POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE SOCIETY DURING THE GUPTA PERIOD AS DEPICTED IN THE CATURBHĀṆĪ

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Abstract:

From the time immemorial, Sanskrit literature has been depicting the corresponding Indian society with all its dimensions. The poets like Śūdraka, Daṇḍīn, Kṣemendra receive acclaim for their courage to depict the lives of the common people of society. In comparison to other forms of rūpaka, bhāṇa has possessed the specialty that its theme can depict the experiences of the lower section of society. The bhāṇas of the Caturbhāṇī encompass different aspects of society prevailed during that period. Except for the descriptions of royal life, all the four bhāṇas viz., Padmaprābhṛtaka of Śūdraka, Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda of Īśvaradatta, Ubhayābhicārikā of Vararuci and Pādatāḍitaka of Śyāmilaka focus on portraying the city life of common people. The Caturbhāṇī is the repository of historical facts. It is the authors' outstanding skill to portray work with so much historical importance and literary value. To analyze the political aspects of the four bhāṇas of the Caturbhāṇī, different features of administrative systems, foreign invasions and the existence of different dynasties have been considered. The present research paper tries to analyze the political aspect of society portrayed in the four bhāṇas of the Caturbhāṇī.

Keywords: *Bhāṇa, Caturbhāṇī,* Political aspects, Gupta Period, Society.

Introduction:

The *bhāṇa*s of the *Caturbhāṇī* comprehend bulks of references manifesting different dimensions of the co-existing society. *Bhāṇa* is one of ten types of *rūpaka*. The features of *bhāṇa* have been stated by the Sanskrit dramatists in their works of dramaturgy. The author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharatamauni defines *bhāṇa* as it should be conveyed by one person, depending on two things- either it describes one's own experience or is characterised by the descriptions related to other persons. One should enact the words of another person employing retorts, originating in oneself and progressively strung together,

as well as by verbal gestures and *ākāśabhāṣita* i.e., voices spoken in the air. It should be set forth by a roguish parasite in one act, and consist of many and varied situations and movements.[1]

The *Caturbhāṇī* is the collection of four *bhāṇa*s viz., *Padmaprābhṛtaka* of Śūdraka, *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* of Īśvaradatta, *Ubhayābhicārikā* of Vararuci and *Pādatāḍitaka* of Śyāmilaka. The four *bhāṇa*s i.e., *Padmaprābhṛtaka, Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda, Ubhayābhicārikā* and *Pādatāḍitaka* of the collection *Caturbhāṇī* provide the important information of the society of a particular period regarding the popular beliefs, customs, livelihood etc. Except for the royal life, the authors draw the focus on the city life of common people in the *bhāṇa*s. Along with other sources, the *Caturbhāṇī* also gives a clear picture of the Gupta period which is regarded as the Golden Age of Indian culture.

Methodology:

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[1] ātmānubhūtaśaṁsī pa*rasa*ṁśrayavarṇanāviśeṣastu / dvividhāśrayo hi bhāṇo vijñeyastvekahāryaśca // paravacanamātmasaṁstaṁ prativacanairuttarottaragrathitaiḥ / ākāśapuruṣakathitairṅgavikārairabhinayaiścaiva // dhūrtaviṭasaṁprayojyo nānāvasthāntarātmakaścaiva/ ekāṅko bahuceṣṭaḥ satataṁ kāryo budhair *bhāṇaḥ* // *bhāṇas*yāpi hi nikhilaṁ lakṣaṇamuktaṁ tathāgamānugatam /

……………………………………………//

Nāṭyaśastra, Part III, XVIII.108-111

The work will follow some stages of systematic studies. The methodology of the research will be entirely qualitative. In the first stage of the study, the book '*Caturbhāṇī*' has been collected for the thorough study to understand and to reveal the inner concepts and meaning of the four *bhāṇa*s. Some relevant books and materials related to the Gupta age covering the age of the *Caturbhāṇī* have been studied.

In the second stage, the collected materials have been compared and critically examined from the point of view of the objectives of the present work. The relevant books have been reviewed critically to have a better and clear picture of the Gupta age. Some historical and geographical phenomena have also been taken into consideration in this regard. Thus, information and data collected at different levels from various sources have been systematically arranged for proper analysis and interpretation.

Political Aspects of the Society as Depicted in the *Padmaprābhṛtaka*:

Monarchy prevailed in ancient India, so at the age of the *Padmaprābhṛtaka bhāṇa*. The *bhāṇa* mentions feudalism, which existed during that period. History also sheds light on the Gupta times when

practising feudalism was vague.[2] The *Padmaprābhṛtaka* mentions an incident where Maurya prince, Candrodaya is sent to dominate the *sāmanta*s.[3] As mentioned by Monier M. Williams, the term *sāmanta* means neighbour, feudatory prince, the chief of a district paying tribute to a lord paramount.[4] Some duties had to be followed by the *sāmanta*s including rendering military aid, paying tributes to the king, performing administrative and judicial functions of the states. More often they refused to obey the rules and took up arms against the kings. It is important to note that during the Gupta period, village headmen appointed by the king were also becoming semi-feudal officers primarily concerned with their gains.[5] And the kings made special operations to handle them either by making deals or using arms. In the *Padmaprābhṛtaka*, the poet uses the term *daṇḍa*[6], what was to be carried with the prince. The term *daṇḍa* could be used either to mean the involvement of military force

or to control, restraint[7] the *sāmanta*s by using any means. This incident refers to the prevalence of feudalism at the age of the *Padmaprābhṛtaka* and the opposition of the *sāmanta*s. And to subdue their instinct to attack, the state took action upon them by using military forces.

Political Aspects of the Society as Depicted in the *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda*:

The plot of the *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda bhāṇa* is situated in Kusumapura city. Kusumapura was another name of Pāṭaliputra which was one of the ancient capitals of Magadha. Viśākhadatta in his *Mudrārākṣasa* mentions both the names Kusumapura[8] and Pāṭaliputra.[9] In the notes of the *Mudrārākṣasa*, M.R.Kale remarks that Pāṭaliputra was founded by a certain prince named Putraka and he named the city after his wife Pāṭali[10]. Pāṭaliputra was known by many names like Kusumapura, Kusumadhvaja, Puṣpapura, Polibothra[11]. During the Gupta period, Kusumapura is meant by the term *nagara* i.e., city. In the *Mudrārākṣasa* also, the term *nagara* is used

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[2] Ram Sharan Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India,* p.202

[3] sa ca subhagaḥ sāmantapraśamanārthaṁ daṇḍenodyataḥ / *Padmaprābhṛtaka*, p.40

[4] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.1205

[5] Sharma, Ram Sharan Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p.211

[6] sa ca subhagaḥ sāmantapraśamanārthaṁ daṇḍenodyataḥ / *Padmaprābhṛtaka*, p.40

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[7] M.Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-Engkish Dictiory*, p.466

[8] asti kusumapure maṇikāraśreṣṭhī candanadāso nāma / *Mudrārākṣasa*, p.132

[9] ....eṣa pāṭaliputrādāgataḥ iti / *Ibid.,* p.200

[10] *Mudrārākṣasa*, Notes, p.53

[11] *Some Aspects of Literary References to Pataliputra, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* vol. 58 (1997), p. 160

to indicate the city Kusumapura[12]. Daṇḍin in his *Daśakumāracarita* refers to Puṣpapurī as the centre of Magadha, which was considered as a touchstone for other cities that prevailed at that period. It was an affluent city because of its diverse culture and business.[13] Puṣpapurī was another name for Kusumapura or Pāṭaliputra as remarked by Taracharan Bhattacharya in his Bālabodhinī[14] commentary of the *Daśakumāracarita*. The name of Kusumapura was established throughout the world and the term *nagara* i.e., the city was not shared by any other place.[15] The *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda* mentions that there are large mansions everywhere in the city and people are amazed by the prosperity of the country from the selling of vast amount of products to flooding of people.[16]

Kusumapura followed a very strict administrative ethics. In that Gupta periodic society, the citizens of Kusumapura had to pay taxes on regular basis. Some persons got appointed as *nagaraghaṭṭaka*, they were most probably the tax collector. It is quite clear from the speech of Viṭa that they maintained the rigorous discipline to collect tax from city dwellers, cf., *yadyapyanyo'sti nagaraghaṭṭakānāṁ praveśāya mārgaḥ /*[17]

As mentioned by the *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda,* there were also some other prosperous cities that exist other than kusumapura in that period[18]. But, kusumapura had some specialties which established the city as a unique one among all. Kusumapura had a prosperous socio-economic and culturally flourished condition, women were treated with respect and citizens were well-mannered and enlightened. As specified by Viṭa, the significant features of Kusumapura are that it is full of donators, art forms are always respected, women are only addressed with courtesy, uneducated persons are not jealous. All the people are affable and well-versed in polite conversations and they appreciate the talents of others. According to Viṭa, Kusumapura is such a prosperous city that even the gods find joy in the city

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12 evaṁ khalu nagaravāsī jano mantrayate /
Mudrārākṣasa, p.14

13 asti samastanagarīnikaṣāyamāṇā śaśvadagaṇyapaṇyavistāritamaṇigaṇādivastujātavyākhyātaratnākaramāhātmyā magadhadeśaśekharībhūtā puṣpapurī nāma nagarī /
Daśakumāracarita, Prathamocchāsa, pp.4-5

14 puṣpapurī kusumapuraṁ nāma nagarī asti vartate yasyāḥ sāmpratikaṁ nāma pāṭaliputramiti jñeyam /
Daśakumāracarita, Prathamocchāsa, p.5

15 ….kusumapurasyānanyanaga*rasa*dṛśī nagaramityaviśeṣagrāhiṇī pṛthivyāṁ sthitāḥ kīrtiḥ /
Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda, p.66

16 bahuni khalvasya purasya gṛhāṇayucchrāyavanti / paṇayasamudāyajjanabāhulyācca tāṁstān samṛddhiveśceśān dṛṣṭvā vismayate janaḥ /
Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda, p.69

17 *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda,* p.69

18 ……santi hyanyānyapi samṛddhimanti purāṇi /
Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda , pp.69-70

abandoning the pleasure of heaven.[19] In the rainy season, even kings who hold each other in hostile contempt set aside their quarrels.[20]

In the Gupta period, some accords were provided by the government which were known as *agrahāra*. With the rise of Saivism and Vaishnavism in society, the Hindu rulers were not lagging in making grants to the Brahmins. The system of conferring *agrahāra* started from the reign of King Kumāragupta.[21] *Agrahāra* was the royal donation of land to Brahmins given in form of land or village.[22] Ramila was considered the sole inheritor of the Kāmadeva's *agrahāra*. This again indicates that government property inheritance was in practice at the time of the *Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda*.

Political Aspects of the Society as Depicted in the *Ubhayābhisārikā*:

In ancient India, the kings formulated a council of ministers for administering the state properly. Such political counsel was invested with a certain power. The *Ubhayābhisārikā* mentions *mahāmātramukhya* i.e., the head of the *mahāmātra*. *Mahāmātra* could be a man of high rank, high official or prime minister of the state. This indicates that the king also appointed some officials called *mahāmātramukhya* who were higher in the ranks than the *mahāmātra*. According to the description found in the *Ubhayābhisārikā*, it appears that *mahāmātramukhya*s were assigned to roam here and there and gathered the updates of the city.[23]

Political Aspects of the Society as Depicted in the *Pādatāḍitaka*:

Monarchy was in practice at the age of the *Pādatāḍitaka*. The king appointed state officials like *Mahāmātra, Baleṣvadhikṛta Śāsanādhikṛta, Amātya. Mahāmātra* is a high official or prime minister of the state.[24] The term *adhikṛta* refers to the head or superintendent of administration.[25] *Śāsana* means the royal

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[19] datāraḥ sulabhāḥ kalā bahumatā dākṣiṇyabhogyāḥ striyao

nonmatta dhanino na matsarayutā vidyāvihīnā narāḥ/

sarvaḥ śiṣṭakatha parasparaguṇagrāhī kṛtajñāṁ janaḥ

śakyaṁ bhoḥ nagare surairapi divaṁ santyajya labdhuṁ sukham //

Dhūrtaviṭadaṁvāda, p.70

[20] samprati pārthivānāmapi

tāvadnyonyabaddhavairāṇāṁ pratinivṛttāḥ kalahā /

Ibid., p.83

[21] Rajaram Narayan Saletore, *Life in the Gupta Age,* pp. 543-544

[22] M.Moner Williams, *A Sanskrit- English Dictionary,* p.6

[23] …..itastataḥ paricalantaḥ śobhante mahāmātramukhyāḥ / *Ubhayābhisārikā,* p.125

[24] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary,* p.798

[25] *Ibid.,* p.20

edict or command.[26] Viṣṇunāga is the son of a *Mahāmātra* and he is a *Śāsanādhikṛta* by profession. *Śāsanādhikṛta* is the superintendent of the royal edict section.[27]Dayitaviṣṇu is a *Baleṣvadhikṛta* of king. *Bala* implies military force or troops[28]. Hence, he is the commander of the king's army[29]. Viṣṇudāsa is appointed both as *amātya* of the king[30] and also as *prāḍvivāka*. The term *Amātya* denotes minister.[31]

To administer the judicial system properly, the king assigned *prāḍvivāka* in the state[32]. *Prāḍvivāka* is the chief or judge of a stationary court according to M.Monier Williams.[33] In the *Daśakumāracarita,* Daṇḍin cites the word *prāḍvivāka* for an authorized official who pronounces judgment on some disputes related to the Brahmins.[34] M.R.Kale derives the word *prāḍvivāka* as *prāḍvivāko vyavahāranirṇāyakaḥ /*[35] In the thirty-fourth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharatamunui elaborately presents the qualities of a *Prāḍvivāka.* Those who are well aware of litigation, monetary transactions, intelligent, and well-versed in many departments of knowledge, impartial, followers of *dharma,* wise, able to discriminate between good and bad deeds, and are forbearing and self-controlled, who can control anger, are not haughty and have equal respect for all, should be appointed as *Prāḍvivāka* or judge.[36] The Gupta kings were known for their military invasions. The reign of Candragupta II was remarkable for his military campaigns laid in different parts of India. War with Śakas, automatically included the regions *mālava, aparānta* i.e., modern-day Konkan that includes *kāthiyāvār,*[37] to the Gupta dominion. This was one of the most important achievements of Candragupta

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[26] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.1069

[27] bhavati ca punarmahāmātraputro rājñaḥ śāsanādhikṛta iti na dānakāmopekṣate / *Pādatāḍitaka,* p.154

[28] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary,* p.722

[29] …eṣa yo'yaṁ rājño baleṣvadhikṛtaḥ pāraśavaḥ kaviḥ …. / *Pādatāḍitaka,* p.160

[30] …vṛṣalacaukṣāmātyo viṣṇudāsaḥ / *Ibid.,* p.163

[31] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary,* p.81

[32] anena hyevaṁ mahatyapi prāḍvivākakarmaṇi niyuktena…… ../ *Pādatāḍitaka,* p.164

[33] M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.709

[34] ….nyāya iti prāḍvivākavākyādakṣuraddhaṇāya nīyate / *Daśakumāracarita,* p.131

[35]*Daśakumāracarita,* p.131

[36] vyavahārārthatatvajñā buddhimanto bahuśrutāḥ
   madhyasthāḥ dhārmikā dhīrā
kāryākāryavicakṣaṇāḥ /
   kṣāntā dāntāḥ jitakrodhā noddhatāḥ samadarśinaḥ
   īdṛśāḥ prāḍvivākāśca sthāpyā dharmāsaneṣvatha //
Nāṭyaśāstra, 34.93-94

[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aparanta

II.[38] This same possession of Gupta king over the Śaka kings reigned on *mālava* and *aparānta* has been mentioned by Śyāmilaka in his *Pādatāḍitaka.*[39]

At the age of the *Pādatāḍitaka,* Sārvabhuama city was full of people belonged to different dynasties viz., Śaka, Yavana, Tuṣāra, Pārasīka, Magadha, Kirāta, Kaliṅga, Vaṁga, Mahiṣaka, Cola, Pāṇḍya, Kerala. According to historical pieces of evidence, Śakas were conquered by Candragupta II.[40] The *Mahābhārata* has also made references to the dynasties viz., Yavana, Kirāta, Śaka, Tuṣāra [41] Kaliṅga, Pārasīka Vaṁga and Mahiṣaka.[42] It is important to note that, in the *Manusmṛti,* Manu has stated some of the dynasties that are also mentioned in the present *bhāṇa.* Manu states that the dynasties viz., Śaka, Yavana, Kirāta were conquered by Vṛṣala i.e., Candragupta II.[43] King Candragupta II was also known as Vṛṣala who was by birth a Śūdra.[44] In the *Mudrārākṣasa* also,

sometimes Kauṭilya addressed Candragupta II by the name Vṛṣala.[45]

The societies of these four *bhāṇa*s depict Monarchism that prevailed during the age of the *Caturbhāṇī.* The king assigned state officials to administer the state properly. He created various posts like *Amātya, Mahāmātra, Baleśvadhikṛta, Śāsanākṛta* etc. It implies systematic and disciplined political arrangements of the Gupta dynasty. The *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* has mentioned the system of conferring *agrahāra* i.e., royal donation and the *Pādatāḍitaka* mentions the high official called *Śāsanākṛta* i.e., the chief of royal edict section. This indicates that the system of conferring *agrahāra* was considered as an important political order.

Conclusion :

The four *bhāṇa*s of the *Caturbhāṇī* reflect the strict administrative ethics practised by the cities. The *Padmaprābhṛtaka* builds a military force to control the rising potency of the *sāmanta*s, the *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* mentions hard and fast rules for collecting taxes. The *Ubhayābhisārikā* helps us in providing the knowledge of the service of the royal officers of Pāṭaliputra. The *Ubhayābhisārikā* refers to the appointments

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[38] R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Age*, p.21

[39] yenāparāntaśakamālavabhūpatīnāṁ

    kṛtvā śirassu caraṇau caratā yathcṣṭam /

Pādatāḍitaka, 60

[40] R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Age*, p.21

[41] yavanāḥ kirātā gāndhāraśca cīnāḥ śabarabarbarāḥ /

    śakāsa tuṣārāḥ kahlāśa ca pahlavāśca cāndhra

madrakāḥ // *Mahābhārata,*Śāntiparva.65.13

[42] *Mahābhārata,* Bhīṣmaparva, 6.9. 46-58

[43] *Manusmṛti,* 10.43-44

[44] M.Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.1013

[45] …kathamasau vṛṣalasya sācivyagrahaṇcna sānugrahaḥ syāditi / *Mudrārākṣasa*, p.28

of high official *mahāmātra* i.e., the superintendent of *amātra* to look after the activities of ministers and the *Pādatāḍitaka* mentions military campaigns lay in different parts of India along with creating various political positions to govern the state effectively. These descriptions reflect the loyalty of the state officials to their state. Among the four *bhāṇa*s, the *Pādatāḍitaka* pertains to the existence of a full-formed judicial system.

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Ubhayābhisārikā helps us in providing the knowledge of the service of the royal officers of Pāṭaliputra. The *Ubhayābhisārikā* refers to the appointments of high official *mahāmātra* i.e., the superintendent of *amātra* to look after the activities of ministers and the *Pādatāḍitaka* mentions military campaigns lay in different parts of India along with creating various political positions to govern the state effectively. These descriptions reflect the loyalty of the state officials to their state. Among the four *bhāṇa*s, the *Pādatāḍitaka* pertains to the existence of a full-formed judicial system.

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