

Status of monarch in Early Medieval Rajasthan

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The very term raja alerts us to the ritually incorporative character of Indian kingship. Since one meaning of the word raja is stretching out, the king being one who stretched himself out and protected [other men] under his powerful arms as to divine powers [**the Vedic Savtar and Agni**]¹. Rulership in early medieval India was based upon ancient canons of Aryan kingship. This was true for the Gurjara-Pratiharas from Rajasthan. The sacral character of the Pratiharas provided the means for attaining encompassing incorporative and universal kingship. Through ritual as well as political might, both the dynasties incorporated all lesser rulers.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya² sees a connection between the legitimization or validation of temporal authority and the complex ideological apparatus i.e. inter-dependence between temporal and sacred authority. According to him, if temporal power needed legitimization from spiritual authority, so did the human agents of spiritual authority require sustenance from temporal power³. He further talks of the need for constant validation of power not only in areas where a community was passing from the pre-state to state society stage but even in the established societies. In this background, the present article will investigate whether the status of monarch under the Pratiharas was based mainly on the sacral edifice or other important aspects such as the signs of sovereignty [capital, palace, throne etc.], origin, myths, dynastic traditions, genealogy, ksatriya lineage, chakravarti status, warrior, donor images, strong army, king's ownership over land, marriage alliances, glorification of monarch and the changing nature of the ruling elites.

J. Gonda⁴ regards Indian kingship as intelligible only from the religious point of view. He says, as protector of social order and its people, the king possessed a morality of his own. A.M. Hocart also says that sacrifice is the central means by which the king is made sacred⁵ E. W. Hopkins⁶ notes that the concept of divine kingship is at the foundation of all ancient Indian texts

dealing with the governance. Burton Stein, the proponent of segmentary state formulation, says, the concepts of pyramidal segmentation and sacral kingship both imply a political system of fluidity and indeterminacy⁷. However, according to B.D. Chattopadhyaya, the rigid use of the segmentary state concept relegates the different foci of power to the periphery and does not really see them as components of the state structures.⁸ Ronald Inden⁹ situates kingship in the context of the court or in relation to the goals of life and the temple. The focus is essentially on the signs of sovereignty – capital, palace, throne, sets of musical instruments, etc. and it is argued that the more powerful the king was in hierarchy of kings, these symbols of power that he was entitled to were correspondingly more grand and totalizing. Kesavan Veluthat¹⁰ four kingdoms [Pallavas, Pandyas, Chera & Cholas] of south India suggest an inter-relationship between the structure of polity and elements of court ideology. Origin, myths, dynastic traditions, genealogies and Ksatriya lineage lent prestige to the dynasty as a whole and emphasized the inheritability of virtues, typical of caste ideology.

In Rajasthan, the Pratihara feudatories use the title Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja Parmeswara for the Pratihara monarch, but the Pratihara rulers call themselves only rajas or maharajas, their intention perhaps being to divert the people's attention not so much on their political achievements as on their cultural aspirations and fight for the preservation of Indian freedom.¹¹ The founder of the dynasty, Nagabhata I is represented as the image of Narayana himself.¹² Pratihara rulers took the titles such as Adivaraha¹³, Ranhastin.¹⁴ Pratihara rulers were the heads of the army, lords of the state treasury, the highest court of appeal¹⁵ and the chief executive of the state. The usual description of a ruler is anekasamanta pranipatitacharna [one at whose feet bowed numerous samantas or samanta-samantakopatta-sasana¹⁶.

From the grants of the Pratiharas, we learn that the king was the owner of the land. To him also came the fines for dasaparadha¹⁷ or the offences of disobeying the king's order, murder of a woman, confusion of varnas, adultery, theft, pregnancy from one not the husband, abuse and defamation, obscenity, assault and abortion. The ruler had the right to exact forced labour, though we are not told from whom.¹⁸ The king also received military service in lieu of land grants. For example, prince Harivahana and Samarketu became free from anxiety by distributing the towns and villages of their own bhuktis among the rajaputras who served them. The distribution was according to the patrata [merit] of the recipients.¹⁹ Extensive tracts of the

Pratihara empire were under feudatories like the Chahamanas of Sakambhari, Tomars of Delhi, the Guhilas of Madapata and the Chandellas of Mahoba. The Chastu inscription of Baladitya.²⁰ Jodhpur Inscription of²¹ and the Una grant of Avanivarman,²² show that their ancestors, viz. Sankargana, Kakka and Vahukadhavala respectively played an important role in the wars of their feudal overlord Nagabhata II against Dharmapala of Bengal.

Nagbhata II's relations with the rulers of Andhra, Kalinga, Vidarbha and the Saindhavas also throw some light on the status of the monarch. The expression used in the Gwalior inscription seems to indicate that though they were at first free and equal partners in a confederacy, they were ultimately reduced to the position of subordinate allies. A number of copper plate grants²³ of the Saindhawa chiefs seem to confirm this view. The observation of Arab writer Sulaiman²⁴ also throws light on the status of monarch. Referring to Gurjara-Pratihara ruler Bhoja I, he observes, this king maintains numerous forces and no other Indian prince has so fine a cavalry. He is unfriendly to the Arabs..... among the princes of India there is no greater foe of the Mohammadan faith than he. His territories form a tongue of land. He has got riches, and his camels and horses are numerous....there is no country in India more safe from robbers. From contemporary literature we come to know about people's expectation from the ruler. The king was to protect the people, to punish the guilty, to be a Kubera [God of wealth] as well as Yama [God of death] as his circumstances and duties demanded. According to Mahesvara Suri²⁵, He alone was a bhupata [ruler] who protected the land. An unjust ruler was a mere thief or robber.

The status of monarch was also based on the achievement of political eminence and movement towards a corresponding social status. The Pratiharas projected Brahma – Ksatra²⁶ status in order to legitimize their new Ksatriya role. Since Brahma-Ksatra was a relatively open status, it was seized upon by the new royal families before they would formulate a claim to pure ksatriya origin. The transition from feudatory to independent status was clearly through the growth of military strength. Inscriptions of Chahamanas and Pratihara feudatory families from Rajasthan highlight the part played by them in the military expeditions of their Gurjara-Pratihara overlords.²⁷ Thus, the status of monarch was also dependent on the changing genealogical claims as well as the military strength.

The status of monarch was also based on the construction of fortresses on a large scale. Early medieval inscriptions suggest their location in different parts of Rajasthan.

Kamyakiyakotta in Bharatpur area,²⁸ Rajyapura at Rajor in Alwar,²⁹ Mandavapuradurga at Mandor near Jodhpur,³⁰ Chitrakutamahadurga at Chitor,³¹ Kosavardhanadurga at Shergarh in Kota,³² Suvarnagiridurga at Jalor,³³ Srimaliyakotta at Bhimtal,³⁴ Taksakagadha,³⁵ and other places. The fortresses served not only defence purposes but had wider functions,³⁶ They represented the numerous foci of power of the ascendant ruling families and appear to have had close links with land holdings in the neighboring areas.

Marriage and marriage alliances also throw some light on the status of monarch as these alliances had significant political implications for the family. In an inscription of AD 837 of the Pratihara family from Jodhpur area, the originator of the family is mentioned as having married a brahmana and a ksatriya wife. In another inscription of AD 861, the brahmana wife is dropped from the account of the ancestry. Towards the end of the genealogy, Kakka, who is very close to the last and the current ruler in the genealogical list, is mentioned as having married Padmini of the Bhati clan, considered by some to be identical with the Bhattis of Jaisalmer area.³⁷ A ranaka Tribhuvaneshvara of the Chahamanas family was married to Rastrakuta Laksmidevi.³⁸ Alhana of the Chahamanas family of Nadol married Annaladevi of the Rastrakuta family.³⁹ Paramara Dhaarvasa of Mt. Abu married the daughter of Chahamanas Kelhanadeva.⁴⁰ Alhanadevi, from a Guhila royal family, was married to Gayakarna of the Cedi family.⁴¹ Marriage relations of Guhilas extended to the Chalukyas,⁴² the Paramaras,⁴³ the Rastrakutas,⁴⁴ the Chahamanas⁴⁵ and the Hunas.⁴⁶ Memorial stones also throw light on the status of monarch. In the inscriptions, these memorial stones are called govardhana dhvaj⁴⁷ and Paliyas or devali, devil or devakulika.⁴⁸ They were installed to commemorate death, including death on the battlefield. In a number of cases, titles indicative of the political and social status of the commemorated occur such as raja,⁴⁹ mahasamanta,⁵⁰ rana,⁵¹ rauta or rajaputra.⁵²

Splendour and luxury was associated with the status of monarch. From Samaraicakaha, we learn that prince Gunasena had different palaces in different cities.⁵³ The palace Vimanacandaka in Vasantapura had all the enchantment of the rainy season,.....the king's sleeping chamber [vasagrha] was furnished with auspicious jeweled lamps, pavements bestrewn with the most fragrant flowers, jeweled walls besmeared with musk, pillars of gold adorned with exquisites, devanga cloth, a canopy of resplendent patterned cloth, bedsteads of reddish coral, covered with splendid pairs of beautiful parvata and kalahamsa birds, betel [

tambula] with camphor and vanini served in golden cups.⁵⁴ In the morning the king was awakened from his sleep by the sound of the turya instrument whilst women sung auspicious songs and bards sang the glories of the dawn and panegyrics.⁵⁵ The assembly of the king held in the outer audience hall was a grand affair. The king sat on a golden throne studded with jewel, surrounded by his mantrins, scholars and others. It is said, no art or science remained unrepresented there.⁵⁶

The status of monarch was also reflected through the changing status of the traditional kshatriya group or ruling elites of Rajasthan. Perhaps the proliferation of the Rajputs contributed towards an undermining of the political status of the early kshatriya groups which were taking to less potent occupation and also that the preferred term for the ruling stratum was not so much Kshatriya as Rajput.⁵⁷

To conclude, we may say that the sacral character of the monarch provided the means for attaining encompassing incorporative and universal kingship. However, too much emphasis on sacral character ignores the other aspects which have a bearing on the status of monarch such as the signs of sovereignty, origin, myths, dynastic traditions, genealogy, Kshatriya lineage, chakravari status, warrior, donor images, strong army, king's ownership over land, construction of fortresses, marriage alliances, glorification of memorial stones, splendor and luxury associated with the monarch, the king's assembly hall and also the changing nature of the ruling elites.

END-NOTES

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4. *Ibid*, pp.103, 108.
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23. EI, XXVI, p.185.
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35. K.C. Jain, pp.256-8.
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37. EI, XVIII, pp.87-89; D. Sharma, op. cit., p.124.
38. EI, XVII, pp.155-8.
39. Ibid, ix, pp. 66 ff.
40. Ibid, xxxii, pp. 136-8.
41. IA, XVI, pp. 345-55.
42. PRASW [1905-6], p. 61.
43. EI, xxxi, pp. 237-48.
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48. PRASWC [1911-12], p.53.
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52. ARIE [1954-55], P.59.
53. Samaraiccakaha, pp.12,35.
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55. Kuvalayamala, pp. 91,141,161,173,198.
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