

Development & Growth During the Rule of Western Kshtrapas

Abstract

The Western Kshatrapas, or Western Satraps, were Saka rulers of the western and central part of India (Saurashtra and Malwa: modern Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states). They were synchronic with the Kushans who ruled the northern part of the Indian subcontinent and the Satavahana (Andhra) who ruled in central India. Kshatrapa, a Sanskrit form of an early Persian word, means "protector of the land." The title Kshatrapa was addressed to the heir-apparent to the throne (usually the son) and the more exalted title of Mahaksatrapa (akin to Maharaja) was bestowed upon the ruling king. Both the Mahaksatrapa and his subordinate, the Kshatrapa, ruled independently and were permitted to mint and issue coins bearing their own names. The long reign of these leaders of Persian descent was marked by stability and peace, which resulted in overall development and prosperity. Coming from the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea, Gujarat was the maritime gateway to India. Throughout this period, Gujarat's ties with the Persian world were maintained either overland via Arachosia (Zābolestān) or Gandhara (Taxila), or by sea. The archaeological and literary data of this time will support me to understand my study.

Keywords: Kshatrapa, Gujarat, Vihara, Three Arched hill, Trade, Bharuch, Nahapana, Coins

Introduction

The Western Kshatrapas, or Western Satraps, (35-405 CE) were Saka rulers of the western and central part of India (Saurashtra and Malwa: modern Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states). They were contemporary with the Kushans who ruled the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, and the Satavahana (Andhra) who ruled in Central India.

With their foreign rudiments the Western Kshatrapa rulers were open with their trade policy and political developments of that time were deeply rooted in changing material conditions. This has been of importance not only in establishing a firm chronology of their rule, but also for dating many rulers of other dynasties contemporary known from their inscriptions. The Western Kshatrapas ruled a considerable kingdom, including parts of the modern states of Sind, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, yet they called themselves *kshatrapas* or *satraps*.

Aim of the Study

The aim of my paper is to understand the development during the period under study. My focus will be on trade, religion and other factors which played a major role in shaping the relative urbanization and overall development of Gujarat during that period.

History

Altogether, there were twenty seven independent Kshatrapa rulers during a period of about 350 years. The word *Kshatrapa* stands for *satrap*, and its equivalent in Persian *Ksatrapavan*, which means viceroy or governor of a province. Kshatrapa, a Sanskrit form of an early Persian word, means "protector of the land." The title Kshatrapa was addressed to the heir-apparent to the throne (usually the son) and the more exalted title of Mahaksatrapa (akin to Maharaja) was bestowed upon the ruling king. Both the Mahaksatrapa and his subordinate, the Kshatrapa, ruled independently and were permitted to mint and issue coins bearing their own names. The long reign of these leaders of Persian descent was marked by stability and peace, which resulted in overall development and prosperity. Though they are known as Sakas in the literature, they are commonly referred to as Western Kshatrapas due to their reign in the western region of India and Malwa.

The Kshaharata dynasty was short lived of which we know about the rulers Abhiraka, Bhumaka and Nahapana, through their coinage. Though there is no concrete evidence other than through their coins, it

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would seem that Nahapan was probably the last ruler of the dynasty Kshaharata. His territory included Gujarat to Ujjain and Nasik. The Kshatrapa dynasty became very powerful with the accession of Nahapana to the throne. Nahapana occupied vast portion of the Satavahana Empire in Western and Central India, although he was ultimately defeated by the powerful Satavahana king Gautamiputra Satakarni in 125 CE. Nahapana managed however to build a strong power base in the west, from which his successors would benefit.

He also established the Kshatrapa coinage. But soon, he lost his territory to Satavahana due to the conflict with the kingdoms of the northern Deccan and the Ganges valley.

Another Saka chieftain, maybe of same or different family named Chastana, laid the foundation of his dynasty around 78 AD in the kingdom of Malwa. The dynasty is referred to as Kardamakas. Here the Kshaharata significantly disintegrated into the Indian politics in the mid second century under the reign of Rudradaman I. With the declining Kushana power, he strengthened his reign and took up the title Mahakshatrapa, but soon had to invite troubles from the Satavahanas. The conflict became so grueling between Rudradaman and Satavahanas, that in order to contain the conflict, a matrimonial relationship was concluded by giving Rudradaman's daughter to the Satavahana king. But that did not stop Rudradaman from raging a war against Satavahanas and in fact Satavahanas were defeated twice in his hands known to us from Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradamana I. Such was the greatest of the Saka ruler and Chastana's grandson Rudradaman-I.

After the death of Rudradaman, the Sakas entered a political quietude until the end of fourth century AD. Damajadasari was the son and successor of Rudradaman-I. However it was Rudrasimha-I, the brother of Rudradaman ascended the throne instead of his son Jivadaman. Rudrasena-I, the son of Rudrasimha-I was the next Saka Satrap. He was followed by many insignificant satraps. Although it is known from the records that Rudrasimha-III, the Saka member was killed by Chandragupta-II (Vikramaditya) while sacking the Saka capital in 388 AD, It is doubtful that the dynasty was important. The dynasty seems to have ended with the death of Visvasena, the son of Bhartridaman. The Kshatrapa dynasty seems to have reached a high level of prosperity under the rule of Rudrasen II (256-278 CE), 19th ruler of Kshatrapa The last Kshatrapa ruler was Vishwasen, brother and successor to Bhratadaman and son of Rudrasena II. A new family took control under Rudrasimha, but was eventually conquered by the Gupta emperor Vikramaditya.

The Kshatrapas established their own calendar, which starts in 78 CE and defines the beginning of the Saka era, and which today the starting year for the official calendar of the Indian Republic.

Religion

Adopting Buddhism by the foreign rulers and traders was due to the liberal outlook of this religion. Thus Gujarat became a land of caste and sub- caste, the only of its kind existed in Ancient India. Due to the flexibility of Buddhism and acceptance of all within its

fold led to brisk growth of overseas trade. The kshatrapas were tolerant towards other religion is proved by many rock-cut caves and viharas. The local rulers were the ones who were patronizing this new religion Buddhism due to its simplicity. Due to intermingling in the society, the Dharma Sastras considered it a 'Mlechcha Desa' and forbade people to visit it and were outcaste except for pilgrimage. Thus Buddhism could be one of the reasons for the rapid growth of trade which brought about prosperity in this region. Buddhism under Asoka had become a state religion of the Maurya dynasty. The transformation of a local cult into a worldwide religion was the work of Asoka alone.

During the kshatrapa period many Rock-cut caves and excavations revealed the Buddhism activities of this time. Excavation at Devnimori , Vadnagar , Boriya Tekri near Junagarh, kamrej has yielded Stupa whereas Amreli , Baroda, Vallabhi , Intwa has evidences of Buddhism in Gujarat during Kshatrapa period. Rock cut caves like Babaparya, Uparkot, Sana, Khapra Kodia, (Junagarh) Kadiya dungar (Bharuch) near Jagadiya, Taranga, Khambalida, Siddhasar, (Rajkot), Talaja (Bhavnagar) Lakhpat, Bhuj, Gunthaligarh (Kutch). In Buddhist caves of the kshatrapa- Gupta period suggests the movement of the *bhikshus* in Gujarat. Each of these rock cut caves are in many numbers, some of them with sculptures and ornamentations and some are just plain. The discovery of a brick *stupa* and a *Vihara* at Devnimori belonging to Kshatrapa period, with big brick red terracotta sanctuary evincing Gandharan influence show a continuity of Buddhism in Gujarat. The Buddhist stone casket with inscription from the Maha Stupa and the relics of Buddha's ashes are worth mentioning. Boriya Tekri yielded a Stupa made of bricks whose casket is at present at Junagarh Museum. A terracotta sealing with *Brahmi* inscription 'Maharaja Rudrasen Vihare Bhikshu Sanghasya' found from Itwa during the reign of Rudrasena I (Ksatrapa King) depicts that a *Vihara* was run by the *Bhikshu sangha*. The Lakhpat excavations unearthed several clay sealings showing Buddha seated in *Bhumisparsh mudra*. It also has an inscription saying *Dharma sandesh* written in *Brahmi* dated to 3rd - 4th century A.D.

The Vadnagar excavations have revealed stupa. A structure, measuring 55 by 55 feet with 12 residential cells for the monks, of a Buddhist *vihara* or monastery, being in use from the second to the fourth century, has been unearthed. Its identity as a Buddhist monastery has been authenticated by a team of Japanese archaeologists that visited the place and examined the evidences excavated by Y. S. Rawat's team. The unearthed monastery corroborates well with the account of the famous Chinese traveller Hsuan-Tsang, who visited Vadnagar (then known as Anandapur) in the seventh century A.D, that the city had some ten *sangharams* with about a thousand Buddhist monks. The Kshatrapa coins excavated at Devnimori, Vadnagar, Amreli, Junagarh, Uparkot caves and Kutcha depicts the symbol of *chaitya* on the reverse.

Buddhism suited the commercial classes in the cities and provided for the merchants the required ethics. Buddhism looked favorably upon trade

supporters, happily tolerated money lending and praised freedom from debt without condemning indebtedness on principal. Buddhism was moderate in its stress on ahimsa. It had very liberal views towards trade and untouchables unlike the Hindu law books where only *Vaishyas* were to trade in certain commodities and sea voyage was considered a sinful act (Boudhyana). This gave impetus not only to *Vaisyas* to cross sea and trade overseas but encouraged other like *Bramanas* and *Kshatriyas* to take up this profession and become wealthy. A reflection of this can be seen in the *Mahavastu* (II.90) which refers to a *Brahmana* returning from across the seas and takes a local boat to reach *Bharuch*.

Trade

The strategic location of Gujarat, as it opens out into the Arabian Sea, has been historically important for trade and commerce, with ancient countries like Sumer, Phoenicia, Rome, Iran, Egypt, East Africa, Malaya, Sumatra and China etc. As narrated in various religious and ancient literatures, Gujarat had a well documented maritime trade dating back to 4500 years. Ancient period was the Golden Age of Shipping and Ship-building activities. Sir William Jones, a renowned scholar is of opinion that the Hindus "must have been navigators in the age of Manu, because bottomry (the lender of money for marine insurance) is mentioned in it" A vast repository of ancient literature has random references to a brisk seafaring trade. *Harivansh Purana* mentions that the Prosperity of *Yadavas* was due to the sea. *Kautilya* has also mentioned in his *Arthshashtra* that the main occupation of people living in coastline was navigation. The Bible refers to Phoenician sailors who sailed to *Ophir* (*Abhira* in Gujarat) and brought back treasures. The Greek '*Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*' contains many detailed references to the Gujarat seaports as *Barygaza* (*Bharuch*, Gujarat).

Even, the Greek author *Galazy* has mentioned in his book *Batias* about the shipping activity of *Kachchha* in circa 246. The well known historian *Hiuen- Tsang* described *Saurashtra* as *Sa-la-ch'a* and referred it as 'the highway to the sea where all inhabitants were traders by profession'. Sea trade was carried out during *Indus valley age*. Archaeological excavations at *Lothal* in Gujarat, the remains of dockyard have been unearthed by *S. R. Rao* and *Kuntasi* being a port excavated by *Prof. Dhavlikar*, indicates that India engaged herself in maritime commercial activities from the beginning of civilization and during the opening centuries of our era, it had reached its perfection and heights watermark.

The presence of a large coastal belt and its related advantages has hastened the development of trade in this region. It has been a major attraction as a meeting point for the traders and foreigners alike who utilized and exploited its wealth. The goods from these ports were transported to hinterlands through market, towns and cities. This transporting of goods from one place to another helped in the development of trade routes.

Maritime trade was very vigorous at that time in the Indian Ocean, involving Romans, Arabians, Indians, Indonesians, and Chinese (*Chandra 1987*), and even East Africa (*Stiles 1992b*). For example, 120

Roman ships a year were going to India under *Augustus* (*Verlinden 1987:32*). The monsoon winds were "discovered" by *Hippalus* in the fifth century B.C., which allowed vessels to sail directly to India from Arabia without following the coast. This added to the ascendancy of *Broach* over ports to the west in *Sind*, such as *Barbaricum* at the mouth of the *Indus*. In addition, the Roman-Parthian conflict closed the overland route between China and the West, diverting trade to *Broach* (*Thapar 1990: 118*). Merchants from Rome to Java mingled in Indian cities to exchange wine, manufactured goods, silks, cotton, spices, aromatics, ivory, rhinoceros horn, medicinal herbs, precious stones and metals, and a hundred other commodities from all corners of the known world.

Scythians from the plains of central Asia were pushed south by invading *Yuehchi* from North West of India in the first century B. c. These *Scythians*, known in India as *Sakas*, captured the *Bharukachcha* in the first century A.D. The first century A.D. *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* stated that *Nahapana*, of a Western *Kshatrapas* (*Shaka* dynasty), ruled *Broach* and a region encompassing as far north as *Ajmer* in *Rajasthan*, west to *Kathiawar* and southern *Gujarat*, to the east into *Malwa*, and in the south to *Nasik* and *Pune* in *Maharashtra* (*Casson 1989: 81; Chakraborti 1966:93; Fig. 2*). *Nahapana* may have been feudatory to the *Kushana* Empire to the northwest, which was derived from a section of the *Turko-Mongolian* *Yueh-chi*. The imports to *Broach* indicated that it was a sophisticated, industrial city with great wealth and an active trading community (*Casson 1989:22-23*), and *Chakraborti*(1966: 93) concluded that " ... it served as the main gateway of northern and also of southern India. All trade routes from the north and south ... converged there.

Broach is located in Gujarat on the eastern side of the *Bay of Cambay* (or *Khambhat*). It is currently several kilometers from the sea on the north bank of the *Narmada* River with the port situated near the river to facilitate access by large vessels. Access to the port was difficult because of the strong tides and many shoals, and ships with inexperienced captains could founder and be lost (*Casson 1989: 79*); thus trade from the port must have been lucrative for merchants to take such risks. In the first century A.D. it was known as *Barygaza* by *Greco-Roman* writers.

Broach was an important port under the *Kshatrapas* from c. 320 to c. 185B.C. (*Majumdar 1977*), and the *Jatakas* spoke of voyages to *Suvarnabhumi* (probably *Sumatra*) in the third century B.C. (*Chakraborti 1966:63*). Although the record here incomplete, it seems that *Indo-Greeks*-descendants of *Alexander* the conquests-controlled *Broach* for a period between 185 B.C. and the first century A.D. Coins with Greek legend the earlier *Indo-Greek* kings *Menander* and *Apollodotus* were in circulation in *Broach* in the first century A.D. (*Casson 1989:81*). Maritime trade was very vigorous at that time in the Indian Ocean, involving Romans, Arabians, Indians, Indonesians, and China (*Chandra 1987*), and even East Africa (*Stiles 1992b*). For example, 120 Roman ships a year were going to India under *Augustus* (*Verlinden 1987:32*). The monsoon winds were "discovered" by *Hippalus* in the first century A.D., which allowed vessels to sail directly to India from

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The Satavahana and the Kshatrapa dynasties were constantly in struggle to capture Bharukachcha. The Satavahana were briefly successful in the late first and early second centuries A.D., but by A.D. 150 Broach was back in the hands of the Kshatrapas and King Rudradaman extended his rule to Kutch, Sind, western and southern Rajasthan, and the Narmada Valley (Majumdar 1977:203). The Sakas were finally by Gupta empire rulers' A.D. 395 when Chandragupta II defeated Rudrasimha III and took Broach (Majumdar 1977: 241). The Guptas controlled Broach until the late fifth century and, between c. A.D. 475-750; various kingdoms fought with each other and ruled Broach at various times (Majumdar 1977; Thapar 1990)

The hinterland marts and the towns and Viharas situated in the trade route too played important role for the trades. The *Mahastupa* and the Vihara at Devnimori is situated on the trade route and is also very near to Shamlaji an ancient trading center. Indigenous support for the monks of Devnimori came mainly from the mercantile community both foreign and Indian and most probably they owed their existence from the donations from the merchants. Thus Devnimori itself became repositories of wealth and lavishly extended their architecture.

The Mulasarvastivadavinaya says that the Buddha received a present of grapes when he was traveling with his disciples. As the disciples had not seen such a fruit before, the Buddha clarified that it is eaten and also pressed for juice and could be preserved in a container and kept in a Sangha as syrup (Kartunnen, 1989:208). This clarifies the amphorae sherds base from Devnimori which has black substance tested as wine. Thus Devnimori was major stopover center for the traders as it received merchants and merchandise directly from Shamlaji (Mehta and Choudhary, 1966:123).

Vadnagara also was known as Anatapura, Chamatkarapura, Vrddhanagara situated in Mehsana district. When visited by Hiuen –Tsang, in sixth century A.D he observed that it was a very wealthy city and many Buddhist Viharas and Hindu temples existing side by side. It was learning centre of the Buddhist monks. There were ten Sangramas and learning of little Vehicle of Sammatiya school was common (Beal, 1984). Recent Excavation by the State Archaeology department also revealed the layout of Stupa and Viharas and coins of Kshatrapa period. Earlier excavations antiquities revealed that it was a prominent trade center (Nanavati, et.al., 1971). Amreli situated in Saurashtra was a big trading center which connected Somnath to Vallabhi. Being a major trading center many of the Buddhist rock cut cave

shelters situated nearby. The excavations have revealed Chinese glazed ware and some Buddhist terracotta figures, which probably indicate that the monks and merchants alike were trading in goods. Vallabhi or Vala situated in Bhavnagar was a trading centre connecting Amreli and Nagara.

Coins

The chief currencies in Gujarat comprised non indigenous silver Indo-Greek coins, and also local debased silver or copper imitations of the Mauryan silver punch-marked coins. The obverse of these silver coins has a boldly engraved bust of the ruler, facing right. Their physiognomies are extremely well-defined and various rulers and eras can be identified by stylistic differences in eye shaping, hair style, hat placement and nose size and dates. When dates The chief currencies in Gujarat comprised non indigenous silver Indo-Greek coins, and also local debased silver or copper imitations of the Mauryan silver punch-marked coins. Both the Mahakshatrapa and his subordinate, the Kshatrapa, ruled independently and were permitted to mint and issue coins bearing their own names. The long reign of the kings was marked by numerous dated coin issues, they are placed behind the bust, each bearing a likeness of the ruler and information about his predecessor. The Western Kshatrapas coins thus served as a detailed record by, allowing historians to piece together a remarkable genealogy of six families.

The reverse features a three-arched hill (called a Caitya or shrine), a characteristic symbol that predominates all Western Kshatrapas coins. To the left this hill is topped with one or two crescents and a circle on the right indicating sun and moon on either side of the hill and a wavy line below. The Brahmi inscription circling the edge identifies the ruler as Mahakshatrapa or Kshatrapa and gives the name of his father, providing a genealogical thread from ruler to ruler and family to family.

The Kshatrapas used Greek legends on their coinage. Prominent among the various issues are the silver coins of Nahapana, with the bust of the ruler and a legend in Greek script on the obverse, and symbols such as the thunderbolt and arrow and inscriptions in Kharosthi and Brahmi on the reverse. The Greek legend on the obverse is a transliteration of the inscriptions in Brahmi/Kharosthi on the reverse (Jha and Rajgor 1994:25). All three inscriptions acknowledge Nahapana as the Kshatrapa of the Kshaharata house, reading *Ragno Kshaharata Nahapānasa*. The obverse legend is a Greek transcript of this Prakrit legend and reads *Ranniu Ca-aaratasa Na-aapanasa*, in a garbled form (Bhandare 2006).

The artistic drawing of Nahapana's coins was derived directly from Indo-Greek silver drachmas. The silver coins issued by the Western Kshatrapas were immensely popular in regional trade circles, evidenced by the continuation of the coin style long after the overthrow of their more than 350-year-rule. Under the Western Satraps, Bharukachcha was one of the main centers of trade with the Western world. One of the important reasons of their using the Indo – Greek coin stylize was that, the Western Kshatrapas didn't wanted to change the currency which would have disturbed the foreign trades at the same time

looked into the regional aspect by introducing the Brahma legend to popularize the coins for inter regional trade. They also followed stylize of Indo Greek silver drachum, which helped the foreigners and local traders alike immensely for trade. Thus the coins were used of exchange both by the internal and foreign traders.

The domination of Gujarat by first century AD by Nahapana ensured an incursion of silver into his domains, and also linked Gujarat with centre in the Persian Gulf on the one hand and those in the north-west on the other.

Significance

The region under discussion consists of the "catchment area" of Indian trade items that came from forests to Broach in the early centuries A.D. This area consists roughly of the territories under the political control of the Western Kshatrapas and Guptas in which foragers were likely to have lived, as determined by the distribution of forests and the documented ancient trade items. From inscriptions and the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* we know the general range of control of the kshatrapa king Nahapana in the first century A.D. and of the Guptas in most of the fifth century (Fig. 2). These were very active periods of trade and also of Indian cultural and religious spread to the east into Southeast Asia and China. Buddhist and Hindu influence became very important in the rise of the early Southeast Asian kingdoms of Funan, Champa, Sri Vijaya, and others (Hall 1964).

During this period we can observe that there is a close relationship between Buddhism, traders and trade. The traders got freedom from the strict social norms of the society which allowed any person irrespective of cast creed and colour could carry out any kind of trade. This helped in the rise of trade and prosperity. The traders played an important role and not only supported the monks and nuns but also with increase in commerce brought about economic prosperity of that region. The relationship between Buddhism and trade is largely due to the reliance of the Buddhist monastic community on donations from lay supporters.

Conclusion

The virtue of having a long coastline with several convenient anchorages, having a mixed cultural society, and rise of Buddhism helped Gujarat to become a commercial hub for internal and external trade in ancient India. The Indian traders along with foreigners were trading goods and venturing abroad. The monasteries and *viharas* of Gujarat were practically situated near the trade centers and the trade routes in the ancient period. The monks needed their necessities from the traders and the traders wanted their help in religious matters like a safe journey, educating the society etc. Both the traders and monks were working for the society. There was no obstacle for the traders to trade anywhere or trade in any kind of goods. This was only possible due to the liberal outlook of Buddhism. Gujarat had many Viharas and monasteries as observed by Chinese travelers and also mentioned in literary works. Very few are remaining today. *Viharas* situated near ancient trade centers were Junagarh, Bharuch, Devnimori near Shamlaji, Vadnagar, Vallabhi, Amreli, Bhavnagar and Bhuj, all of them were situated on the trade routes. It is also possible that the establishment of the monasteries

near the trading centers, gave enhance for these centers to emerge as important urban cities of Gujarat.

There has obviously been a great deal of cultural and socioeconomic change, immigration, and mixing of ethnic groups over the past 2000 years; Increases in trade were more likely to be the result of a period of prosperity and political stability which brought about overall development during this period. At this point it may not be wrong to suppose that the incursion of the foreigners and the rise of Buddhism in Gujarat, trade became both the cause and effect of increasing urbanization and vice versa.

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