

# Polygamy and Genealogy in the Gupta Age: A Note on Feudalism from Above in Ancient India

The aim of this note is to illustrate a point raised by Engels in *Anti-Duhring*, about the relationship between 'social institutions and politics': 'it is always the exercise of social functions which is at the basis of political supremacy'. I hope to show the importance of polygamy and genealogies in the development of a political system known to some historians of Ancient India as 'feudalism from above'. I shall use the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta to illustrate my point.<sup>1</sup>

'Feudalism from above' means 'a state wherein an emperor or a powerful king levied tribute from subordinates who still ruled in their own right and did what they liked within their own territories — as long as they paid the paramount ruler'.<sup>2</sup> This system is contrasted with 'feudalism from below', when administration is left in the hands of a land-owning stratum which stood between the state and the villages. More often than not this stratum was created by the state through landgrants.<sup>3</sup>

This system of 'feudalism from above' is closely linked with the concept of *dharmavijaya*. The political theorists of Ancient India recognised three types of conquest: (*vijaya*), *lobhavijaya*, *asuravijaya* and *dharmavijaya*.<sup>4</sup> The 'conquest for greed' (*lobhavijaya*) meant raids into neighbouring kingdoms for wealth and the 'conquest according to the rules of demons' (*asuravijaya*) meant uprooting the families of defeated kings and the annexing of territories. Almost all political theorists of ancient India condemned the first two modes of conquest. The ideal king was a *dharmavijayin* (righteous conqueror). According to the rules of *dharma* the ideal conqueror should not uproot the royal

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<sup>1</sup> For the stories of *Aśvamedha* and *Rājasuya* I have used P. C. Roy (ed. and trans.), *Mahābhārata*, 'Sabhā Parva' and 'Śānti Parva', 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1919-21. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription is from J. F. Fleet (ed.), *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, London, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism (300-1200)*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 1-76.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India*, Oxford, 1964, p. 168.

families of defeated kingdoms. Instead he should reinstate the defeated kings on their thrones, as long as they accepted the victor as their overlord. In practice, however, most Indian monarchs followed whichever mode or combination of modes the situation demanded. But still the ideal king was a *dharmavijayin*. In A.D. 150 Rudradāman prided himself on being an 'establisher of kings who had lost their lands'.<sup>5</sup> We have many such examples in literature and in historical records before A.D. 150, but more frequently from the fifth century on. It would seem that the system of tributary kingdoms was more common during the post-Gupta period than before.

Originally the word *sāmanta* was used to mean 'neighbour'. In the *Arthasātra* and in Aśokan inscriptions (c. 300 B.C.) *samānta* meant 'neighbouring kings'. By A.D. 455 the word came to indicate 'subordinate king'. By A.D. 700 it was a standard word for 'feudatory'. This semantic change indicates, I think, the development of a system of 'subordinate neighbouring kings', i.e. feudalism from above. The history of medieval India is the history of constant warfare between rival monarchs in their attempts to reduce neighbouring kings to subordinate positions.

Marxist historians such as Kosambi and Sharma have taken a linear view of pre-Muslim history. Indian society, according to this view, passed through various stages of development from tribal kingdoms to feudalism. The Vedic period (c. 1500-600 B.C.) is seen as a period of tribal warfare and of the development of agriculture. This was followed by a period of great kingdoms (*mahājanapada*), expansion of trade and the breakdown of tribal systems (c. 600-350 B.C.). The period of 'Imperial Unity' (c. 350-180 B.C.) followed the period of great kingdoms, when Magadha brought most of India under her control and organised a highly centralised state. The 'Age of Invasion' destroyed the great Mauryan empire. The period saw the rise and fall of many kingdoms and many dynasties (c. 180 B.C.-A.D. 300). The age of the Imperial Guptas saw another attempt to build a large empire. The empire that the Guptas built was not as large as the Mauryan empire and it was also quite different in nature. The core of the empire was ruled directly by the emperor while vast parts of the kingdom were ruled by tributary kings who enjoyed various degrees of autonomy (A.D. 320-543). But after the Huṇa invasions no such empire was possible and the age of feudalism ensued (from about A.D. 500 till the consolidation of

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<sup>5</sup> *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. VIII, p. 44.

the empire under Akbar, the Great Mughal, in A.D. 1556). This is a bird's-eye view of Indian history, and it is rather too simple. The Kosambi-Sharma thesis is far more sophisticated than this outline, and I agree with them that a form of feudalism developed in India at the end of the fifth century A.D. But I feel that they tend to ignore the importance of the Guptas in this process, the role of polygamy and genealogies, and the fact that tributary kingdoms existed in India at least 600 years before the rise of Magadha.

Two royal sacrifices are connected with *dharmavijaya*: *rājasuya* and *āśvamedha*. One of the purposes of the *rājasuya* sacrifice was to confirm the title of paramount king by the tributary princes. We are told in the *Mahābhārata*, the great epic, that the king, with or without an army at his back, entering the dominion of the kingdom which he would subjugate, should say to all the people, 'I am your king. I shall always protect you. Give me the just tribute or encounter me in battle.' If the people accept him for their king, there need not be any fighting. If a hostile king be vanquished by the troops of the invader, the latter should not himself fight his vanquished foe. On the other hand, he should bring him to his (conqueror's) palace and persuade the vanquished foe for a whole year to say, 'I am thy slave.'

It would seem that the payment of tribute and the acceptance of suzerainty was mostly a formality. Yudhiṣṭhira performed *rājasuya*; his brothers went out to conquer all kingdoms for him. Arjuna fought King Bhāgadatta of Prāgjyotiṣā. The battle ended in a stalemate. Arjuna then said:

'Let tribute be paid to Yudhiṣṭhira. Thou art my father's friend and I also have been gratified by thee. I cannot command thee, let the tribute therefore be paid by thee joyously at thy will.'

And Bhāgadatta was 'subjugated' for he paid tribute.

A more important sacrifice which is closely linked with the development of the order of 'neighbouring subordinate kings' was *āśvamedha*. It is an ancient form of sacrifice, probably developed in the remote Indo-European past. We know that many Indian kings performed this sacrifice until the end of the eighth century A.D. Puṣyamitra Śuṅga performed such a sacrifice in 181 B.C., Samudra Gupta performed it some time after A.D. 350 and eighty years later his grandson Kumāra Gupta I performed it.

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At the beginning of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, rice porridge was cooked for all priests and gifts of 4,000 cows and 400 pieces of gold were given to them. The king then prayed, surrounded by his wives and various ranks of servants and officers. In the evening, after another sacrifice (*agnihotra*) had been offered, the king sat between the legs of his second queen, remaining abstinent during the night. The following morning, the stallion that had been selected for the ceremony was brought out and more offerings and gifts were made. The horse was then let loose to roam at will with 100 other horses, protected by a troop of warriors. They were to fight anyone who resisted the horse and also to prevent the horse from mating with any of the mares. For a year the horse was to roam unrestricted while the priests offered more sacrifices, told legends of the king's ancestors and received gifts. When the horse and the warriors returned, having subdued many kings, the horse was bathed and led to the sacrificial post, ornamented with gold and other decorations. A number of other animals were prepared to be sacrificed with the horse. The horse was then killed and its entrails taken and the odours inhaled by the king and his followers. Then a cloak was thrown over the horse and it was approached by the chief queen who had mock intercourse with it, while other women stood around making ribald merriment over the situation. After this the limbs were cremated and gifts were given to the priests.

As stories of these sacrifices are to be found in the later Vedic literature and in the Epics, it seems that there were tributary kingdoms in India before the age of the great *janapadas*. If we were to look at feudalism simply as a barter system, whereby services are exchanged for protection, some form of feudalism existed in many periods of history and in many countries. Warriors protect cultivators in exchange for services and tribute, and strong monarchs protect weaker chieftains in exchange for tribute. It occurs whenever a military power conquers a large territory, which, because of cumbersome and expensive transport systems, cannot itself be controlled by one unitary government, and the economy cannot be controlled by one common market. Hence a system of exchange of services and hierarchy evolves. But the exchange of services, and tributary kingdoms, are only two factors in a complex system which can be called 'feudalism'. We may call an order 'feudalism' when a 'feudal mode of production' develops with decentralisation of government. In India, a feudal mode of production evolves with the process of what Indian historians call 'feudalism from below'. By 'feudal mode of production', I mean a simple division of

labour, a low level of technology, production primarily for the village community and not for wider markets. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The surplus is absorbed by a stratum of intermediaries (Brahmins, temples, monasteries, hereditary chieftains, military officers, civil servants and subordinate kings) and the state. What is interesting to note is the fact that 'feudalism from above' (which was an old process) took its classical form about the same time as the 'feudal mode of production' dominated the economy. Samudra Gupta's *dharmavijaya* played an important role in this development.

There is enough numismatic evidence to link the Guptas with the invading Śakas and Kuṣānas, different branches of Scythian invaders. They established themselves in and around Magadha sometime during the middle of the third century A.D. They needed to legitimise their rule, so they patronised Sanskrit, Vaishnava religion, wore Indian clothes and married into important families. The subject classes, the cultivators and herdsmen, had 'family' in the sense of wife and children, but the ruling classes needed 'family' in the sense of recorded genealogy, whose acceptance decided their higher status. In ancient India there was already a long tradition of keeping genealogies and kinglists. The *Purānas* maintained such lists. But by the time the Guptas rose to power the *Purānas* were committed to writing and their genealogies received such sacred status that they could not be altered.<sup>6</sup> The last section of the *Purānas* mentioned the Guptas as the rulers of Oudh (Saketa), Allahabad (Prayāga) and South Bihar (Magadha). It would seem that the *Purānas* referred to the kingdom of Candra Gupta I who assumed the imperial title of *Mahārāja-dhirāja*. The Guptas had created their own genealogies in their official inscriptions. All Gupta kings proudly proclaimed themselves as descendants of a *Lichhavi dauhitra* (son of a daughter of the Lichhavis) and quite unlike other genealogies of ancient India, the Guptas mention their mothers' names.

This clearly indicates that matrimonial alliances were crucial to the dynasty. The system of polygamy made it possible for the king to marry into many families, thus it was a source of power and status. It was, however, also a source of their weakness. All factions at the imperial court revolved round queens and their sons. There was almost no peaceful succession to the throne in Gupta history. Hence it was important for the rulers to mention their mothers' names. The system is

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<sup>6</sup> F. E. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, Oxford, 1913, pp. viii-x.

well illustrated in the Gupta documents, particularly in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription is a *praśasti* (eulogy) of 33 lines composed by Hariṣeṇa, who held many posts at Samudra Gupta's court, including that of court poet. It seems that this was originally at Kosambi, where Samudra Gupta fought his successful battle against the Nāga kings, and Hariṣeṇa thought it fit to inscribe his panegyric record on this splendid Aśokan pillar.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth verse of this *praśasti* refers to an emotional court scene. The father, Candra Gupta I, in the presence of the full court embraced Samudra Gupta, and overcome with emotion, 'with the hairs of his body standing erect and with tears in his eyes', declared, 'You are worthy, protect the whole earth'. We are told that this declaration caused joy among the courtiers (*sabhyeṣucchavaneṣu*) and heartburning among others, of equal birth, who looked with sad faces at Samudra Gupta (*tulyakulaja mlān anān adviksi/tā/h*).

This emotional scene at the court refers to some political upheaval in the kingdom. To understand the nature of the political crisis we have to look elsewhere. There is enough numismatic evidence to show that there was in this period another Gupta king who ruled for about five years and issued coins. His name was Kāca. It seems that Kāca, who was one of the sons of Candra Gupta I, rebelled against his father and brothers and proclaimed himself king. It is most likely that Candra Gupta had many wives and, hence, that there were many claimants to the throne. It is probable that Samudra Gupta was not the eldest son of Candra Gupta I, but was the ablest and most powerful due to his Lichhavi connections. This is why Candra Gupta had to call a special *sabhā* where he declared that he favoured Samudra Gupta. This brought joy to many and made others sad. Hariṣeṇa deliberately chose the term *tulyakulaja* (men of equal birth) to distinguish this group from others of the same family. The term *kula* is used here for maternal families.

The maternal families were contesting the Gupta throne and the Lichhavis whose candidate was Samudra Gupta were among them. Candra Gupta's selection and the victory of Samudra Gupta over his brothers (which is referred to in the fragmentary verse of the inscription) was a victory for the Lichhavis. Hence the Lichhavi connection had to be mentioned. This connection was important both socially and politically. According to *Mānava-dharmaśāstra* (X. 20, 22) the Lichhavis were descendants of *vrātya kṣatriyas* and hence not one of the old Vedic *kṣatriya* tribe. They were, however, very prominent

during the time of the Buddha and gained respect from the North Indians, as one of their sons, Mahāvira, became the founder of the Jain religion. For an outsider such a social connection was important.

Hariṣeṇa describes his master's successful military campaigns in India. It is clear that Samudra Gupta pursued the policy of *asuravijaya* in North India. Hariṣeṇa mentions the names of some nine kings in North India who were 'uprooted' (*unmulya*). It is significant that the names of the defeated kingdoms are not mentioned. From other correlative evidence it is clear that these kingdoms were annexed to the Gupta empire. This area, from the south of Punjab to south-west Bengal, north of the Vindhyas and east of the Śaka kingdom, was directly controlled by the monarchs. They controlled the most important trade route in ancient India, mines and the fertile land of the Gangetic valley. They could manage it well. This was called *madhyadeśa* (middle country) and a Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hsien, who visited the kingdom during Candra Gupta II's reign, was most impressed:

The people (in the Middle Kingdom) are numerous and happy. They have not to register their households or attend to any magistrates and their rules. Only those who cultivate the royal land have to pay (a portion of) the grain from it. If they want to go they may go, if they want to stay on, they stay.... The king governs without decapitation or (other) corporal punishments. Criminals are simply fined, lightly or heavily, according to the circumstances (of each case)....The king's bodyguards and attendants all have salaries.... In buying and selling commodities they use cowries.<sup>7</sup>

Note that there was no serfdom in Madhyadeśa. The officers of the state received salaries and ordinary trade was carried on with cowries. The land tax was in grain. In the heart of the empire there was no feudal structure. Samudra Gupta followed a very different policy in his southern campaign. Hariṣeṇa tells us that the southern kings (*dakṣinapatha rājan*) were captured, liberated and favoured (*grahana—mokṣa—anugraha*). This phrase appears in Kālidasa's *Raghuvamśa* and it indicates a policy of *dharmavijaya*, where the defeated kings were reinstated on their thrones. Samudra Gupta was most likely accepted as

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<sup>7</sup> J. H. Legge, *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms: Being an Account of the Chinese Monk Fa-Hsien's Travels*, Oxford, 1886, pp 42-3.

their nominal paramount ruler. He pursued such a policy because he could not control these kingdoms from the north, without a modern transport system and without a modern bureaucracy.

It is clear from the history of the later period that the Guptas were driving westwards; they aimed at controlling the lucrative western trade, which was enjoyed by the Śakas. The southern campaign of Samudra Gupta aimed at reducing the kings to subordinate positions and enriching his treasury with gold and jewels. This treasure must have helped his son Candrar Gupta II to enable the army to conquer the Śaka kingdom in the late fourth century A.D.

Hariṣeṇa's *praśasti* now draws our attention to another group of kings and tribes in North India who entered into some feudatory and overlord relationship with Samudra Gupta. These were the *pratyanta* kings and tribes. Samudra Gupta created a circle of friendly subordinate kings and tribes who lived beyond the frontiers of the kingdom he ruled directly. They paid all kinds of taxes, obeyed imperial orders and attended the imperial court to perform obeisance. These kingdoms included Nepal, Assam and East Bengal.

So the centre of the empire was directly controlled. In the south Samudra Gupta established his supremacy, but left the kings virtual rulers of their own domains. The forest dwellers were forced to serve him (*paricāraki kṛta*), then there was the circle of subordinate kings who paid all types of taxes and who lived near the borders of the kingdom he ruled directly. Thus there was a hierarchical structure and various rulers enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy.

Hariṣeṇa refers in verses 23 and 24 to another set of rulers, who accepted the suzerainty of Samudra Gupta and rendered a number of services to the emperor. This list includes the Śaka *Kṣatrapa* of West India, probably Shapur II of Persia, Ceylon and the Southeast Asian Islands; it is clear that the panegyrist got carried away. It is most likely that these powers exchanged embassies and gifts. We know from the Chinese sources that Meghavarna, King of Ceylon (c. A.D. 352-379), sent a mission to Samudra Gupta to seek permission to build a monastery and a rest house in Bodhgaya. The permission was readily given and a splendid monastery was built, north of the Bodhi tree. It was suggested by a Chinese pilgrim, Hsuan-tsang, who visited the monastery nearly three hundred years later, that the Ceylonese king 'gave in tribute to the king of India all the jewels of his country'.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>8</sup> S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1906, Vol. I.



seems that there were many such embassies from other formidable contemporary kings and Hariṣeṇa distorted the evidence to glorify his master.

I think, however, this list of services sums up the Gupta views of the relationship between the paramount ruler and his subordinates. They should offer their services to the king (*ātma-nivedana*) and they should offer their daughters in marriage (*kanyopāyana-dāna*). This seems to refer to a custom of exchanging daughters as gifts.

The third compound, *garutmad-aṅka-sva-viṣaya-bhukti-śāsana-yācana*, is difficult to translate. It can mean that there was a twofold request for charters (*śāsana-yācana*) (i) for the use of Gupta coins bearing the *garuda* symbol (*garutmad-aṅka*), and (ii) for the government of their own territories (*sva-viṣaya-bhukti*). But I think that we should take *garutmad-aṅka* as the epithet of *śāsana*. Then this compound would mean that these princes were soliciting for a Gupta charter bearing the *garuda* seal in order to enjoy their own territories (*sva-viṣaya-bhukti*). Although it is clear that none of the princes mentioned in the inscriptions rendered such services, these, however, were expected from the feudatories and were in fact offered by many kings from North and South India.

The phrase *kanyopāyana-dāna* clearly refers to the policy of matrimonial alliances. Candra Gupta I married the Lichhavi princess Kumāradevi, a union which was important both politically and socially. His grandson Candra Gupta II had many wives — one of them was his brother's widow<sup>9</sup> and another one was Kuberaṅga, a Nāga princess. The daughter of this union, Prabhāvatī, was married to the Vākāṭaka king Rudra Sena II. In fact Prabhāvatī ruled the Vākāṭaka kingdom as a regent for her minor son. The powerful Kadamba dynasty of Kuntala (Karnataka) gave their daughters to the Guptas. This process continued throughout the whole period of Gupta history.

Polygamy and genealogies are symbols of power and status. Their existence indicates inegalitarian society. In a feudal structure polygamy reinforces the status and power of the paramount rulers, and genealogy helps confirm the high rank of the superiors. Perhaps the Guptas were not very different from the aspiring chieftains in Melanesian societies. Like them they had to accumulate a 'store of power' — gold, control of trade routes, control of the supply of iron ore and a large army. But they had to create a network of obligations and a following by careful

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<sup>9</sup> *Supra*, p. 123.

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distribution of goods and favours. Like Malinowski's Trobriand chiefs<sup>10</sup> the Guptas used polygamy as a source of power and privilege. What is true for a segmentary society with a relatively simple economy can also be true for a 'state society' and a complex economy. Family and kinship are important in all societies, more so in pre-industrial societies. Polygamy and genealogies helped to create a hierarchy and a circle of subordinate kings, and hence feudalism from above. The process had to be different in Christian Europe, with primogeniture and monogamy.

### POSTSCRIPT

The original version of this paper was presented at a workshop organised by the Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture (SASSC) in 1981. The present version is the paper read at the International Conference on Feudalism held in Sydney in 1984.<sup>11</sup> I did not publish this paper for I wanted to make some important changes in it, in the light of a recent debate on feudalism in India and the recent researches on the Allahabad Pillar Inscription especially by Mr Alistair Dick of London. I have now decided to publish the 1984 version of my paper with this postscript, in which I summarise the recent debate on feudalism and the implications of my research on polygamy and genealogy in relation to feudal (*sāmanta*) policy in India.

The outline of feudalism in India that we have already mentioned above comes from the works of Marxist historians of India, mostly from books and articles by Kosambi, Sharma and Yadava. The idea of feudalism is one of the most important constructs in Indian historiography. The debate that was sparked off by the publication of Kosambi's book in 1956 still continues. Two of the most important critics of the Kosambi-Sharma thesis are Harbans Mukhia<sup>12</sup> and B. D. Chattopadhyaya.<sup>13</sup>

Mukhia, supporting the old thesis of an 'unchanging India' during the pre-colonial period, finds that in India, unlike Europe, there appears to have been no prolonged and acute scarcity either of labour or production: 'The routine increase in demand could perhaps have been met by the routine extension of agriculture.' There was no tension,

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, Cambridge, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Leach, S. N. Mukherjee and John O. Ward (eds), *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, Sydney, 1985, pp. 1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Harbans Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 8, 3, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Process and Structure of Polity in Early Medieval India: Problems of Perspective', *Indian History Congress*, 1984.

economic, social or political, to change the mode of production in pre-colonial India. Chattopadhyaya, on the other hand, does not directly attack the *sāmanta-feudatory* network theory, but only the simple equation between the fragmentation of government and land grants. He highlights the process of legitimisation of lineages, old and new, both at the centre and at the periphery, and the interdependence of the temporal and spiritual powers. According to Chattopadhyaya there developed in India a system close to the classical feudal polity of Europe, but its origins and nature were quite different from the simple picture of feudalism as depicted by Kosambi, Sharma and Yadava.

Whatever might have been the origins and the real nature of the *sāmanta* system, it is clear that in India, with the coming of the Guptas, a strong feudal ideology developed. There was no universal feudal system, but there was a common ideology-shared value system, which could be found in many pre-modern societies in Asia and Europe.

This ideology was associated with a faith in hierarchy ('the natural order' was against equality), in the idea of exchange of services (duties and obligations for all, kings, lords and serfs), in valour, in warriors and in some form of divine sanction for kingship and feudal order. It would be wrong to presume that such an ideology did not exist in the pre-Gupta period of Indian history, but it was more marked in the Gupta and post-Gupta period where it became the dominant ideology; and polygamy and new style genealogies were used to foster this ideology and the system.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta was a *praśasti* (eulogy) composed by Hariṣeṇa highlighting his master's achievements. To Hariṣeṇa, however, it was *kāvya*, a narrative poem like Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*. Modern researches by Dick in London and by Agrawal in Chandigarh suggest that Kālidāsa was a contemporary of Hariṣeṇa and there are striking similarities between the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and the great poet's story of the dynasty of Raghu. Alistair Dick goes further and suggests that Hariṣeṇa was Kālidāsa himself and the *praśasti* was a *śleṣa* (satire) written after the death of Samudra Gupta. We await the results of Dick's researches, but the inscription still is an important document for the development of 'feudalism from above' and feudal ideology.

If valour was an important element of feudal ideology, then according to Hariṣeṇa, Samudra Gupta was a great feudal hero, 'whose most charming body was covered over with all the beauty of the marks of a hundred confused wounds, caused by the blows of battle-axes,

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arrows... and many other (weapons)' (line 17). Samudra Gupta was compared with the gods like Varuna and Indra and he was a protector of *dharma*. Thus there were divine and spiritual sanctions for Samudra Gupta.

In a patriarchal and patrilineal society as India was, genealogists did not usually record women members of the families in their works. In the ancient period, the Purāṇa kinglists ignored women, as did the bardic poets of late medieval Rajasthan and the seventeenth-century matchmakers of Bengal. What is unique about the Gupta and post-Gupta genealogies of the early medieval period is that the names of the mothers of the emperors are proudly mentioned in them. This was true for the Guptas and for the dynasty of Harṣa-vardhana of Thaneswar and for many other dynasties of North India.

The Gupta princes and princesses strongly identified themselves with their respective maternal families. Prabhāvātī Gupta proudly mentions her mother's *gotra* (clan), Dharana. Dharana was not her husband Rudrasena II's *gotra*, nor was it the *gotra* of her father Candra Gupta II, but it was her mother Kuberaṅga's paternal family *gotra*.

It would seem that the system of polygamy gave the women's *kula* a political status in the Gupta court and strengthened the network of the *śāman*-tributary system ('feudalism from above'). In this respect the aspirations and the mode of behaviour of the Gupta emperors were no different from those of the Trobriand chiefs. The following quotation from Malinowski<sup>14</sup> could help us to understand Hariṣeṇa's concepts of *Kanyopāyana-dāna* and *ātma-nivedana*:

The chief possesses a high degree of authority within his own village, but his sphere of influence extends far beyond it. A number of villages are tributary to him, and in several respects subject to his authority. In case of war, they are his allies and have to forgather in his village.... From each subject village, he takes a wife, whose family, according to Trobriand law, has to supply him with large amounts of crops. This wife is always the sister or some relation of the headman of the subject village, and thus practically the whole community has to work for him.

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<sup>14</sup> B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London, 1932, pp. 63-5.