Political History of Ancient India

PART I

From the Accession of Parikshit to the Coronation of Bimbisāra

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Section I. Foreword

No Thucydides or Tacitus has left for posterity a genuine history of Ancient India. But the patient investigations of numerous scholars and archaeologists have opened up rich stores of material for the reconstruction of the ancient history of our country. The first notable attempt to "sort and arrange the accumulated and ever-growing stores of knowledge" was made by Dr. Vincent Smith. But the excellent historian, failing to find sober history in bardic tales, ignored the period immediately succeeding "the famous war waged on the banks of the Jumna, between the sons of Kuru and the sons of Pāṇḍu," and took as his starting point the middle of the seventh century B.C. The aim of the present writer has been to sketch in outline the dynastic history of Ancient India including the neglected period. He takes as his starting point the accession of Parikshit which, according to Epic and Purānic tradition, took place shortly after the Bhārata War.

Valuable information regarding the Pārīkṣhita and the post-Pārīkṣhita periods has been given by eminent scholars like Weber, Lassen, Eggeling, Caland, Oldenberg, Jacobi, Hopkins, Macdonell, Keith, Rhys Davids, Fick,
Pargiter, Bhandarkar and others. But the attempt to frame an outline of political history from Parikshita to Bimbisāra out of materials supplied by Brāhmaṇic as well as non-Brāhmaṇic literature is, I believe, made for the first time in the following pages.

Section II. Sources

No inscription or coin has unfortunately been discovered which can be referred, with any amount of certainty, to the post-Parikshita-pre-Bimbisārian period. The South Indian plates purporting to belong to the reign of Janamejaya\(^1\) have been proved to be spurious. Our chief reliance must, therefore, be placed upon literary evidence. Unfortunately this evidence is, in the main, Indian, and is not supplemented to any considerable extent by those foreign notices which have “done more than any archæological discovery to render possible the remarkable resuscitation” of the history of the post-Bimbisārian epoch. The discoveries at Mahenjo-Daro and Harappa no doubt constitute a welcome addition to the purely literary evidence regarding the ancient history of India. But the civilisation disclosed is possibly that of Sauvīra or Sovīra (Sophir, Ophir)\(^2\) in the pre-Parikshita period. And the monuments exhumed “offer little direct contribution to the materials for political history,” particularly of the Madhya-deśa or the Upper Ganges valley.

Indian literature useful for the purpose of the historian of the post-Parikshita-pre-Bimbisārian age may be divided into five classes, viz.:—

I. Brāhmaṇical literature of the post-Parikshita-pre-Bimbisārian period. This class of literature naturally contributes the most valuable information regarding the history of the earliest dynasties and comprises:

(a) The last book of the Atharva Veda.

---

\(^1\) *Ep. Ind.*, VII, App. pp. 162-63; *IA.*, III. 268; IV. 335

\(^2\) Cf. *IA.*, XIII. 228; I. Kings, 9, 28; 10, 11,
THE EPICS

(b) The Aitareya, Satapatha, Pañchaviṃśa and other ancient Brāhmaṇas.

(c) The major part of the Brihadāraṇyaka, the Chhāndogya and other classical Upanishads.

That these works belong to the post-Pārīkshita period is proved by repeated references to Pārīkshita, to his son Janamejaya, to Janamejaya’s successor Abhipratārin, and to Janaka of Videha at whose court the fate of the Pārīkshitas was discussed by the assembled sages. That these works are in the main pre-Buddhistic and, therefore, pre-Bimbisārian, has been proved by competent critics like Dr. Rājendralal Mitra, Professor Macdonell and others.

II. The second class comprises Brāhmaṇical works to which no definite date can be assigned, but large portions of which, in the opinion of scholars, belong to the post-Bimbisārian period. To this class belong the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The present Rāmāyaṇa consists of 24,000 ślokas or verses. But even in the first or second century A.D. the epic seems to have contained only 12,000 ślokas as the evidence of the Buddhist Mahāvibhāṣa, a commentary on the Jñānaprasthāna of Kāṭyāyanīputra, suggests. It not only mentions Buddha Tathāgata, but distinctly refers to the struggles of the Hindus with mixed hordes of Yavanas (Greeks) and Śakas (Scythians), Śakaṇ Yavana-Miśrītāṇ. In the Kishkindhyā Kāṇḍa, Sugriva

---

1 Of special importance are the gāthās or songs in the thirteenth kānda of the Sat. Br. and the eighth pañchikā of the Aitareya.
3 Translation of the Chhāndogya Upanishad, pp. 23–24.
3 History of Sanskrit Literature, pp. 189, 202–203, 226.
4 1. 4. 2—Chaturvāhīsa-sahasrāṇi ślokānāṁ avatān rishīh.
6 II. 109. 34.
7 I. 54. 21.
8 IV. 43. 11–18. Note also the references to Vaijayantapura in the Deccan (II. 9. 12), the Dravidas (ibid., 10. 37), Malaya and Dardārā (ibid., 91. 24) Muragittapana (Muziris, Cranganore, IV. 42 3), practices of the people of the Deccan (II. 93. 13), “the seven flourishing realms” of Yavadvipa (Java), Suvarṇadvipa (Sumatra) in IV. 40. 50, and Karkaṭaka lagna (II. 15. 3).
places the country of the Yavanas and the cities of the Sakas between the country of the Kurus and the Madras, and the Himālayas. This shows that the Græco-Scythians at that time occupied parts of the Pañjāb. The *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa* apparently refers to the Purāṇic episode of the uplifting of Mount Mandara, or of Govardhana, *Parigṛhya giriṁ dorbhyāṁ vapur Vishnur viḍambayan.*

As regards the present *Mahabhārata*, Hopkins says: "Buddhist supremacy already decadent is implied by passages which allude contemptuously to the edūkas or Buddhistic monuments as having ousted the temples of the gods. Thus in III. 190. 65 'They will revere edūkas, they will neglect the gods'; ib. 67 'the earth shall be piled with edūkas, not adorned with godhouses.' With such expressions may be compared the thoroughly Buddhistic epithet, Cāturmahārājika in XII. 339. 40 and Buddhistic philosophy as expounded in the same book."

"The Greeks are described as a western people and their overthrow is alluded to......The Romans, Romakas, are mentioned but once, in a formal list of all possible peoples, II. 51, 17, and stand thus in marked contrast to Greeks and Persians, Pahlavas, who are mentioned very often......The distinct prophecy that 'Scythians, Greeks and Bactrians will rule unrighteously in the evil age to come' which occurs in III. 188. 35 is too clear a statement to be ignored or explained away."

The *Ādiparva* refers to king Aśoka who is represented as an incarnation of a *Mahāsura* or great demon,

---

1. 69, 32; cf. Matsya, 249, 53; Bhāgavata. X. 25, Mbh., III. 101, 15.
2. For some other Purānic allusions see Calcutta Review, March, 1922, pp. 500-02. For references to sūttee see Hopkins, *J.A.O.S.*, 13, 173. For 'empire' Rām. II. 10, 36.
4. I. 67, 13-14. Cf. also XII. 5, 7 where Aśoka is mentioned with Śatadhanvan.
5. It is interesting to note in this connection that in the *Devīmāhātmya* of the *Māraṇḍeya Purāṇa* (88, 5) Maurya is the name of a class of Asuras or demons:—

*Kāḷahā Daurḥrītau Mauryāh Kālakṛṣṭasthāsuraḥ<br>yuddhāya sūjā nirvāntu ājñayā tvaritā mama*
and is described as *mahāvīryoparājītah*, of great prowess and invincible. We have also a reference\(^1\) to a Greek overlord, *Yavanādhīpah* of Sauvīra and his compatriot Dattāmitra (Demetrios?). The *Sāntiparva* presupposes the inclusion of the city of Mālinī, in the land of the Āṅgas, within the realm of Magadha.\(^2\) It mentions Yāska, the author of the *Nirukta*\(^3\), *Vārshagāṇya*,\(^4\) the Sānkhya philosopher who probably flourished in the fourth or fifth century after Christ\(^5\) and Kāmandaka,\(^6\) the authority, on *Dharma* (sacred law) and *Artha* (polity) who is probably to be identified with the famous disciple of Kauṭilya.

The eighteen *Purāṇas* were certainly known to Alberuni\(^7\) (A.D. 1000), Rājaśekhara (A.D. 900), and the latest compiler of the *Mahābhārata* who flourished before A.D. 500. Some of the Purānic chronicles are mentioned by Bāṇa (A.D. 600) and earlier writers. But the extant texts which contain lists of kings of the *Kali Age* cannot be placed earlier than the third or fourth century A.D.,

\[\text{"Let the Kālaka, the Daunhīra, the *Maurya* and the Kālākṣaya *Assuras, hastening at my command, march forth ready for battle."} \]

Note also the expression *suradośham* (of the enemies of the gods, i.e., *Assuras*\(^*\)) used by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1. 3. 24) in reference to people "deluded", by the Buddha.

\(^1\) *Mbh.*, I. 139. 21-23.
\(^2\) 5. 1-6.
\(^3\) 342. 73
\(^4\) 318. 59.
\(^6\) *Sānti*, 123. 11.

\(^7\) Cf. Alberuni, Ch. XII; *Prachanda-Pāṇḍava*, ed. by Carl Cappeller, p. 5 (*aśṭādāsa-puṇāṇa-sāra-saṅgraha-kāraṇa*); *Mbh.*, XVIII. 6. 97; *Harshacharita*, III (p. 86 of Parab’s ed., 1918), *Pavamāna-proktā Puṇāṇa*, i.e., *Vāyu Puṇāṇa*; Cf. *Sakala-puṇāṇa-rājarshi-charita-bhujijñāḥ* (HI. 87) and *Hareriva Vīśvavirodi-dhīni Bālacharitānī* (II. 77); E.H.V.S. second ed., pp. 17, 70, 150. The fact that the collection of the essence (*sāra-saṅgraha*) of all the eighteen *Purāṇas* is attributed to a very ancient sage by Rājaśekhara proves that the Purāṇas themselves were believed by him to have been composed long before the ninth century A.D. The existence of some of the texts in the sixth century A.D. is hinted at by the Nervīr inscription of Maṅgalesa (*IA.*, VII. 161—*Mānavā-Puṇāṇa-Rāmāṇa-Bhāratetthāsa-kusalah . . . Vallabhaḥ, i.e., Pulikesī I). The reference in the *Maṭya Puṇāṇa*, which is regarded as one of the earliest among the Purānic works, to week days (70, 46; 56; 72, 27, etc. is of value in determining the upper limit.
because they refer to the so-called Andhra kings and even to the post-Andhras.

It is clear from what has been stated above that the Epics and the Purāṇas, in their present shape, are late works which are no better suited to serve as the foundation of the history of the pre-Bimbisārian age than are the tales of the Mahāvamśa and the Aśokavadāna adapted to form the bases of chronicles of the doings of the great Mauryas. At the same time we shall not be justified in rejecting their evidence wholesale because much of it is undoubtedly old and valuable. The warning to handle critically, which Dr. Smith considered necessary with regard to the Pali chronicles of Ceylon, is also applicable to the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas.

In a recent work Dr. Keith shows scepticism about the historical value of these texts, and wonders at the "naïve credulity" of those who believe in the historicity of any event not explicitly mentioned in the Vedas, e.g., "a great Bhārata war". It cannot be denied that the Epics and the Purāṇas, in their present shape, contain a good deal of what is untrustworthy; but it has been rightly said that "it is absurd to suppose that fiction completely ousted the truth." The epigraphic or numismatic records of the Sātavāhanas, Ābhīras, Vākāṭakas, Nāgas, Guptas and many other dynasties fully bear out the observation of Dr. Smith that "modern European writers have been inclined to disparage unduly the authority of the Purānic lists, but closer study finds in them much genuine and valuable historical tradition." As to the "great Bhārata war" we have indeed no epigraphic corroboration, because contemporary inscriptions are lacking. But, as will be pointed out in a subsequent chapter, Vedic literature contains many hints that the story of the great conflict is not wholly fictitious. Many of the figures in the Kurukshetra story, e.g., Bālhika Prātipēya¹ (Balhika Prātipīya), Dhrītarāśhra Vaichitravīrya, Kṛśṇa, Devaki-

¹ Mbh., V. 25. 9.
putra and perhaps Śikhandin Yājñasena, are mentioned in some of the early Vedic texts, and we have a distinct allusion in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa to the unfriendly feeling between the first of these, a prince of the Kurus, and the Śṛiṇjayas. It will be remembered that the great war described in the epic often takes the shape of a trial of strength between these two peoples (Kurūṇāṁ Śṛiṇjayānāṁ cha jīgīṣhūnāṁ parasparam). In the Jaiminiya Upanishad Brāhmaṇa Kurus reproach the Dālbhyas, a clan closely connected with the Pañchālas who appear to have been among the principal antagonists of the Kuru leaders in the Bhārata War. The Chhāndogya Upanishad, as is well-known, contains a gāthā which eulogises the mare that comes to the rescue of the Kurus. Battle-songs describing the struggle of the Kurus against the Śṛiṇjayas and associate tribes or clans must have been current at least as early as the fifth century B.C., because Vaiśampāyana and his version of the Mahābhārata are well-known to Āśvalāyana and Pāṇini. If, as suggested by Vedic evidence discussed in the following pages, the “great Bhārata war” really took place in or about the ninth century B.C., the broad outlines of the story about the conflict dating from a period not later than the fifth century B.C., cannot be dismissed as wholly unworthy of credence.

Pargiter, unlike Keith, is inclined to give more weight to Purānic tradition than to Vedic evidence, and his conclusions have apparently been accepted by Dr. Barnett. It has eloquently been urged by the former that Vedic literature “lacks the historical sense” and “is not always to be trusted.” But do the Purāṇas which represent Śākya as one individual, include Abhimanyu and Siddhārtha in lists of kings, make

---

1 Cf. also Arjuna identified with Indra in the Śat. Br., V. 4. 3. 7 and Pārtha in the Āśvalāyana Srauta Sūtra, XII. 10 (Vedic Index. I. 522).
3 Mbh., VI. 45. 2.
4 I. 98. 1 (xii. 4).
5 Calcutta Review, Feb., 1924, p. 249.
6 Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, pp. 9 ff.
Prasenajit the immediate lineal successor of Rāhula, place Pradyota several generations before Bimbisāra, dismiss Aśoka with one sentence, make no mention of the dynastic name Śātavāhana, and omit from the list of the so-called “Andhras,” princes like Siri-Kubha (Śrī-Kumbha) Śātakaṇi whose existence is proved by the incontestable evidence of coins,¹ possess the historical sense in a remarkable degree, and are “always to be trusted”? Pargiter himself, not unoften, rejects Epic and Purāṇic evidence² when it is opposed to certain theories. In this connection it will not be quite out of place to quote the following observations of Mr. V. Gordon Childe.³ “The Kṣatriya tradition (i.e., Epic and Purāṇic tradition) . . . . is hardly an unpolluted source of history. The orthodox view is not really based on the priestly tradition, ‘as embodied in epexegetical works, but rather on the internal evidence of the Veda itself. The latter carries conviction precisely because the historical and geographical references in the hymns are introduced only incidentally and in a thoroughly ingenuous manner . . . . The same cannot be said of Kṣatriya tradition, which in its recorded form dates from an age (perhaps as late as 200 A.D.) when myth-making had had many centuries to work in, and which might serve dynastic ends.” Priority of date and comparative freedom from textual corruption are two strong points in favour of Vedic literature.

III. The third class of literature comprises Brāhmaṇical works of the post-Bimbisārian period to which a date in a definite epoch may be assigned, e.g., the Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra assignable to the period 249 B. C. to c.100 A.D.,⁴ the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali between c.150 B.C. and 100 A.D.,⁵ etc. The value of these impor-

¹ Mirashi in the Journal of the Numismatic Society of India, Vol. II.
² Cf. A.I.H.T., pp. 173, n. 1 ; 299, n. 7.
³ The Aryans, p. 32.
⁴ The work was known not only to Bāṇa, the author of the Kādambari who flourished in the seventh century A.D., but to the Nandisūtra and Paṇṇas.
⁵ For recent discussions about the date of Patañjali see Indian Culture, III, 1 ff., Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Third Session, pp. 510-11.
tant works can hardly be overestimated. They form "sheet anchors in the troubled sea of Indian chronology." Their evidence with regard to the pre-Bimbisārian age is certainly inferior to that of the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanishads, but the very fact that such information as

of the Jainas which may have existed in the early centuries A.D. and probably also to the Nyāya-Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana, which is criticised by Dignāga and perhaps by Vasubandhu too (I.A., 1913, p. 82, 1918, p. 103). According to some scholars the Arthaśāstra literature is later than the Dharmaśastras, and dates only from about the third century A.D. But the prevalence of the study of Arthavidyā in a much earlier epoch is proved by the Junāgāth Rock Inscription of Rudradāman I and the existence of treatises on Arthaśāstra is rendered probable by the mention of technical terms like "Praṇaya," "Vishīṭi," etc. It is interesting to note that the Kautūliya, which purports to be a compendium of pre-existing Arthaśāstras, does not quote the views of previous Acharyas or teachers in the chapter on "Praṇaya" (Bk. V, Ch. 2). It is, therefore, not unlikely that Rudradāman I, who claims to have studied the Arthavidyā learnt the use of the term from the Kautūliya itself and not from a pre-Kautūliyan treatise. In this connection it is interesting to note that the Junāgāth epigraphs show a special acquaintance with the Arthaśāstra literature. The Junāgāth Inscription of Skanda Gupta, for instance, refers to the testing of officials by upadhit-s-sara-opadhitabhisheka viśuddhabuddhiḥ, "possessed of a mind that (has been tried and) is (found to be) pure by all the tests of honesty." The verse

Nyāy-ārvane-rthasaḥ cha kah samarthaḥ
syād-arjitasvāpy-atha rakshaṇe cha
gopāyitasvāpi cha vṛiddhi-hetau
Vṛiddhasya pātra-pratipādānya

"Who is capable both in the lawful acquisition of wealth, and also in the preservation of it, when acquired, and further in causing the increase of it, when protected, (and able) to dispense it on worthy objects, when it has been increased" (Fleet),

reminds us of Kaut., 1, 1—

Danājanītīḥ; alabdha-lābhārthā labdha-parirakshaṇī, rakṣita-vivardhanī vṛiddhasya tirthashu pratipādanī cha.

"The science of government, it is a means to make acquisitions, to preserve what is acquired, to increase what is protected and to distribute among the worthy what has been increased."

Johnston (J.R.A.S., 1899, 1 January, p. 77 ff.) points out that the Kautūliya Arthaśāstra is not separated by a great interval from Aśvaghoṣa, and is distinctly earlier than the Jātakamāla of Āryasūra (who flourished before 494 A.D. Winternitz, Ind. Lit., Vol. II, 276). An early date is also suggested by the absence of any reference to the Denarius in Book II, Chs. 12 and 19. But the mention of Chīnabhūmi and Chīnapatī in Bk. II, Ch. 11, precludes the possibility of a date earlier than the middle of the third century B.C. The reference must be to the great country of the Far East (Cf. "China which produces silk," Kosmas Indikopleustes, McCrindle's Ancient India, p. 168), and not to any obscure tribe on the outskirts of India. China silk
they contain, comes from persons assignable to a known epoch, makes it more valuable than the Epic and Purāṇic tradition, the antiquity and authenticity of which can always be called in question.

IV. To the fourth class belong the Buddhist Suttas, Vinaya texts and the Jātakas. Several works of the Buddhist canon are noticed in votive inscriptions at Bharhut and Sāñchi assigned to the second and first centuries B.C. Many of the reliefs found on the railings and gateways of Stūpas of the age depict stories taken from the Jātakas. The texts of the Pali canon are said to have been committed to writing in the first century B.C. They furnish a good deal of useful information regarding the period which immediately preceded the accession of Bimbisāra. They have also the merit of preserving Buddhist versions of ancient stories, and vouchsafe light when the light from Brāhmaṇical sources begins to fail.

V. To the fifth class belong the sacred texts of the Jainas. Some of the works may go back to a period earlier than the second century A.D. But the canon as a whole was probably reduced to writing in the fifth or sixth century A.D.¹ It gives interesting information regarding many kings who lived during the pre-Bimbisārian Age. But its comparatively late date makes its evidence not always reliable.

loom large in the pages of classical Sanskrit writers. The great silk-producing country (as well as Kambu, Kauṭ., II. 19) clearly lay outside the horizon of the early Mauryas. The name ‘China’ applied to the famous land can hardly be anterior to the first emperor of the Ch’in Dynasty (249-210 B.C., Mogi and Redman, The Problem of the Far East, p. 15). A post-Chandraguptan date for the Arthāśāstra is also suggested by (a) the reference to parapets of brick instead of wooden ramparts (II. 3), in connection with the royal seat, and (b) the use of Sanskrit at the Secretariat (II. 10). The imperial title Chakravarti (IX. 1) is not met with in inscriptions before Kharavela. The official designations Samāhartṛi and Sannidhāṛi find mention in epigraphs of a still later age.