

Unjust identification of Pushyamitra-A critical study into the incident of Brihadratha

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Abstract: The Mauryan dynasty ended with the murder of last king Brihadratha by Pushyamitra. This incident has got mentioned in Harshacharita, a Sanskrit literary work. The work is of very late time. Historians have identified the murderer as founder of a new dynasty named the Shunga. It was told in the concerned source that last Mauryan king was killed due to his incapability and immoral character. Historians interpreted this as outburst of the Brahmin discontent. Though the identification of Pushyamitra is not acceptable by all, but most of them follow it. A Pushyamitra has been included in the genealogy of Mauryas. Harshacharita itself has called him an Anarya. A war-like tribe has also been called as Pushyamitra. What could be the identification of Pushyamitra, is still disputed. Historians have shown special interest to present Pushyamitra, as a Brahmin. The effort of historians is one of the various examples of biased historical writing.

Keywords: Harshacharita, The Shungas, Varna-system, king Piyadassi, Megasthenese, Bias in Historical writings, Harprasad Shastri, Mekala, Magadha.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The precipitation of biased attitude of writer while writing history is common phenomena. The students of history are advised to consult maximum historians on the same topic. The writing and compiling of the history of India is credited to British colonial rulers. As they have vested interest to develop India as a colony, they are blamed to have inducted all the raw material to prepare suitable Indians for the colonial rule. They got the required support of Indian educated class to produce the history of India. It was essential to attain the support of Indians as there were literary sources which have to be translated for them. We can understand the bindings of the earlier Indians who helped the British rulers to write a history that could help them to produce an educated India who could be in favor of British. But these bindings got eliminated after India got independence. But biased history writing has been a problem even after independence. The Britishers were successful to great extent. The historians of Indian origin, of post independence period mostly belonged to the elite group which got created during the course of colonial rule. They continued the same task initiated by colonial rulers. The real cause lies in the process of the formation of the Indian society. Indian society is a mixture of various tribes that entered India on various stages of time. Most of them became rulers for some time, but were soon ousted and denied by the other. These groups are still visible in the society. Each group is desirous of having upper hand over others. It affected the historical writing. Whole history of India has been deformed due to mutual interest of those elite groups. I have discussed about such distortion in Indian history in one of my previous paper.¹ The current paper discusses critically the effort of historians to prove Pushyamitra, as a Brahmin. Though the identification of Pushyamitra could be have with others, but historians found adamant to prove him Brahmin. It reflected their biased attitude and prejudices. Due to personal prejudices the historians failed to follow the basic principle of 'be impartial' while writing history. This caused distortion of Indian history. It was aimed to prepare the new population with definite mindset for the sake of particular group. It is another form of colonialism which is disastrous in long term for the society as whole.

II. UNJUST IDENTIFICATION OF PUSHYAMITRA-A CRITICAL STUDY INTO THE INCIDENT OF BRIHADRATHA

The mighty empire established by the great efforts of Chandragupta, a Moriya, came to the end around the beginning of the second century of before Christ. The exact dates furnished by the historians differ but is approximately 187 BC.² The decline of the Mauryan empire has been considered as the natural phenomenon which happens normally with Monarchies. Most of the scholars have strong feelings that the Mauryan empire was a monarchy. They have various evidences in the support of their assumption. Though Dikshitaar doubts that

and finds the state as federal in nature.³ Dikshitaar hardly got support from other reputed scholars even though the conditions related to the period are more suitable for the federal form of state. It may have been a confederacy of smaller republics. The basic reason that the scholars did not accept the view of Dikshitaar can be the mental state of the scholars that they support the prevalence of monarchical type state than to the federal system. Federal form of government comes in better understanding with the contemporary social conditions and religious ideology of Buddhism. All of them unanimously agree that the last ruler of the dynasty was Brihadratha. Most of the records whether Pali or Sanskrit source of later times confirms that the last king of the Mauryan dynasty happened to be Brihadratha. But there is only one literary source Divyavadana, which states that Pushyamitta was the last ruling king of the said dynasty. But majority of the scholars rejected the evidence of Divyavadana hence Brihadratha is unanimously accepted as the last ruler of the Mauryan dynasty. The contemporary cultural conditions support correct name as Pushyamitta not as Pushyamitra. The Sanskrit version of Pushyamitta became Pushyamitra. The question arises whether the Pushyamitta of Divyavadana is the same Pushyamitra, which became the talk of the later Sanskrit writers. There is a story provided in the literary source Harshcharita which belonged to much later period. It stated that the last Mauryan king named Brihadratha was killed by his military general Pushyamitra, while the king was inspecting the army gathering. The incident happened in the vicinity of the town. The literary source is biography of king Harsha, which happened in seventh century and may not be placed before seventh century of Christian era. And thus was written about 800 years later of the incident took place. None of the literary or archaeological sources mentioned about the incident in those 800 years of time. Even Pali or Prakrit sources are silent over the incident which ended the most prestigious dynasty of the Indian subcontinent. A Bengali scholar of Sanskrit, lime lighted the issue and most of the historians came forward to make the event of historical importance. HP Sastri asserted that the killing of Mauryan king Brihadratha was Brahmin retaliation. HP Sastri's assertion was taken up by the historians to discuss and thus it became a historical issue. Contemporary historians discussed the issue so frequently that literary evidence became as if a historical issue. Though the statement never gained universal acceptance and remained disputed all the time. What has been gained from the incidence that several generations of history students got up studying the issue which created the mindset that there was a struggle between Brahmin and non-Brahmin ideologies during the time of the Mauryas. If this was the real intention of HP Sastri, he can be declared successful in his intentions.

Harshcharita states that last Mauryan king Brihadratha was killed by his army general Pushyamitra right in the vicinity of the town in front of his own army men.⁴ Pushyamitra was later declared to have established 'Shunga' dynasty which was Brahmin. Puranas declared them 'Brahmin terror' who revenged by destroying the Buddhist sites and killing Buddhist monks. The writer of the Harshcharita called Pushyamitra an Anarya. None of the records of Pushyamitras' successors called themselves to be 'Shunga'. Divyavadana included Pushyamitta in to the genealogy of Mauryas and placed him as the last Mauryan king. Harshcharita also described him as the military chief of the Mauryas. The only literary source that mention about the killing of last Mauryan king by Pushyamitra called him an Anarya, how becomes a Brahmin in other Sanskrit sources is a big question. Some scholars tried to reject calling an Anarya by the writer of the Harshcharita and argued that it was so because he had killed his master. Their argument is totally baseless. The Varnashram system allots the Varna on the basis of birth. Once you are born in a Varna, it could not be changed. It was decided divine. The son of Pasendi of Kosal was to lose its kingship just because of his birth from a queen born from a slave of Shaky king. His father, Pasendi was the undisputed king of Kosal. The evidence proves that the doctrine of Varna was based on birth and was strong enough to be overruled by powerful political powers. This stated clearly how strong the Varnashram system was implemented. None, even the kings were allowed to change their Varna due to their low birth. Similar evidence can be traced from Prayaga Prashasti where Samudragupta has to face legal obstacles to succeed his father as he was born of a Lichchhavi Princess Kumardevi. Even the Varna of Chandragupta and his ancestors is still disputed but panegyrist of Prayaga Prashasti has tried to show that the laws of Varna system had bindings on the members of the Royal families. But it is difficult to accept that a future king will sacrifice his royal ascendancy. A king was the most powerful person on the earth. That is why he has been made the protector of the Varnashrama laws. It seems unnatural and unacceptable for a king or future king. Under, such a harsh condition, how Pushyamitra of Harshcharita, an Anarya becomes Brahmin in Puranic Sanskrit texts. The extent of truth, need to be examined.

If the chief commander of Mauryan king was Anarya, he should remain Anarya in all Sanskrit texts. The era in context did not mention prevalence of the Brahmin social order. None of the contemporary literary source confirms it. Only Megasthenese can be believed as he was contemporary writer. Megasthenese has stated that the Indian society was divided in to seven classes.⁵ The Latin and Greek writers have mentioned about all seven social groups with their full descriptions. The description of Megasthenese is complete and can be trusted. It stated that marriages were strictly carried out within the members of the same class. It proves that his observation was made after required verifications. The social organization mentioned by Megasthenese seems to be more natural as it divided the society on the basis of profession. Varna system was forced division and hence

was declared divine. The social division mentioned by Megasthenese was not only natural but historical also. The social conditions shape themselves under very slow speed. The social divisions could not be forced suddenly with any order from even the God. The social division presented by Megasthenese is in agreement with the process of historical evolution of societies, globally. It can be found in any society of the world. The most trusted evidence is of marrying in one's own class. It is completely logical and natural. A bureaucrat would prefer to have matrimonial relation with another bureaucrat family. Any royal family would like to marry in other royal family. Similarly, a merchant would prefer to have matrimonial relation with other merchant family. It is natural and even practiced today's world also. We often see such incidences of matrimonial bonding in today's India, where Brahmanical Varna laws are disobeyed and mostly broken. Megasthenese's description is in accord with the available contemporary circumstances and is more logical than Brahmanical Varna doctrine. The contemporary conditions support Buddhist atmosphere and hence the society would have been based on the doctrines of Buddhism, not Brahmanism. The Buddhist system doesn't have any room for any social division based on birth.

The period of Piyadassi don't clue about prevalence of Brahmin traditions. If we try to enforce the Brahmin ideology in the concerned period, on the basis of later Sanskrit texts, the numerous inscriptions of king Piyadassi wouldn't allow this. We should keep it our minds that these inscriptions are distributed all over a vast territory. Those historians, who tried to do so, should have committed a crime against the very laws of history. It is unjust and biased history writing. Piyadassi expects all cults to be learned and heard by all. He should not be blamed to stop Brahmanism to flourish. Piyadassi was resolved to uplift the living standards of his subjects irrespective of caste or creed. But Brahmanic Varna system has its reservations according to the doctrine of Varnas. Piyadassi, as explained, a beloved, should have acted, as loved by people also and would have certainly adopted what his subjects would have loved to. It implies that if the people had belief in Brahmin traditions, the king would have also followed it. A.L. Basham has pointed out that king Piyadassi has never projected him as 'Chakravarti' king in any of his inscriptions.⁶ He did not conducted any 'Ashwamedha' sacrifice. Piyadassi hated violence and hence never believed in sacrifices. It may be argued that various texts hinted that he was violent and aggressive before Kalinga war. But again it was literary evidence put forth by authors to prove the supremacy of the respective ideologies. Not conducting any sacrifice even before the war of Kalinga proved that there was no existence of Brahmanical traditions in those years. He never used 'Sanskrit' as the language to communicate to his officers or subjects. How logical it is to appoint a Brahmin as the supreme commander of the imperial army.

Pushyamitra of Harshacharita is said to be chief commander of the imperial army of last Maurayn king Brihadratha. He is designated as 'Senapati'. The date of Harshacharita could not be before seventh century of the Christian era. It is possible that Harshacharita would have been written much later. Even if it is written in seventh century, we have to understand the politico-social conditions prevalent in the concern period. The politico-social conditions have to be compared with that of the beginning of second century before Christ. The presence of a 'Senapati' as supreme commander of army is common in the political scenario of the seventh century or afterwards. 'Senapati' was in-charge of the army other than the king. Was the 'Senapati' present in the same designation in the beginning of the second century before start of the Christian era? Brihadratha belonged to the royal dynasty of king Piyadassi. Brihadratha would be following the rules and directions which were laid down by the great kings of his dynasty. Brihadratha did not need to consult others as he himself has prominent personalities like Chandragupta, Bindusar and Piyadassi, who framed the political laws and traditions of the dynasty. The inscriptions of king Piyadassi are scattered all over subcontinent. Almost of them, have been translated. We don't come across with the term 'Senapati' in any of those inscriptions. This proves that king Piyadassi was following a political culture in which it was the king who acted as supreme commander of his army, both, during war and in the time of peace. Same are the conditions apply to his predecessors Chandragupta and Bindusar. The most powerful first kings of any dynasty, don't depend on 'Senapati' is a well known fact. None evidence supported the war was fought through 'Senapati' by the Mauryan kings. King Piyadassi himself lead the army in the Kalinga war.⁷ When Piyadassi reflects his grievances over the sufferings of people due to the disastrous war, it proves that He himself was present during the course of the war. He accepted that thousands has been killed and were left shelter-less. This clearly proves that king Piyadassi didn't use 'Senapati', the supreme commander, to fight the war in his absence.

The results of the Kalinga war had deep impact on the mind of king Piyadassi. He decided to give up the policy of war for the rest of his life. He also dropped the idea of violence and adhered to policy of non-violence. The changes express that the king himself was present in the battle field and saw the violence of the war. He would have felt personally the pain and sorrow suffered by the people. He was deeply affected that he dropped the aggressive policy of expansion and under took the task of spreading morality. He took up the cause of 'Dhamma', the morality and not religion as considered by some of the historians. He decided to remove the fear and terror that has been residing in the hearts of the people, especially those who lived in the border land of his empire. He addressed them through his inscriptions that they should not fear and instead get all favors

required from the king.⁸ The gigantic state of Mauryas was no more a state to expand the territory. It was converted in to a welfare state. The first welfare state in the history of the ancient world. He directed his officers to work for the welfare. Is there any need to appoint a 'Senapati' by the Mauryan king? Even historians believe that the policy of aggression was dropped by king Piyadassi, became one the cause for the sudden decline of the empire. None, being 'Senapati', could dare to adopt such a policy of non-aggression on his own. Only a 'Senapati', that happened to be the king, could take such a revolutionary decision. The 'Senapati' concerned here has a profession of fighting wars and shedding blood. More bloodshed, would uplift the ranking of the concerned 'Senapati'. Thus, Mauryas never fought wars by 'Senapati' and if yes, it was of no use after the change of policy adopted by king Piyadassi.

But king Piyadassi never disbanded the army. It was not beneficial to dissolve the army. Under those contemporary circumstances the army was executing multiple tasks. They were involved in external as well as internal security. To arrest, to protect jails and to help in collecting taxes etc. were various duties that were executed by the same army soldiers which used to fight the war. They played vital role in establishing law and order of the towns and cities. It was not a wise attempt to disband the army. It was the aggressive foreign policy that has been abandoned by king Piyadassi. The security of the state was still on the top priority. King Piyadassi has made it clear.⁹ The abandonment of aggressive foreign policy specifies that there existed army but the state doesn't need any officer like 'Senapati'. Then what caused king Brihadratha to employ a 'Senapati'? The term 'Senapati' is of much later times. The culture to which the 'Senapati' is attached belonged to later period with different characteristics. It reflects a different socio-political culture. Kautilya's 'Senapati' is disputed and doesn't represent him as supreme commander of the armed forces. The 'Senapati' of later times can be undisputed general of the army. Kautilya's 'Senapati' doesn't seem to be the highest army commander.¹⁰ Kautilya belongs to later period and none trusted evidence proves him contemporary of Mauryan era. Kautilya is discovery of the biased historians, who tried to color ancient Indian history in Brahmanical color by declaring 'Arthashastra' as secular treatise. On various occasions Megasthenese is more trustful than Kautilya. Megasthenese has written that the administration of army was controlled by a committee of 30 members.¹¹ Megasthenese has presented full description of the committee and left no confusion. The evidence of Megasthenese further confirms the fact that Mauryas never appointed any officer like 'Senapati'. It is surprising how an officer named Pushyamitra comes in the scene? And further surprising was that a Brahmin?

Let's assume that after some time due to change of political circumstances or else, the attraction towards appointment of a 'Senapati' would have become obligatory. No doubt, Mauryan Empire was the largest empire in the contemporary time. Let's find a condition when the kings started to consider 'Senapati' as an issue of prestige. Or after some time the kings started to believe that it was necessary to appoint 'Senapati'. It is common that after some generations, the princes become incapable, comparatively. The luxurious lifestyle created a condition where prince lacked the requisite offensive attitude and warlike qualities. The love and affection of queens forbade their prince to go in the battle fields and to lead their army. The Mauryan dynasty was not unique one. It is possible that the later princes would have been gripped by the same kind of disabilities. There would have been circumstances that would have compelled the later kings to appoint 'Senapati'. Even if it was so, who would have been the first choice? What would have been preferences of the king? Whether, the first choice was from outside or inside of the royal family. A 'Senapati' happened to be the chief commander of the army, the army of the king. In monarchical form of state, army ensures the moral to rule for the king. In a tribal state the army was faithful to the tribe, but in monarchy, it was faithful to the king. In monarchical form of state the legitimacy to rule of a king, ends with the end of army. King happened to be leader and the chief commander of the army. The presence of the principle of hereditary accession to the throne reflected the love and exclusive right over the royal sovereignty. Army exhibited and ensured the expansion of the royal power for the members of the royal family. When a king was to decide first appointment of a suitable person to the post of 'Senapati', he would have certainly preferred the member of the royal family. No doubt the preference would be the most trusted and intimate member of the family. And when the choice would be from the closest relative, it would have been the eldest son. King's first and natural selection would have been his son. The Brahmanical texts, itself maintained that the Kshatriyas were to be preferred for the royal designations. It was the Kshatriyas whose duty was to fight wars. Appointing a Brahmin as supreme commander of the army violated the code of Varnashrama law. It also violated the very laws of politics, designed in the Sanskrit literature. Inclusion of Pushyamitta in the dynastic chronology of Mauryas by Divyavadana was not by mistake. Declaring it a mistake, is nothing but the biased attitude of the historians. It is unjust and unfair attitude of the concerned historians. Unfortunately, they forgot to be impartial while writing history.

Pushyamitta, and his successors can be seen with suffix 'Mitta' in their names. That has not been found in the names of previous kings. Some scholars have argued that the prefix of 'Mitta' with the names reflected Persian influence. The more important is that a change is visible. The change in the name pattern indicated some cultural change. The identical Pushyamitra can be seen as favorite king for Sanskrit writers. Moreover the region ruled by Pushyamitra and his successors was not same as that was established by Chandragupta or ruled

by his successors. Some authors argued that the empire was bifurcated after death of king Piyadasi. The literary sources which are used to support their assertions are of very late. Moreover, most of the literary sources of the later period are written by the Sanskrit authors. Sanskrit itself represented a change in socio-political circumstances. Changes took place due to political conditions prevalent during second century of before Christ to third or fourth century of Christian era. The assumption of division specified two centers of power, one at Takshashila and other at Pataliputra. Pushyamitra and his successors could not be found ruling from either of the two main centers. They are mostly settled in the region identified as Malwa. They are also connected to Ayodhya. It may have been an attempt to establish Ayodhya as an ancient city. If Pushyamitra and his successors of Sanskrit literature were the successors of Mauryas, then they would have been ruling from one of the two cities. If not Pataliputra then they might have to be ruling from Takshashila. They can be seen ruling in the central region of the Mauryan empire. How they can be considered successor of Mauryas. Pushyamitra of Sanskrit literature has been declared a 'Shunga' after wards. The concerned 'Shunga' dynasty would not be outcome of the incident mentioned in Harshacharita. If the author of Harshacharita called Pushyamitra, an Anarya, it has deep rooted facts. It is not as simple as just because he killed his master. No Brahmin becomes an Anarya by doing the act of killing a person that was said to have immoral conduct. The Varnas were allotted on the basis of birth and could not be changed under any condition. If some historians tried to establish it, they should rethink and revise their assumptions.

It has been a challenge to accommodate 'Shungas' in the space. Historians have used archaeological facts to make it stronger, but it is well known fact that their dates are still disputed. Moreover the archaeological evidences could not get them out of the central region. The region of Malwa has been heaven for foreign infiltrators. The region of Malwa could not see constant political stability. Continuous infiltration of tribes from west has made Malwa a distinct socio-cultural identity also. The writer of Harshacharita is Bana, who can be a matured Sanskrit writer. Bana has been accepted and believed as a trustful writer by historians on various occasions. If he has called Pushyamitra an Anarya, it matters. Bana is certainly not committing a mistake. He has mentioned about the inhabitants of the Mekala region.¹² Bana makes a mention in Harshacharits how the ministers of the king of Mekala have dethroned the king of Magadha forcefully. The people of Mekala were war like and have vast political influence which is visible by this event. The people of Mekala could not be Arya. Mekala people have made Guptas unstable to the extent that they perished. It is believed that Kumargupta has tried to demolish their independence.¹³

'Pushyamitta' is connected with the elite group of Mekala. Vishnu Puarana called them the rulers of the Mekala.¹⁴ They are known to the writer of Kalpa sutra as it mentioned about 'Pushyamitas-kula'.¹⁵ If these literary sources are took aside then the evidence of 'Bhita' seal establishes their antiquity. 'Bhita' seal belonged to 'Pushyamitas' and has been considered to be of much earlier time, even before Kushanas.¹⁶ Hence we have Pushyamittas as powerful ruling elite from much time earlier who were politically strong enough to interfere in the matters of even northern most state of Magadha. Why the historians did not identify it with the 'Pushyamitra' of Harshacharita. It has been common practice to call a person by his surname. Bana is doing the same. Moreover the incident mentioned in Harshacharita has not got mention in any other source, thus we have to depend only on Harshacharita and should not accept some and reject rest. Historians found the incident true and tried to connect it with Brahmin revolution. Almost of historians believe the incident as historic. But they rejected that Pushyamitra was an Anarya which has been mentioned in the same source. If we accept the incident of murder of last Maurya king as true we should also accept that the murderer was Anarya, not Arya and hence could not be a Brahmin. The author of the source is not making any mistake and is calling him by his surname. And these Pushyamitras could have been the warlike people of Mekala who better suited the place. They have retaliated the invasion of Kumargupta, resulting in the collapse of the Gupta Empire.

III. CONCLUSION

Hence it can be stated that historians did no justice with the incident mentioned by the author of Harshacharita. Historians appeared more adamant to conclude desired outcomes of it. Historians seem to be biased over deciding Pushyamitra a Brahmin. Though Pushyamitra or his successors never called themselves a 'Shunga', they have been established as 'Shunga' by Puranas and other Sanskrit sources. These sources indicated the Shungas were Brahmins. When Bana mentions the incident, he also specified that Pushyamitra was an Anarya, then two of them can't be same as an Anarya can't be a Brahmin. Historians tried to prove him a Brahmin so that the antiquity of Brahmanism may be established. The introduction of Brahmanical ideology could not be place before the advent of Kushanas. The culture and ideology of Brahmanism was result of infiltration that took place due to advent of foreigner tribes entered India during or after Greek influence in North-West frontiers. We can't hand over a biased history to our coming generations. It will result in wide spread discontent and would create dissensions in the society. A scholar of Humanities can't be an anti-social person. Hence there should be efforts to resurrect the damaged portions of Indian history, especially Indian history.

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