

The Historicity of Ram Gupta: An Enigma to South Asian Historians

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The historicity of Ram Gupta has drawn a keen attention of many scholars of our times. In the official records of the Gupta dynasty, his name is marked by conspicuous absence. Thus, the genealogy of the Gupta dynasty shows Samundra Gupta being succeeded by Chandra Gupta II. However, after 1920 the Gupta historiography of South Asia has been bombarded by a fresh wave of literary, epigraphic and numismatic evidences, which led a galaxy of scholars of Indology like Sylvan Levi, R. Saraswati, Stein Know, R.D. Banerjee, D.R. Bhandarkar, and K.P. Jaiswal to devote a considerable amount of energy in this direction.

A. Literary Sources

The abundance of literary sources on Ram Gupta makes it impossible for the students of Indian history to dismiss the historicity of Ram Gupta as a figment of imagination.

1. Devi Chandra Gautam

Among the literary texts, the work of Devi Chanda Gautam may be first mentioned, which today appears before us in the form of quotations in *Natya Darpan* of Ram Chandra and Gupta Chandra. It was the French scholar Sylvan Levi who first of all drew our attention to this passage but he himself did not use it to reconstruct the early Gupta history. This task was first of all taken by R.D. Banerjee as reflected in his speech delivered at the Banaras Hindu University in November 1934. The drama *Natya Darpan* was written by Vishak Dutta and its historicity was emphasized by A.S. Altaker for Vishak Dutta belonged to a family of feudal chiefs. His grand father was a *Sadhu*, his father Prithu was a Maharaja and a good student of political science, history, state craft and dramas. V.A. Smith and K.P. Jaiswal even go to the extent of saying that Vishak Dutta flourished in the time of Chandra Gupta II. The passage from Devi Chandra_Gautam illustrated the following facts:

- i. Samundra Gupta was followed by a weak and timid ruler Ram Gupta.

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- ii. A contemporary Saka king had imposed a humiliating peace term on Ram Gupta that is compelling him to surrender his wife Dhurba Devi.
- iii. The younger brother of Ram Gupta, Chandra Gupta went to Sakapati in the guise of the queen Dhurba Devi and killed him.
- iv. Chandra Gupta then killed his brother Ram Gupta and married his wife Dhurba Devi. The whole event was so well known that it was dramatized by Vishak Dutta and received the mention of four other writers.

1 Bana Bhatta was the first writer to mention it in connection with the unhappy fate of rulers who lost their lives because of their carelessness.

Aripurecha Parakalatra kamukam kamini bhesha Gupta,

Chandra Gupta Sakapati masatapta

cl/ k'/]r k/snq sfd'sd sfdgL e];f u'Kt, rGb| u'KtM zsklt
d;ftKt ..

Altaker argues that Bana Bhatta flourishing only two centuries later in the court of Harsha Vardhan must be relying on a reliable tradition when referring to the Saka episode. Again, Sankaracharya, when commenting upon Harshacharitra gives the following account of the event Sakapati, who also was a religious leader of the Sakas, was killed in private by Chandra Gupta disguised as his brother's wife for the former coveted Dhurba Devi, his brother's wife.

2. **Sringar Prakar**

To add to this R. Saraswati drew our attention to an unpublished manuscript entitled *Sringar Prakar* from the Government oriental Manuscript Library, Madras in the Indian Antiquity of 1923. The above manuscript contains a passage from Devi Chandra Gautam, which reads Chandra Gupta in the guise of a woman went to Alipur, the camp of the enemy in order to kill the Sakapati.

3. The *Kavya Mimamsa* of Rajshekhara, the court poet of Kumar Gupta, also has a reference to the story of the Sakapati and Dhurba Devi. As the story goes there was a king called Sarma Gupta, who being helpless surrendered his wife Dhurba Devi to the Lord of the *Khasas*, who lived at the foot hills of the Himalayas. The caves of the Himalayas rebounded with the songs and the exploits of Kartikaya. A.S. Altaker has identified Sarma Gupta with Ram Gupta, Kartikaya with Kumer Gupta I, and Khasapati with the Sakapati. He further points out that Kartikaya and Kumar are synonyms. Peacock is the vehicle of Kartikaya and is a symbol in the coins of Kumar Gupta. The poet here compares the miserable conditions of the Gupta Empire in the time of Ram Gupta with the prosperous reign of Kumar Gupta.

However, V.B. Mirasi has rightly challenged the view of Altaker by pointing out that Kartikeya cannot be identified with Kumar Gupta for the following reasons. Firstly, if a Gupta bard composed the verse, he would have mentioned the name of Ram Gupta carefully. Secondly, no court poet would like to contrast the age of Kumar Gupta with that of Ram Gupta and make the Ram Gupta scandal more prominent. Lastly, it is hard to believe that a poet would contrast his patron with another of the same dynasty. Thus, in the view of the above objections it would be very misleading to identify Kartikeya with Kumar Gupta.

V.B. Mirasi suggests that Rajsekhar was probably the court poet of Mahipal. Here the poet is contrasting the glorious success of Mahipal with the shameful defeat of Ram Gupta. Ram Gupta suffered defeat in the foothills of the Himalayas while Mahipal seemed to have won a glorious victory. As Ram Gupta was known as Sharma Gupta because of his shameful defeat, tradition preserved his later name.

4. Bhuj Mul Utatabaib

A. S. Altaker further draws our attention to the story narrated in *Bhuj Mul Utatabaib* written in the twelfth century A.D. It brings to light the story of two brothers: Rawal and Barakmarij, which according to him echoes the plot of Devi Chandra Gautam with an interesting mark of craftsmanship here and there.

B. Epigraphic Sources

The literary sources have further been supplemented by the information supplied by the inscriptions. Two inscriptions are very significant in this direction. The first is the Sanjan copper plate inscription dated the Saka era 795 (871 A.D.). It gives the following account of a king of the Gupta dynasty who was evidently Chandra Gupta II. The donor in the *Kaliyuga* was of the Gupta lineage who having killed his brother we are told seized his kingdom and his wife. The second inscription comes from Bengali. It was V.B. Mirasi who first of all drew our attention to this inscription. The content of this inscription can be summarized as follows:

He acted cruelly to his elder brother, and developed illegal connection with his wife. Furthermore, the epigraph goes on to say - he then went to the cemetery to offer human flesh to please the evil spirits so that they would be on his side.

C. Numismatic Evidences

Parameshwar Lal Gupta, perhaps the greatest name in India numismatic history, points out that now we are in a position to confirm the historicity of Ram Gupta from the study of coins. He has brought to light six copper coins from Vilas belong to Ram Gupta. On the obverse, there is the portrait of the figure of a lion with the dotted border, while of

the reverse, there is the circle and a crescent inside and below it the name of the ruler is inscribed. On the coin number one, the letters Ram Gupta is certain. On the coin number two, the name Ram is clearly visible. Then on coin number three the letters *Ma* and *Gu* are very clear. And on coin number four, the letters *Ma* and *Sa* are certain. On coin number five, the letters *Ma*, *Gu* and *Ta* are distinct; and finally, on coin number six, the letters *Ma*, *Gu* and *Ta* are legible.

P.L. Gupta attributes the above six coins to Ram Gupta on the following grounds.

- a. At present we know of no Ram Gupta except Ram Gupta of the Gupta dynasty mentioned in the Gupta literature.
- b. The paleography of the coins resembles that of the Gupta period.
- c. The metallurgy of the coins resembles that of Chandra Gupta II.
- d. The coins of Ram Gupta resemble that of the coins of Chandra Gupta both in the obverse and in the reverse.
- e. The lion motif of Ram Gupta was used by Dhruva Devi Swamini in Vamsali clay seal even after his second marriage.

In Summary P. L. Gupta points out this discussion will show that the present coins are similar in fabric, type and metallurgy with the coins of Chandra Gupta II issued by him at Malabar. They have the legend in the Gupta script and the name of the issuer is clearly Ram Gupta, who was the brother of Chandra Gupta. We, thus, have clear evidences proving his existence.

However, A.S. Altaker is of different opinion. He points but that the coin number one and coin number two does belong to Ram Gupta. But this is a Ram Gupta who flourished in Eastern Malabar at 400 A.D. Altaker conjectures that when Malbar was conquered by Samundra Gupta, where the copper coins of the Sakas were circulating the local officers of Samundra Gupta at Eran saw the necessity of issuing the above copper coins in the name of local ruler Ram Gupta. But this is only a conjecture and has no valid hypothesis.

Thus, the historicity of Ram Gupta is still an enigma. We cannot dismiss it as a mere phantom of a disturbed mind for his name is mentioned by so many literary texts supplemented by the numismatic and epigraphic sources, but at the same time we cannot guarantee his hundred per cent historical authenticity unless more historical evidences are brought to light before us.