

Rulers of Chamba from 8-12th centuries: Study through inscriptions and Vamshavali

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Abstract

Chamba, which is presently one of the twelve districts of the state of Himachal Pradesh, carries a long legacy of rulers. Inscriptions and Vamshavali, both prove an important source of looking at the chronology of Chamba rulers. This paper attempts to: a) work on the chronological lines of kings, b) develop a basic understanding of the polity in Chamba during 8-12th centuries. The paper presents a panoramic view point of polity of Chamba through its rulers and conclude that both, inscriptions and Vamshavali, are important to understand various dimensions of polity of Chamba during 8-12th centuries.

Keywords: Chamba, vamshavali, himachal pradesh, western himalaya

Introduction

The kings of Chamba hold a special place in the history of western Himalaya where Chamba has preserved a well-documented chronicle from c. 500 AC ^[1] in the form of inscriptions issued by these kings. It constitutes a major source material on kings and their polity. Besides inscriptions, Vamshavali is another source which was created late by the kings trying to prove them from Suryavamsi line of the rajputs. It was prepared with placing Narayana Rama as incarnation of Vishnu and sixty third in the order of descent. It followed the pattern like many other Rajput ruling houses of the north western region who did the same. They also tried to claim their migration from Ayodhya ^[2] however, no evidence of such migration to this place was found till date. Thus Vamshavali remained challengeable. Still the efforts done through *Antiquities of Chamba* cannot be rejected as they provide the first list of deciphered by J.Ph. Vogel. The decipherment of several paved a way to establish the history of Chamba in the most authentic way. The supplementary and corroborative literary records from Kashmir through Kalhans Rajatarangini proved very important in creating a genuine record of genealogy of Chamba kings who originally hailed from Bharmour. It remained their capital for long and was established around the middle of sixth century AC.

The past of Chamba from Rigvedic age remained under mystery. Also we are not sure about their relationship with Mauryan kings especially Ashoka who propagated Buddhism in Western Himalaya as no rock or pillar inscription has been found in the region. Though Ashoka and few Kusana princes find mention in Kalhans Rajatarangini ^[3]. Also geographic proximities of Bharmour to Kashmir give rise to the possibility of inter-play of polity in the region.

Another geographic proximity was there with Kangra and Kullu where M.A. Stein established a historic fact that the great Lalitaditya of Karkota dynasty was considered the king of Jalandhar khanda (present day Kangra) among his feudatories ^[4]. The question that nowhere in the epigraphic records of Chamba rulers, the reference of Kashmir or its kings appear can be addressed through various explanations where rest of the several kings from northern plains though accepted the sovereignty of other kings but never mentioned

in donative grants in the form of inscriptions as it could lower their image in the masses.

Material and Methods

For the development of the theme, besides inscriptions as base material, vamshavali, Kalhan's Rajatarangini has also been consulted. Secondary sources remained helpful in developing the understanding of the subject. It remained basically the analytical study based upon available source material.

The Vamshavali and the epigraphic records both are compiled in *Antiquities of Chamba* that hold information from its first king Meruvarman to Lalitavarma covering a long span of more than six hundred years. The inscriptions of Meruvarman found in Brahmaur ^[5] and Chhatrari ^[6], can be assigned to circa seventh century AC ^[7] and Lalitavarma's of 12th century.

Discussion

Understanding genealogy through Inscriptions and Vamshavali

Here we have tried to create the list of Chamba kings through the admixture of Inscriptions and Vamshavali that runs parallel to create a sequence in chronology. Maruvarman had three sons who ruled after him in succession. They were Jai-stambha, Jal-stambha and Mahastambha. We are not sure out of these three who ruled because next reference appears of Adi-Varman who was referred as great-grand son of Meru Varman.

Aditya Varman

In the Vamshavali he has been referred to as the great-grand-father of Meru Varman. He has been mentioned in the Brahmaur inscription ^[8] as king (raja) with 'Varman' suffix. On the basis of chronicle information his time is assigned to 620 AC.

Bala-Varman

The name Bala-Varman appeared as grand-father of Meru-Varman in the Brahmaur inscription ^[9] of Meru Varman. The ambiguity lies that in Vamsavali this name does not appear, still on the basis of palaeography basis, his time period can be assigned 640 AC.

Divakara-Varman or Deva-Varman (660 AC)

The Chhatrari inscription ^[10] mention him as Deva-Varman, while Brahmaur inscription named him as Divakara-Varman ^[11].

Meru-Varman (700 AC)

Meru-Varman seem to be first king in Bharmour who assumed the title of Rajadhiraja i.e. king of kings. He conquered several regions in Bharmour. His time period is assigned generally 700 AC. He was succeeded by Mandar Varman, Kantar Varman and Pragalbh Varman ^[12]. Other names include, Aza-Varman, and Savarna-Varman. It was only after Lakshmi-Varman that history of Chamba rulers again come into some light.

Lakshmi-Varman (800 AC)

We have no information of almost a century between Meru-Varman to Lakshmi-Varman except names of the successors. The only information about the reign of Lakshmi-Varman records that the out-break of a serious epidemic in the state took place. It wiped out a huge chunk of population. Taking advantage of the weak position of the king, attacked the state and occupied a large territory which included present Baijnath and Kangra region.

Mushan-Varman

When Lakshmi-Varman breathed his last, his queen was pregnant. But after his death, due to threat of invasion, queen had to leave the state. During her journey, she stayed in a cave and gave birth to a son. Orality of saving of life of this child by mice, he was named 'Mushan-Varman (Mushan meaning mouse). Queen with her son, took shelter in a Brahmin family for almost a decade and did not reveal the identity. This shelter was in Suket state in disguise. Later when the king of Suket come to know about it, he got his daughter married to Mushan-Varman and gave some territory of his state in the form of dowry to his daughter. In this territory, Mushan prepared a strong army to invade his lost kingdom. He attached the Bharmour region, oust the enemy ^[14] and acquired his lost territory. His rule is assumed to have started around 820AC.

Mushan-Varman was succeeded by several rulers who do not find mention in the sources. Mushan-Varman established his capital in Brahmaur and built famous temple of Lakshna devi who is considered a form of Mahishsurmardini. He also established Devi temple in Chhatrari. The Chhatrari image inscription carries the name Deva-Varman while the Brahmaur inscription quoted Divakara-Varman as his father. The Chhatrari image inscription contained Bala-Varman and Aditya-Varman respectively ^[15], the names of Meru-Varman's grandfather and great-grandfather. Meru-Varman also built Nandi and Ganesa images at Brahmaur.

Mrityunjay-Varman

The only inscription that mentioned his name is in Proli-ragala rock inscription ^[16].

Sahil-Varman (930 AC)

Again there is a gap of almost a century when the arrival of Sahil-Varman on the stage of political history of Chamba brings a paradigm shift. Not only change in capital took place during his reign rather, Brahmanism also grew with greater number of land donation to them. Grants were issued

on the copper plate, instead of fountain stone or rock inscriptions now. Chamba became new capital ^[17]. Sahil-Varman maintained good relations with the kings of Kangra and Kullu. He defeated combined forces of Kiras and Saumatrika and acquired territory ^[18]. We are not sure whether it was to commemorate this victory but shift in religious inclination of Sahil-Varman was noticed where temples in Bharmour were mostly dedicated to female deity, Ganesh or lord Shiva, in Chamba, he built temple dedicated to Lakshmi-Narayan. Later he Lakshmi-Narayan the chief royal deity ^[19]. It was the beginning of new religious wave, i.e., Vaishnavism in Chamba. It may be credited to either Sahil-Varman's visits to religious places in northern plains where Vaishnavism was established religion or it could be due to influence of brahmians coming from Gangetic plains mostly. Through sources, we also come to know about Charpatnath accompanying Sahil-Varman in his expeditions and granting him the boon of having ten sons and one daughter.

The history of Sahil-Varman suffers from few gaps where sacrifice of his queen Nenna took place and daughter Champawati just vanished with an unbelievable truth. Though several sources confirm that during these campaigns Charpat Nath, queen Nenna and daughter Champavati accompanied him ^[20]. Later his queen Nenna sacrificed her life for the sake of water in the Chamba and Champawati vanished from the pages of history.

Yugakar-Varman

No temple was erected by Sahil Varman on the sacrifice of queen Nenna, however, a copperplate inscription was issued by Yugakar-Varman mentioning the name of his mother ^[21] and his wife. So far as the case of Yugakar-Varman's queen Tribhuvanrekha was concerned, it seems that she too had inclination towards Vaishnavism as she got the temple Narasimha built at Brahmapura ^[22]. The time period of Yugakar-Varman was from 950-970AC.

Vidagdh-Varman

Vidagdh-Varman succeeded Yugakar-Varma in 970 AC. In Sungal copperplate the name of his parents along with his gotra has been mentioned ^[23]. It shows the continuity of Mushna gotra till 970 AC.

Dodaka

Dodaka seem to have succeeded Vidagdh in 990 AC. In Tur inscription the name Dodaka appear as Vigadha's successor. It further informs that Vichitr-Varman and after him Dhairy-Varman were successors of Dodaka in sequence ^[24]. No achievement of either of these kings have been mentioned in the inscriptions except their names.

Salvahan-Varman

Dodaka ruled for very long time and in 1040 AC, Salvahan came on the throne of Chamba in 1040 AC, though his name does not appear in genealogical pages of Chamba kings. Three copper plates issued during his reign specify his name. He further was succeeded by his son Soma-Varman after a short span of serving only for five years. Salvahan-Varman had two sons. Soma-Varman and Asata ^[25].

Soma-Varman (c. 1045 AC)

This is very surprising to note that if Soma-Varman ruled for a long period of forty-five years, no reference of his

reign or his achievements appear in any chronicle or inscriptions. Asata-Varman was his brother who most probably succeeded Soma-Varman between A.D 1070 and 1080^[26].

Asata

Asata-Varman acquired throne in 1090 AC and ruled for quite a long time and issued several copper-plate inscriptions. In two of his issued plates, his name appeared.²⁷ Rajatarangini informed about his visit to Kashmir referring him as king of Chamba. This visit took place in 1087 AC when Kalasa who was the son of King Ananta Deva was ruling over Kashmir. Ananta Deva had defeated the hill kings at one point of time^[27] and his son wanted to claim the territories. Kalasa maintained good relations with Asata-Varman and got married to his siter named Bappika. Harsha was Bappika's son who later became the king of Kashmir after the death of his father.

Jasata-Varman

Here in Chamba, after the death of Asata, his son Jasata-Varman took over the throne in 1115 AC. With him again the politics of Chamba gets attached to Kashmir where Rajatarangini provides us the details that Kashmir was invaded by Lohara dynasty in 1101 AC and Jasata-Varman helped Harsa when he was imprisoned during the battle in a temple^[28]. Battle to capture the throne went long in Kashmir with Lohara brothers and Jasata kept supporting rulers of Kashmir. The grandson of Harsha was alive till Jasata-Varma's period whom he always supported. However, the grandson could not survive Kashmir's throne and returned Chamba. Loh-Tikri inscription of Jasata was found in Churah informing about Jasata-Varman bringing this region under his control^[29]. He was perhaps succeeded by Dhala-Varman but no inscription was issued by him.

Uday-Varman

Rajatarangini of Kalhana informed that Uday-Varman visited Kashmir but the purpose of his visit was not explained. Three successors came after Uday-Varman about whom we have very limited knowledge^[30].

Lalitavarman

After a shadow period of almost two decades, the throne of Chamba gets occupied by Lalita-Varman in 1143 AC and Chamba again comes into light. He issued two slab inscriptions. One was found at Devi-ri- Kothi and another at Salhi^[31]. Lalita-Varman ruled till 1175 AC which was almost for 28 years but no achievement or political condition of Chamba has been explained in any source. Again for almost two hundred years, no inscription was found. It was in 1387 AC that copper-plate grant was issued by Bhota-Varman^[32].

Conclusion

The details of Chamba rulers not only provides the continuity in the history of western Himalaya but also connects certain missing links. The ambiguity at certain places in Vamshavali cannot be ruled out but inscriptions come to rescue. The inscriptions not only help us in understanding the change in succession but even religious leanings, level of education, role of brahmins and state officials as well. Both, Vamshavali and inscriptions read together form the chain which with certain missing links form the base to understand the rulers, their time period and other information.

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