

**THE PARIVRAJAKA MAHARAJA****Dr. Moirangthem Pramod\***\*Assistant Professor,  
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The Allahabad stone pillar inscription of Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty refers to the reduction of 'all the forest kingdoms to servitude' in line 21 after the graphic description of Samudragupta's conquest of a large number of rulers of Dakṣiṇāpātha and Āryavarta. The *sarva āṭṭ avikarājaya* of this inscription have generally been identified with the Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand region of central India by scholars.<sup>1</sup> The term has further been equated with the 18<sup>th</sup> forest kingdoms referred to in the Khoh-copper plated inscription of Mahārāja Sakshobha dated Gupta Saṁvat 209.<sup>2</sup> If we are to believe Harishena, the author of the Allahabad pillar inscription, all the forest kingdoms were completely overpowered and forced to oblige the supremacy of the Gupta emperor. If the explanation of lines 22-23 may also be applied to the forest kingdoms along with that of various tribes and bordering kingdoms, it becomes clear that the rulers of these kingdoms were permitted to retain their independence on acceptance of suzerainty of Samudragupta. The question of the identity of these āvīrājyas would have been a complex problem for the scholars, had a number of copper plate inscription belonging to the two houses, the Parivrājakas of Ḍāhala and the kings of Uchchakalpa from the central India been not known to us. The two sets of inscriptions attributed one each to these two families throw some welcome light on the history of these forest kingdoms and their relations with the imperial Guptas. Though we have several references to the forest kingdoms in works like the Arthaśāstra of Kauilya and Bihatsahita of Varāhamihira, the details of their existence and history would have remained unknown but for their inscriptions, that form the only specific source of information about these ruling houses. A brief survey of the same is not only a desideratum but also a must to sketch the complete picture of the political history of northern India during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

To study the history of the ruling Parivrājaka family, we have to depend solely on seven copper plate inscriptions and a stone pillar inscription, which were discovered from various places in the erstwhile Jaso and Nagod in Madhya Pradesh. Eight inscriptions of this family have been so far discovered, of this, six were of Mahārāja Hastin's time and the remaining two were of Mahārāja Sakshobha's period. They are as follows:

**1. KHOH COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN, THE YEAR 156**

The inscription was discovered in 1852, by Col. Ellis, Political Agent at Nagaudh. It was brought to the knowledge of scholars in 1858 in Mr. Thomas's edition of Prinsep's essays,

Vol. I, by H.H.Wilson. A.Cunningham published it again in 1879<sup>3</sup> and later J.F.Fleet<sup>4</sup> published it from the hand copy made by Cunningham. The objective of the inscription is to record the grant of a village Vasuntarashaika to Gopasvāmin and other Brahmans by Mahārāja Hastin. It gives us the genealogy of this ruling family. The inscription also mentions that it was issued in the year 156 of the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta king.

**2. KHOH COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN, THE YEAR 163**

The inscription was brought to notice along with the above mentioned inscription by Cunningham<sup>5</sup> and later Fleet<sup>6</sup> published it. It records the grant made by Mahārāja Hastin, of the agrāhāra of Korparika to certain Brahmans. The inscription mentions the year 163 in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta king.

**3. JABALPUR COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN, THE YEAR 163**

The inscription is engraved on two copper plates. R.B. Pandey brought it to notice of scholars for the first time in Epigraphia Indica.<sup>7</sup> The inscription is issued with the objective to record the grant of a village to a number of Brahmans in the Gupta year 170. It also supply us the genealogy of the Parivrājaka kings.

**4. MAJHGAWAN COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN, THE YEAR 191**

The inscription was discovered in the year 1870, while ploughing a field at the village of Majhgawan about 3 miles south-west of Uchchahar in Madhya Pradesh. It was first published in 1879 by A. Cunningham.<sup>8</sup> Later, Fleet published it in 1888.<sup>9</sup> The inscription gives us the genealogy of this ruling family. It is issued to record the grant made by Mahārāja Hastin at the request of a certain person named Mahādevideva in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta kings.

**5. AVAGRAMA COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN, THE YEAR 198**

The inscription is brought to the notice of scholars by K.N. Dikshit.<sup>10</sup> The plate records the grant of a village by Mahārāja Hastin in the year 198 to several Brahmans of the Parāśara gotra and Madhyandina-śākhā.

**6. BHUMARA STONE PILLAR INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA HASTIN AND ŚARVANĀTHA**

Bhumara is a small village about 9 mile to the north-west of Uchahara. The inscription was first published by A.Cunningham in 1879,<sup>11</sup> later by J.F.Fleet.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly it gives us the names of Mahārāja Hastin of the Parivrājaka family and Mahārāja Śarvanātha of the

Uchchakapas. Fleet take the village Ambalode mentioned in it to be the boundary line. It is generally agreed to be a family stone as suggested by D.C.Sircar.<sup>13</sup>

### 7 BETUL COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA SAKSHOBHA, THE YEAR 199

The inscription was found in the possession of a person named Sahib Lal Singh. The inscription is engraved in two copper plates. Hira Lal came to know of the inscription and published it for the first time in 1905-06.<sup>14</sup> The objection of the inscription is to record the grant of half of the village Prastaravataka and quarter of Dvāravāika in the province of Tripuri by the Maharaja Sakshobha to the Brahman Bhānusvāmin of the Bhāradvāja gotra. He is said to have defeated eighteen forest kingdoms.

### 8 KHOH COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF THE MAHĀRĀJA SAKSHOBHA, THE YEAR 209

The inscription was published for the first time by A.Cunningham in 1879<sup>15</sup> and later by J.F.Fleet.<sup>16</sup> The object of it is to record the grant made by Mahārāja Sakshobha, at the request of a certain person named Chhodugomin of the village of Opani to a temple of the goddess Pishapuri apparently some local form of Lakshmī, the wife of Vishu. It mentions Mahārāja Hastin as governing the kingdom of abhālā. The importance of this inscription is that the genealogy of this ruling family starts from Suśarman.

These inscriptions give us the full genealogy of this ruling family of six rulers, of these we have no records of the first four rulers. Whatever we know about this family is from the inscriptions of last two rulers, Mahārāja Hastin and Mahārāja Sakshobha.

The term Parivrājaka literally means a wandering religious mendicant, an ascetic. We do not know as to how the family acquired the appellation 'Parivrājaka'. J.F.Fleet<sup>17</sup> while translating line 3 of the khoh copper plate of Sakshobha, used the expression 'born in the family of the kingly ascetics Suśarman' for Sakshobha. This has led most of the scholars to infer that the family belonged to a line of ascetics. However, it has been pointed out by Professor Ashvini Agrawal<sup>18</sup> that Suśarman was a distant ancestor of Hastin and Sakshobha, in the same manner as Pushyabhūti, was the founder of the line of Harshavardhana. None of the other Parivrājaka inscriptions refer to his name. He is described as a learned person who knew the whole truth, the fourteen sections of science, who was a great sage equal to Kapila, who knew all the first principles.<sup>19</sup> This is more of a general description than factual. It is possible that the word mahaisha in the inscription has been used for sage Kapila, knower of all the tattvas i.e. elements with whom Suśarman has been equated. In any case the information confirms that Parivrājakas were Brahmans of Bhāradvāja gotra and as Brahmans they may have been wandering ascetics at some remote time in the past, which became their appellation with the passage of time. It may be noted here that the king of Pishapura is named as Mahendragiri in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. Fleet had pointed out the giriradri ending names belonging to ascetic's only.<sup>20</sup> Yet, we find numerous examples of rulers having giri ending names. Likewise, it is not necessary to look for a clan of wandering ascetics in the name of Parivrājakas.

Like several other Brahmana families of the period,<sup>21</sup> they too seem to have risen to power and carved out a kingdom for themselves. As pointed out by Fleet<sup>22</sup> himself *nṛ ipati-Parivrājaka* may be taken as equivalent of *rājaishi* the ‘royal sage’. It may also refer to some remote tradition in the family where the kings abdicated throne in the last quarter of their lives accordingly to the law of four stages of life (*aśramas*) and became wandering ascetics, which is the literal meaning of the term.

The progenitor of the *Parivrājaka* family was the royal ascetic *Mahārāja Suśarman*. He is mentioned as such in the *khoh* copper plate inscription of the *Mahārāja Saṁkshobha* of the *Gupta Saṁvat 209* and *Betul* plates of *Saṁkshobha*, the year 199. He seems to belong to the *Bhāradvāja* gotra as mentioned in the inscriptions and lived like a sage though he was a king, for this he has been compared with the great sage *Kapila*.<sup>23</sup> Born in his family was *Mahārāja Devāḍhya*, whose son was *Mahārāja Prabhañjana* from whom was born *Mahārāja Dāmodara*. We do not have any details of the first four kings. We can tentatively calculate the year of the first four rulers by assigning 20 years to each ruler from the first known date 156 of *Mahārāja Hastin*, which is given in *Gupta era*. Tentatively assigning twenty years, *Suśarman* might have ruled from *Gupta era c. 76 till 96*; *Mahārāja Devāḍhya* can be assigned between *Gupta era c. 96 – 116*; for *Mahārāja Prabhañjana*, *Gupta era c. 116-136*; and for *Mahārāja Dāmodara*, *Gupta era c. 136-156*. By this assignment we can probably traced the beginning of their rule somewhere in c. 76 that corresponds to 395 CE.

The term *Gupta-nṛipa-rājya bhuktau*, i.e., ‘in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Guptas’, is mentioned in the *Khoh* copper plate inscription of the *Mahārāja Hastin*, year 156; *Khoh* copper plate inscription of the *Mahārāja Hastin*, year 163; *Majhgawam* copper plate inscription of the *Mahārāja Hastin*, year 191 and *Khoh* copper plate inscription of the *Mahārāja Saṁkshobha*, year 209. But in none of these inscriptions the name of the *Gupta* ruler or rulers is mentioned. The term has been variously interpreted by several scholars in the past. Prof. H.H.Wilson translated it as “in the year of the occupation of the kingdom by the *Gupta* kings” thus taking the dates to be calculated from the time of the *Gupta* occupation of the *Parivrājaka* territory.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Hall translated it as “in the year 156 of the extinction of the sovereignty of the *Gupta* kings” thus taking these inscription to the post *Gupta* period.<sup>25</sup> Fleet translated it as “in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the *Gupta* kings.”<sup>26</sup> From this P.L.Gupta,<sup>27</sup> expresses that mere mention of the phrase *Gupta-nṛipa-rājya* for the era used in the records does not show their subordination to the *Guptas*. He further says that they were in all probability feudatories of the *Guptas*, earlier. Even after establishing their own independent kingdom they continued to use the *Gupta era*. In support of his statement, he gives the example that we now use the *Christian era* even after the independence from the *British* domination. V.C.Pandey<sup>28</sup> is of the view that the use of the *Gupta era* in the inscriptions only proves the existence of an old style of dating. He comes to this conclusion from the point that they had not mentioned the names of their overlord. Although no individual *Gupta* emperor is named, explicit mention of the prevalence of the rule of the *Gupta* kings in the grants indirectly points to the sovereignty of the *Guptas* over the *Parivrājaka* kings. This point can also be supplemented from the political titles of the *Parivrājaka*

kings as Mahārāja. Since the term Mahārāja was usually applied to the feudatory chiefs owing allegiance to an overlord in this period. Thus there should not have any doubt of the Parivrājaka kings being feudatories of the Guptas. It is well known fact that the Gupta empire started to decline from the early sixth century CE. The Gupta hold over the feudatory Parivrājaka was probably very feeble, interfering in no way with the latter's internal administration. This is evident from the Parivrājaka inscriptions, as they did not bother to mention the name of their Gupta overlords. This might have paved the way for the rise of Brahmana feudatories like the Parivrājakas, who were the descendents of the 'kingly ascetic' to perform administrative function almost independently. This would show that the Parivrājaka owned only nominal allegiance to the Guptas. However, there appears to be something amiss in all these view. The use of the term Bhuktau has not been properly interpreted by any scholars. H.H.Wilson had suggested to amend this reading to Muktau or Mukte, without any reason.<sup>29</sup> It is simply untenable as shown by Fleet. Hall had taken it in the sense of 'possession' or 'fruition' as a thing of the past.<sup>30</sup> Fleet, though made detailed comments on the meaning of this term but failed to use it in his translation of the term.<sup>31</sup> Bhukti is a well-known term during the Gupta period denoting an administrative unit equal to modern 'province' or 'state'. Several clay sealings belonging to the governors or official of various provinces, such as Tirabhukti, have been known and the term is also frequently used in the Gupta inscription.<sup>32</sup> Again, our attention has been drawn by Prof. A.Agrawal to an expression in lines 23-24 of the Allahabad inscription where in Daivaputrashahis and Śakas, Murundas etc. are referred to as applying to Samudargupta for the charters bearing the Garuḍa seal assuring their self-rule in their own viśayas and bhuktis.<sup>33</sup> In the light of these references the term may be taken to mean that the Parivrājakas were reduced to the status of governors ruling over their own territories under the supremacy of the imperial Guptas. In other words they had become the feudatories of the Gupta rulers and openly acknowledged this fact. Or a step further they considered their possessions only a province of the Gupta empire as the term 'Guptanṛīpa rājya bhuktau' may imply. Either of these derivations would exactly fit with the claim of Samudragupta that all the āṭavika kingdoms were reduced to servitude, as pointed above. There should not be any doubt of Mahārāja Hastin being a feudatory of Budhagupta though the former was probably independent for all practical purposes.

Mahārāja Hastin, the fifth descendent of the Parivrājaka family, is the only king of this line of which we are able to obtain some historical information. He is the son of Mahārāja Dāmodara. He is said to have donated thousands of cows, gold pieces, elephants, horses and pieces of land. He had given in grant many lands to the Brahman families, which is a sign of his charitable disposition. He has been credited with numerous victories, achievements in hundreds of battles. It is not sure who were the adversaries he is said to have defeated in hundreds of battle. K.C.Jain is of the view that he must have helped the Guptas in their fight against the Hūas, which was recorded in the posthumous inscription of Goparāja of Eran, dated in 510-11CE. This inscription is silent about the result of the battle. He further states, "it is not unlikely that Bhānugupta freed Eran from the yoke of Toramāa, for the Gupta sovereignty was acknowledged by Parivrājaka Mahārāja, who ruled in the adjoining province from 510 AD to at least 528 AD."<sup>34</sup> V.V.Mirashi<sup>35</sup> suggests that the Mahārāja Hastin ousted Indrabala II, son of Udayāna of the Mahakośala king, from the Mekala region. But we are not able to find any convincing evidence in support of this event, so it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion, without any

new evidence. In the Khoh copper plate inscription of the Mahārāja Sakshobha, year 208-9, Hastin is said to have ruled over the inherited kingdom of ābhala (later āhala) together with the region included in the eighteen 'aavi-rājyas' i.e., forest kingdom. V.S.Agrawala has identified the limits of the 'aavi-rājyas' from the river Chambal in the west and Son in the east.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to identify satisfactorily who these forest kingdoms were but it is reasonable to suppose that most of them lay in the Vindhya region.

Mahārāja Hastin's first known date is Gupta Savat 156. He ruled for an unusual long period of 42 years, since his last known date is 198 year. The dates have been undoubtedly referred to the Gupta era. It means he was contemporary at least three Gupta kings viz. Budhagupta, Vainyagupta and Bhānugupta and possible also of Narasihagupta. The first of these being a powerful ruler, there should be no doubt that Hastin was a feudatory of Budhagupta, especially when we know that a copper plate from Sankarapur in Sidhi district dated year 168 of Budhagupta's rule has been discovered. From the wording of Hastin's inscription also his feudatory status is clearly reflected. Śarvanātha, the Uchchakalpa king had recorded his rule from 191 to 214 year, which is undoubtedly referred to the Gupta era. From the dates of both the rulers, it can be established that they had a parallel years. Not only this, a joint record has been issued, the Bhumara pillar inscription. From these points, it can be established that Śarvanātha was a contemporary ruler of Mahārāja Hastin and Śarvanātha's kingdom was contiguous to that of Hastin, as is indicated by the Bhumara pillar inscription.

He made over several villages to the Brahmans in order to increase his own religious merit and built a ladder leading to heaven. He not only made grants to Brahmans but also to dozen vedic scholars with identical aim. His devotion for Lord Śiva, stands out beyond ever the shadow of a doubt. In his Bhumara stone pillar inscription, he is mentioned as meditating on the feet of the lord Mahādeva. The opening invocation to the same deity in Majhgawam copper plate further attests the facts.

Five silver coins of Raa Hastin are lying in the Indian museum, Kolkata, P.T.Banerjee<sup>37</sup> attributed these coins to the Mahārāja Hastin of Parivrājaka family of central India on palaeographic considerations. E.J.Rapson<sup>38</sup> was not fully convinced, but he attributed these coins to Mahārāja Hastin. Following their footsteps, R.D.Banerji<sup>39</sup> and B.P.Sinha<sup>40</sup> also assigned the coins to the Mahārāja Hastin of Parivrājaka dynasty. P.L.Gupta<sup>41</sup> while visiting the Prince of Wales museum has encountered a specimen of these coins. These specimens of coins were also found from different places, i.e., from Kanauj,<sup>42</sup> Rajasthan<sup>43</sup> and somewhere in Surashtra.<sup>44</sup> Rejecting Banerjee's assigning of these coins to the Mahārāja Hastin of Parivrājaka, Gupta states that the palaeographic character of the coins cannot be put anywhere earlier than the eighth century CE. He goes along with the suggestion of Dasharath Sharma,<sup>45</sup> attributing these coins to Vatsarāja, the Pratihāra ruler who, according to the Kuvalayamāla of Uddyotana Suri who wrote in c. 779 CE, had the title of Raṇa Hastin. This is quite plausible, since no feudatories of the Guptas had dared to assume the imperial right of issuing coins in their own name.

Mahārāja Sakshobha, the last known king of Parivrājakas, succeeded his father Mahārāja Hastin somewhere in the Gupta Savat 198 and 199, since, we have the last known date of Mahārāja Hastin in the Gupta Savat 198, corresponding to 517 CE from the Navagrama grant and the first known date of Mahārāja Sakshobha in the Gupta Saṁvat 199, from the Betul copper

plate inscription. Two more copper plate grants of his time have been brought to the knowledge of historians. He is said to have inherited all the territory of his father including the eighteen forest kingdoms.<sup>46</sup> Following his father's foot step, he also made land grants for the purpose of increasing the religious merit of his parents and of himself. He appears to have been an ideal Hindu ruler who was constantly engaged in establishing the law of caste and Āśramas. Departing from the religious leaning of his father, whose grants opened with salutation to Śiva-Mahādeva, his Khoh grant opened with the invocation of the god, Vāsudeva. Till the last known date of their rule, the Parivrājaka Mahārāja recognized the sovereignty of the Gupta empire. We fail to get any evidence of the Parivrājaka after Saṁkshobha's last known date of the Gupta era 209 i.e., 528 CE. It is generally believed that the Parivrājaka dynasty came to an end with the end of Mahārāja Saṁkshobha's rule. It is also possible that they lost their status as a political entity with the decline of the Guptas and rise of the Aulikaras in central India.

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18. Explained to me in a personal discussion. He has kindly provided me with a copy of the draft of his forthcoming publication on the subject.
19. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, III, 1888, p. 115.
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21. For example, Śālankāyanar of Vañ gi, Vākāṭ akas of Vidabha, Ikshnākus and even the imperial Guptas were ruling Brahamana families.
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