, Brahmanism and along with it, the Sanskrit language and literature, suffered a good deal on account of the ascendancy of Buddhism and the cultivation of the Prakrits under the patronage of the Kushān kings. During that period people in many parts of the country ceased even to perform some of the Vedic rites, and to show veneration to gods and Brahmins. The kings did not care to celebrate the *āsvamedha* sacrifice, even on the assumption of supreme sovereign power. R. G. Bhandarkar in *A Peep into the Early History of India*<sup>3</sup> has shown that "the Brāhmanic revival may be understood to have truly begun" in the time of Wema-Kadphises, who styled himself a worshipper of Maheśvara. He also pointed out that some of the kings of foreign origin "were no doubt

3. Reprinted and published by D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay, 1920, cf. pp. 56-74.

Hinduized, but they were not Brāhmanized. And the Brāhmaṇa themselves complained of their being neglected by the Yavanas, Śakas and Pahlavas". Hence he thought that "an all-sided revival and renovation could proceed only under the patronage of Hindu princes" like the Guptas.

We have seen before that the first few Gupta monarchs were great patrons of learning and all kinds of fine arts. The general consensus of opinion amongst scholars points to Kālidāsa, the greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist, having flourished during the Gupta period. It is quite true that extensive royal patronage to the Muses made it possible for poets like Harisheṇa, Vatsabhaṭṭi and the like, to appear in such poetic glory. The Buddhist teacher and philosopher Vasubandhu, Asaṅga and the former's pupil Diṅnāga also lived during this period. Sir Ramkrishna was also of the opinion that this period was "the age when metrical Smṛtis, Purāṇas and Bhāshyas or commentaries containing explanatory, apologetic, and controversial matter, began to be written; and the general literary impulse was communicated to other branches of learning including poetry". Some chapters of the *Mahābhārata*, containing reference to the races and tribes who set the Brahmins at defiance and gradually ceased to perform their religious rites, were probably interpolated into the epic, and the prevalent *Manusamhitā* was also in all

probability composed, during this period. The Purāṇas were recast, and it is assumed that the *Vāyu*, the oldest of them, was written under Gupta patronage. The epigraphic records, from which we derived the materials for the previous chapters, show clearly how far the worship of the various deities, belonging to the three chief cults, viz. Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śāktism, was adopted by the people of this age, and a study of the Purāṇas, supposed to have been written during the time, convinces us of the considerable progress made by these cults. It is quite probable too that Śabarasyāmin, the great commentator on the *Mīmāṃsā*, and the great Prabhākara of the other school in the same branch of philosophy, who fought so hard against the tenets of the Buddhists and Jains and also Bharadvāja, the author of the Nyāya work called the *Uddyota*, wrote their works during the period between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D.

The progress of science in this period is attested by the scientific and mathematical works of the great Indian astronomers, Āryabhaṭa (born A.D. 476), Varāhamihira (born A.D. 505-87) and Brahmagupta (A.D. 598). The practice of the various fine arts, specially music, architecture, and painting was extensive in this golden age. Temples of this period built of stone and bricks, discovered in whole or in parts, in different parts of the country, e.g. at Jhansi, Benares (Sarnath),

Kanpur and Paharpur (Bengal), the rock-cut caves of Ajanta with their excellent frescoes and the beautiful Buddhist images of the period indicate the perfection attained by these allied arts. The inscriptional records and the literature of the period have disclosed the existence of all kinds of artisans, artists, and craftsmen, of whom there existed various regulations of corporate industrial life. Metallurgy and coinage were two of the special features of Gupta civilisation. Foreign influence due to trade intercourse between India on the one hand, and on the other, the European countries, specially the Roman Empire in the west and China, Java and other Asiatic countries in the east, made a somewhat palpable impress on the civilized life of the people of India at that time ; and Indians then knew how far to imitate and assimilate the excellent features in the art and culture of foreigners.

A few words on the system of provincial government during the Gupta rule, specially in North-Eastern India, will not be out of place here. We know incidentally from the edicts of Aśoka that the Maurya<sup>4</sup> emperor appointed his own viceroys to

4. It may be noted here that a fragmentary Maurya inscription at Mahāsthāna in the Bogra district which conveyed an order of some ruler of the Maurya period to a *mahāmātra* officer stationed in Puṇḍranagara for helping the famine-stricken people by advancing money and distributing paddy from the district granary (E.I., XXI, pp. 85).

rule over the large provinces in the north-west, the south, the east and the west, the central part of the empire having probably been kept under the direct rule of the emperor at Pāṭaliputra. A remarkable continuity of this policy seems to have prevailed among the rulers of India in later times, though they belonged to different dynasties. The eight earliest (North Bengal) copper-plate grants of the Gupta period known to archaeologists, six of which were deciphered and published for the first time by the present writer, reveal a most important fact of administration viz., that it was the central Government under the Gupta emperors, which used to appoint the provincial governors, who are described as being *lat-pāda-parigrihīta* (literally, accepted by the imperial majesty's feet), and have right of use of such titles as *uparika-mahārāja*. Their position may be compared to some extent with that enjoyed by the Divisional Commissioners of modern times, if the latter could be directly responsible to the Imperial Government. The present writer remarked while editing the Damodarpur inscriptions that these

According to D. R. Bhandarkar, this inscription, the earliest of those so far discovered in Bengal, establishes the identity of Puṇḍranagara with Mahāsthāna, and that Bengal, at any rate North Bengal, must have been included in the Mauryya empire. It may be mentioned incidentally that Kushān or pseudo-Kushān coins have also been found in North Bengal,

provincial governors of the Gupta period had power to appoint the *vishayapatis* (district officers), who are described as *tan-niyuktas* (literally, appointed by them), and as having right of use of such titles as *kumārāmātya* or *āyukta*. But it appears from the wording of the text in the Baigram inscription<sup>5</sup> that the *vishayapatis* were also sometimes appointed directly by the emperor's court, and the component word *ta* in the compound *tan-niyuktaka* may in that case refer to the emperor himself. It may, however, be reasonably assumed that the emperor appointed them in consultation with the *bhukti* governors, whose own appointment, however, was directly in the hands of the emperor. It is also a most important and interesting point that the *vishayapatis* had their head-quarters in *adhishthānas* (towns), where they had their own *adhikaraṇas* (offices or courts). Another most interesting fact of administrative history, which was known for the first time from these North Bengal inscriptions, is that the *vishayapati* as the head of the *vishaya* was aided in his administrative work (*saṃvyavahāra*) by a Board of Advisers, which seems to have been constituted by four members, representing the different interests of those days, viz., (1) the *nagaraśreṣṭhin*, representing the various guilds or corporations of the town or the rich urban population, (2) the *sārthavāha* (the chief merchant),

5. *E. I.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 81 ff.

representing the various trade-guilds and other mercantile professions of the *vishaya*, (3) the *prathama-kulika* (the chief artisan) representing the craft-guilds and (4) the *prathama-kāyasthas* (the chief scribe), representing either the *kāyasthas* as a class, or acting as a State official in the capacity of a Chief-Secretary of the present days. The same system of administration appears to have prevailed in the Tīrabhukti province and the *Vaiśālīvishaya*, and this can be very easily gathered from the inscriptions of the innumerable stray clay-seals belonging to the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., discovered during the excavations<sup>6</sup> at Basarh (old Vaiśālī in Tirhut). These have revealed to us the designations of some of the important State functionaries of the Gupta period. We read of both a *vishaya* and an *adhishtāna* of the name of Vaiśālī. The legend on the Basarh seal (No. 25), viz. *Vaiśālyadhishtānādhiparāṇa* referring to the court (or office or department) of the *vishayādhipati* in the town of Vaiśālī, can be very well compared with the legend on the seal of Damodarpur plate (No. 5) viz., *Koṭivarshādhishtānādhiparāṇa*, referring to the court at the head-quarters of Koṭivarsha. We have no doubt that the *Kumārāmātyādhiparāṇa* and the *uparikādhiparāṇa* mentioned in some of these Basarh seals, refer to the court of the *vishayapati* of Tīra (town) and the governor of Tīrabhukti respectively.

6. *Archaeological Survey Report*, 1903-4.

The word *adhikaraṇa* used with the word *kumārāmātya* or such other words cannot mean “the chief”, as the learned writer of the *Archaeological Survey Report* (1903-4) wrongly thinks. Tīrabhukti was at first probably under the direct administrative jurisdiction of the emperor (Chandragupta II) who had under him a *vishayapati*, and it was to the latter’s office or court that the legend on some of the seals, standing thus *Śrī-parama-bhaṭṭārakapādīya-kumārāmātyādhikaraṇa* (Seal No. 6), is to be referred. But when *mahārāja* Govindagupta (as *yuvarāja*) was appointed by the monarch to act as the Governor of Tīrabhukti, presumably with the title *uparika* (cf. the legend *Tīrabhuktyuparikādhikaraṇasya* on seal No. 20), the office or court of the *vishayapati* working under him must have been named *Yuvarāja*-(or, *yuvarāja-bhaṭṭāraka*)-*pādīya-kumārāmātyādhikaraṇa* (cf. seals on Nos. 4 and 6). When an empire expands through gradual territorial aggrandizement, it becomes impossible for the emperor to rule it directly with the help of the central executive alone, and therefore the outlying provinces are constituted into different units or divisions, for administrative purposes, presided over by princes or governors appointed by him. The success of the Magadhan government under the Mauryyas was undoubtedly due to the prevalence of a perfectly trained machinery of administration—almost a veritable form of modern bureaucracy—which included a

hierarchy of different kinds of officers, under the title *adhyaksha*, both civil and military. This is clear from the pages of the *Arthasāstra* of Kauṭilya. The policy of maintaining such a constitution with necessary modifications, according to circumstances, was continued by the Gupta emperors and their successors, in all parts of India, specially in the North-Eastern provinces, such as Sāketa, Old Bengal (including Karnasuvarṇa-Puṇḍra-wardhana, and Vaṅga-Samatāṭa), Orissa, and Kāmarūpa. In some of the Basarh seals, as in the inscriptions of the Gupta and post-Gupta period, we have reference to certain other administrative departments, such as *balādhikaraṇa* (Army office), *raṇabhāṇḍāgārādhikaraṇa* (Department of munition or military stores), *daṇḍapāśikādhikaraṇa* (Police Department), *vinaya-sthiti-sthāpakādhikaraṇa* (the Department of the minister of Law and Order, or of the Superintendent of the moral conduct of the people, as some may translate the word). It seems that Vaiśālī was a large trading centre, as is clear from the occurrence on a large number of seals, of the names of some individual *kulikas* and *śreshthins*, as well as from that of such legends, as *śreshthi-śārthavāha-kulika-nigama* (seal No. 29), which certainly refer to some corporate bodies of bankers, traders and artisans existing in the town. There seems to be no doubt that they were represented in the Bord of Advisers of the *vishaya-*

*patis* at Vaiśālī, as in the Koṭivarsha *vishaya* in North Bengal. Names also occur in some of the Basarh seals of persons holding the high offices of the *mahāpratīhāra* (the Chief door-keeper, perhaps the chief of the palace Police), the *daṇḍanāyaka* (the administrator of justice), and the *bhaṭūśvapati* (master of infantry and cavalry). Another high State-officer, reference to whom is frequently found in early inscriptions, is the *sāndhivigrahika* (the Minister of Peace and War). The existence of village *pañchāyet* committees (cf. the term *Parishad* at Udānakūpa in one of the Basarh seals) can be proved from some of the records of the Gupta period in India, and of a somewhat later period of Nepal.

Another class of local officers, found mentioned in the North and East Bengal plates of the Gupta and post-Gupta period, are the *pustapālas* (the Government record-keepers), who, it seems, were possessed of the knowledge of the title to all lands. The Government would sanction land-sales only after these record-keepers had, on receipt of application from the *bonafide* purchasers, determined the title to the land under proposal of transfer, and sent in their report to Government. Other important bodies, presumably rural, are also mentioned in old epigraphic records of the period, viz. the *Mahāttaras* (the leading men of the villages), *ashtakulādhikaraṇas* (probably small departments having supervising authority over eight *kulas*, which

may mean either the particular divisions of land of the same name, or families), and *grāmikas* (the heads of villages who had the special privilege of using a portion of the king's dues and the right to refer criminal offences to the heads of group of ten villages). These officers were often consulted by Government in making arrangement for land-transfer and inspection of the execution of the transaction.

There is evidence to show that there prevailed different rates in different parts of Bengal during the period discussed, in the valuation of the price of unsettled and untilled *khila* (fallow) land and *vāstu* (home-stead land). In the province of Puṇḍra-*vardhana*, we find that such land was sold by Government, in some places at the rate of two *dīnāras* for each *kulyavāpa* area, and in others three *dīnāras*; but in East Bengal it was sold at four such coins for the same area. We meet with the name of the coin *rūpaka* (silver coin) in the Baigram copper-plate grant; and we have clearly shown in our article in the *Epigraphia Indica* that the relative value of this silver coin as compared with the gold *dīnāra* is 1 to 16, i.e. one gold *dīnāra* or *suvarṇa* is equal to 16 *rūpakas*.

After the downfall of the imperial Guptas, Northern India suffered again from social and religious disorder, when the orthodox Brahmanic culture and cults received a set-back, probably due

to the spread of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which now embraced within itself a pantheon of deities almost Brahmanic in form, and to the gradual political darkness prevailing in many parts of the country, on account of fresh oppression by the Hūnas and other outlandish tribes. During the next two centuries we find the people of North-Eastern India enjoying State aid in the restoration of Vedic rites, and sacrifices, and the worship of several additional Brahmanic gods and goddesses was newly ordained. Hence it is easy to explain why some of the Maukhari rulers, some members of the Śailodbhava dynasty of Orissa and some of the Varman kings of Kāmarūpa are described, in their records, as the upholders of *varṇāśramadharmā*. It may be remembered in this connection with what devotion the Nepal kings performed the phallic worship during this period.

All the special economic, social, political and religious features that marked the Gupta period were preserved, with slight modifications, here and there, by the kings and people of the next two centuries in all the North-Eastern provinces. It is indeed curious that, generally speaking, a unity of Hindu culture and civilisation was maintained almost unmodified throughout the period under our notice.

The typical Hindu village community in the North-Eastern part of India is even to-day self-contained, in the sense that we find therein the

same village-heads, the same agriculturist householders, the same hired labourers, the religious establishments under the same priests, and a whole host of artisans of various classes, carrying on their age-long functions for the common good. It seems as if a constant cultural and religious unity among the Brahmanic Hindus, which was so palpably evident during the Gupta and post-Gupta period of North-Eastern India, noticed in the above chapters, has been retained intact, though with certain modifications, down to the present day, while we are under the independent Sovereign Indian Union.