

This was a new defeat to her. She had thought that she would cool her burning heart in Rajani's tears, but for each single drop that fell out of Rajani's eyes, Lakshmi shed a thousand. Rajani wept because she had lost her beloved, and Mahalakshmi's life became

flooded with tears—while her mutilated soul gasped "Ah beloved, I am your murderess!"

Translated from the original Bengali by

ASHOKE CHATTOPADHYAY

## THE GANAS OR REPUBLICS OF ANCIENT INDIA\*

BY BENOY KUMAR SARKAR.

**S**TUDENTS of comparative politics are generally familiar with the norm in the *Realpolitik* of monarchical India. It is well known that the rights of the people and their institutional achievements under the Hindu royalties were generically on a par with those of the nations ruled by the *grand monarch* and such "enlightened despots" as Peter, Frederick and Joseph. The political psychology that lay behind the Hindu institutions was not different in any way from that of the French under the Bourbons or of the Germans till the War of the Liberation.

But it is hardly known among scholars that the Hindu constitution grew along republican or non-monarchical lines also.<sup>1</sup> Let us exclude from our present consideration the patriarchal-democratic "crowned republics" of Vedic India, as well as the *vairjya* or kingless states mentioned in the *Aitareya Brihmana*,<sup>2</sup> the *koolasamghas*<sup>3</sup> (family-soviets or communal republics) and *ganas*<sup>4</sup> referred to in the *Artha-shāstra*, or the nationalities described in the *Mahābhārata* as "invincible" because of their being constituted on the principle of "equality". Archaeology is now in a position to safely declare that there were at least three periods in the early history of India during which Hindus developed the *vairjya* or *gana* polity of the Hellenic and pre-Imperial Roman type.

To begin with the latest. In the fourth century A D there were "independent" republics with full sovereignty in the Punjab, Eastern Rajputana and Malwa. The central parts of the Punjab were held by the commonwealth of Madrakas. The Yaudheyas<sup>5</sup> had their territory on both banks of the Sutlej. In the second century Roodra-damana (125-150) had inflicted a defeat on them, but centuries before, they came out brilliantly in India's resistance to Alexander. The Abhirs and the Mālavas were settled between the Chambal and the Betwa. In the teeth of Samodragoopa the Indian Napoleon's *digvijaya* or "conquest of the quarters" (330-75) all these republican nations succeeded in maintaining their autonomy by doing homage and paying tribute. But they lost their sovereignty and became feudatories or protectorates of the Gupta Empire.<sup>7</sup>

The greatest period of Hindu republics lay, however, between the fourth and sixth centuries B C. The republican nationalities of India were thus contemporaneous with Sparta, Athens, Thebes and Rome. And their ultimate extinction through the establishment of the Maurya Empire (B C 323) synchronized with the annihilation of the Greek city states by Philip of Macedon at the battle of Cheronoea (B C 338).

Megasthenes records the Hindu tradition prevailing in his time (B C 302) that during a period of 6042 years from the time of "Dionusos to Sandrokottos"

\* A chapter from the author's forthcoming Political Institutions and Theories of the Hindus

a "republic was thrice established" in India.<sup>8</sup> Certain cities are also mentioned by him where "at last the sovereignty was dissolved and democratic government set up."<sup>9</sup> The Maltecoroe, the Singhoe, the Moium, the Maiohoe and the Raungi were, as he says, free nations with no kings. They occupied mountain heights where they had built many cities.<sup>10</sup> This is the earliest foreign report about the existence of republican states among the Hindus.

Nor had republics passed into the domain of legend towards the end of the fourth century B C. For the India that was encountered by the Greeks who had preceded Megasthenes by about 20 years, i.e., who belonged to Alexander's hordes previous to Chandra-gupta Maurya's establishment of the empire and expulsion of Seleukos the Greco-Syrian from Afghanistan (B C 303), was a land of republics and commonwealths, used to assemblies or senates, and leaders or presidents. In the estimation of the Greek soldiers, Patala, for instance, was the Sparta of the Hindus. It was a famous city at the apex of the delta of the Indus. In this community, as Diodorus tells us, "the command in war was vested in two hereditary kings of two different houses, while a council of elders ruled the whole state with paramount authority."<sup>11</sup>

Large indeed in Alexander's days was the number of democratically governed peoples, with the institutions of *sva-rj* or self-rule though sometimes of the oligarchic character. One of the most important of these nations was the Arättas (*Arāshtrakas*, i.e., kingless) with their kinsmen, the Kathians. Justin calls them robbers and they are condemned as such in the *Mahābhārata* also. But they proved to be a powerful military aid to Chandra-gupta in his successful wars against the Macedonians and the Greco-Syrians. It was the splendid assistance rendered by the Arättas<sup>12</sup> that to a great extent enabled the Hindu conqueror to easily clear the Indian borderland of the *melchchha* (unclean, barbarian) Europeans and push the north-western limits of his

empire to the "scientific frontier", the Hindukush Mountains.

Two other nationalities that have a pan-Indian reputation as having figured in the army of the Kooros in the armageddon of the *Mahābhārata* happened to strike the imagination of the Greeks in an interesting way. These were the Mallois (*Mālavas*) and the Oxydrakai (*Kshoodiakas*).<sup>13</sup> The former are described by Arrian simply as "a race of independent Indians." But the latter are singled out by him as by far the most attached to freedom and autonomy. From the military standpoint, both were very powerful peoples. But like the Athenians and Spartans they had always been used to flying at each other's throats. Alexander, however, had to count on a formidable opposition from them. For, as it happened on this occasion, parallel in Hindu annals to the Persian invasion of Greece, the *Mālavas* and the *Kshoodrakas* "resolved to forget old enmities and to make common cause against the invader." The alliance was cemented, as Diodorus narrates, by "wholesale intermarriage, each giving and taking ten thousand young women for wives."<sup>14</sup> The strength of the combined army was 90,000 fully equipped infantry, 10,000 cavalry, and about 900 chariots.<sup>14</sup>

Among the other republican nationalities of the time we know about the *Sambastar*<sup>15</sup> (the *Sabaracae*?), on the statement of Diodorus, that they dwelt in cities with democratic form of administration, and about the *Gedrosi* (*Gedrosioi*<sup>16</sup>), on the report of Curtius, that they were a "free people with a council for discussing important matters of state." Another race is mentioned by Curtius, probably the *Sabaracae* (?) of Diodorus, as a powerful Indian tribe whose "form of government was democratic and not regal." They had no king but were led by three generals.<sup>17</sup> Their army consisted of 60,000 foot, 6,000 cavalry, and 500 chariots.<sup>18</sup> Similarly the *Oreitai*, the *Abastanoi*, the *Xathroi* (the *Kshatriya*), and the *Arabitai* are four peoples whom Arrian calls "independent tribes with leaders."<sup>19</sup> Of these the *Kshatriyas* were expert naval architects. They supplied Alexander with

galleys of thirty oars and transport vessels

Two other nations came to have close touch with the troops of Alexander. These are the Agalassoi and the Nysaians. The former as Curtius says, put up a strong resistance to the Greek invaders, and may be taken to have been the first historic protagonists of Hindu *Bushido* or Kshatriyasm. For when they were defeated by the enemy, these gallant patriots preferred death to dishonor and national humiliation. Accordingly they "set fire to the town and cast themselves with their wives and children into the flames"<sup>20</sup>. Thus in the pride of nationalism, fostered also on the occasion of Moslem invasions in the Middle Ages, has to be sought one of the feeders of the custom that in subsequent ages came to be practised exclusively by women, viz, the *satee* or the self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

The Nysaians<sup>21</sup> are described by Arrian as a free commonwealth. They had a president, but the government of their state was entrusted to the aristocracy. This aristocratic element was represented by the council of three hundred wise men. One hundred of these Senators were called for by Alexander. "How, O King!" was the reply of the president of the Nysaian Republic to this suggestion of the Macedonian, "can a single city, if deprived of a hundred of its best men, continue to be well governed?" The reply was characteristic of the political mentality of the republican Hindus of the Punjab and North-western India who presented single or united fronts against Alexander's Indian adventure (B C 327-324)<sup>22</sup>.

This cluster of republics represented evidently the survival of a type of polity that had been more or less uniformly distributed throughout the Hindu world. An older link in the chain of India's political evolution is furnished by the clan-commonwealths of the fifth and sixth centuries B C. And it is to the eastern and central regions of Northern India, roughly speaking, to the modern province of Bihar, that we have to turn our eyes

for these oldest historical specimens of Hindu republics.

These republican peoples are generally enumerated as ten<sup>23</sup>. In regard to seven of them there is hardly any information of political importance. The Bhaggas had their headquarters in Soomsoomara Hill, the Boodis in Allakappa, and the Kalamas in Kesapootta. Pippalivana was the territory of the Moriyas, and Ramagama of the Koliyas. There were two branches of the Mallas, one with sovereignty in Koosinara, and the other in Pava. The most important of these ten nations were the Sākīyas of Kapila-vastu, the Videhas of Mithilā and the Licchhavis of Vesali. The last two were amalgamated and went by the name of the Vajjians.

No republic in mankind's ancient history can surpass the Sākīya republic in the magnitude of its influence on world-culture. It had authority over a region which has for two thousand and five hundred years been the Jerusalem of Buddhism, the *Tenjiko* of the Japanese, and the *Tien-chu* (Heaven) of the Chinese. Shākya the Buddha (or Awakened) was, as the name implies, a citizen of the commonwealth of the Sākīyas. His father and brother were archons of this state. The common tradition that Shākya renounced princedom is erroneous. For he was not a prince at all, but only the son of a president.

The Sākīyas numbered one million strong. Their territory lay about fifty miles east to west and extended thirty or forty miles south from the foot of the Himalayas. The administrative and judicial business of this republic was carried out in a public assembly. The civic center of Kapila-vastu the capital, as that of other cities of the nation, was the motel-hall. The young and old alike took part in the deliberations as to the government of the country. The chief was elected by the people. He used to preside over the sessions. The title of the president was *rājā* (literally king)<sup>24</sup>. It corresponded in reality to the consul in Rome and the archon in Athens. And if the emissaries that Pyrrhus of Epirus sent to republican Rome (B C 280) could not describe the

Roman Senate except as an "assembly of kings", there was nothing specifically undemocratic in the honorific title of *iājā* for the chief executive of a Hindu republic.

The republic of the Vajjians was a United States of ancient India. It was a federation formed by the union of eight clans that had formerly been distinct and independent of one another. Vesali was the headquarters of this federal republic. The two most prominent of the members of this union were the Videhas and the Licchavis. The Videhas had once been citizens of a monarchical state, and their original territory covered 2300 miles. The Licchavis used to elect a triumvirate of three archons to conduct their administration.<sup>25</sup>

The principles of the Sākya republic, nay, the entire philosophy of democratic republicanism, found an able exponent in Shākya, the Buddha, who though he renounced the family-ties, remained an active propagandist all his life. And the propaganda embraced lectures<sup>26</sup> on constitutional law, trial by jury, *res judicata*, government by the majority, the importance of public meetings, and all other branches of civic life as much as on the pathway to salvation and the elimination of misery from the world of men. He had great interest in the welfare of the Vajjian Confederacy and was almost the political and spiritual adviser of its Council of elders. During the last days of this republic, while it was singing the swansong of its sovereign existence owing to the threat of Ajātashatru, King of Magadha, that he would extirpate the Vajjians, "mighty and powerful though they be," it was Shākya's anti-monarchism and republican fervor that kept up the spirit of resistance among the elders sufficiently high to accept the royal challenge. For they were heartened by Shākya's judgment that the Vajjians could not be overcome by the king in battle as long as their federation was unbroken.<sup>27</sup>

We have a picture of ultra-democratic judicial proceedings<sup>28</sup> at the mote-hall of the Vajjian Confederacy. A succession of regularly appointed officers administered the criminal law. These were the justices, the

lawyers, the rehearsers of the law maxims, the council of the representatives of the eight clans constituting the union, the vice-consul, and the *ruj* or consul himself. The accused could be acquitted by each of these officers of the hierarchy. But if they considered him guilty, each had to refer the case to the next higher authority. The president of the republic was the final judge as to the penalty in accordance with the law of precedents.

It is interesting to observe that the management of affairs of the rural areas of these republics was not the monopoly of the male sex. Women also were proud to bear a part in works of public utility. The laying out of parks, the erection of communal halls, rest-houses and reservoirs, and the construction and mending of roads between village and village were undertaken by men and women in joint committees.<sup>29</sup>

The cultural achievements of republican India might easily be belittled. But let students of the history of civilization compare the contributions of the age of Hindu republics with the values of European culture from Pythagoras to Plato. In an inventory of India's contributions<sup>30</sup> to the spirit of inquiry and the progress of mankind, the epoch of republics (C. B. C. 600-322), interspersed no doubt with monarchies, must be recognized as responsible for the beginnings of the anatomy, therapeutics and medicine of Charaka's academy, of the linguistics and methodology of Pāṇini and his scholars, and of the metallurgy and alchemy that subsequently found patron-saints in Patañjali and Nāgārjuna, the philosophical speculations of the atomists (*Vaishesika*), monists (*Vedānta*), sensationalists (*Chārvāka*) and sceptics (*Lok yata*), the schools of political science that came to be finally absorbed in the systems of Kautilya and Shookra,<sup>31</sup> the legal and sociological theories associated in the long run with the *nom-de-plumes* of Manu and Yājñavalkya,<sup>32</sup> the elaboration of the *Jātaka* folklore and of the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* epics, the foundations of dramatic and fine arts in the Bharata and Bātsayana cycles, the origins of the

mystical militarism and *nishkāma karma* or "categorical imperative" of the *Geetā* and last but not least, the *sarva-sattva-maitree*<sup>33</sup> or humanitarianism and universal brotherhood of Shākya, the preacher of *appamāda* or strenuousness and apostle of *virīya* or energism

1 *Vide* the author's article on "Democratic Ideals and Republican Institutions in India", in the *American Political Science Review* for November 1918, Narendranath Law's "Forms and Types of Hindu Polity" in the *Modern Review* for September 1917, Kashiprasad Jayaswal's "Introduction to Hindu Polity" in the same journal, May-July, 1913, and "Republics in the Mahabharata" in the *Journal of the Orissa and Bihar Research Society*, 1915, pp 173-80

2 VII, 3, 14

3 *Artha-shastra*, I, 35 (transl by R Shamasastri of Mysore)

4 *Ibid*, XI, Ch I

5 *Shanti-parva*, Ch CVII 23-24, 30-32

6 Cunningham's *Coins of Ancient India*, pp 75-79

7 Smith's *Early History of India* (1914), pp 285-86

8 McCrindle's *Ancient India*, Fragment L

9 *Ibid*, Fragment I

10 *Ibid*, Fragment LVI

11 McCrindle's *Invasion of India by Alexander* (ed 1896), p 296

12 *Ibid*, p 38-406

13 *Ibid*, p 149

14 Diodorus, XVII, 98,

15 McCrindle's *Invasion of India*, pp 252, 292

16 *Ibid*, 262

17 *Ibid*, 252

18 Smith's *Early History*, 98

19 McCrindle's *Invasion of India*, pp 155, 156, 167, 169

20 *Ibid*, 93

21 McCrindle, pp 79, 80, 81, Arrian, v 11

22 Smith's "Position of the Autonomous Tribes of the Punjab" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1903, pp 685-702

23 Rhys Davids' *Buddhist India*, Ch II

24 *Ibid*, pp 22, 41

25 *Ibid*, p 19

26 *Choolla-vagga* (The Sacred Books of the East Series, ed by Max Muller), XI, 1, 4, IV, XIV, 24-26, IV, x, *Maha-Vagga* (S B E Series), IX, 11, 1-4, IX, III, 2

27 *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Vol II, *Mahapari-nibbana-suttanta* (transl Rhys Davids)

28 *Vide* Hemchandra Rai Chaudhuri's "Lichchavis of Vaisali" in the *Modern Review*, July 1919

29 Rhys David's *Buddhist India*, p 49

30 Brajendranath Seal's *Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*, Benoy Kumar Sarkar's *Hindu Achievements in Exact Science*

31 Transl by B K Sarkar (Panini Office, Allahabad) *Vide* the author's articles "Hindu Political Philosophy" in the *Political Science Quarterly* (Columbia University), Dec 1918, and on the "Hindu Theory of International Relations" in the *Am Pol Sc Review* (August, 1919), Law's articles on "Vartta or Hindu Economics" in the *Indian Antiquary*, 1918-19.

32 Jolly's *Recht und Sitte*

33 *Saddharma-poondarika* (Lotus of True Law), edited by Kern and Nanjio, p 234, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol XXI, p 222

## TO A MIGRANT BIRD

BY KOLAPI, DARBAR SURA SINGH-JI, PRINCE OF LATHI IN KATHIAWAD, INDIA

*Translated from Gujarati by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Premanand V Vaishya*

The terrible darkness of life! the endless path before us!  
 (But when the destined task is altogether done, we shall return)—  
 Taking thy burden up, fly on, fly on  
 Wherever the winds shall waft thee, take thy rest, and be at peace

To the land of Kashmir, of sweet springs and balmy breezes!  
 Dear traveller! linger there in a land that is dear to me—  
 In a land of uttermost delight and honey-flowing groves,  
 Where shadows of clustered grapes are cast on crystal streams