Chapter- 5

**Dāna: Donors and Recipients as Gendered Figures**

_Dāna_ was an act of giving where reciprocation was expected, although not in a literal sense. Manu reiterated that just as _tapas_ was the trait of the _Kṛta yuga_, similarly _dāna_ was a feature of the _Kali yuga_.

_Dāna_ was a major social, economic, and religious activity which was prevalent in ancient societies. The concept of _dāna_ had gained prominence from the _Ṛgvedic_ period onwards, and by the early medieval period it became formalized with rules and regulations. It had become a prominent feature in textual sources, especially the _Dharmaśāstras_ and _Purāṇas_. Vijay Nath posits that the concept of _dāna_ had changed its form from _yajña_ to _saṁskāra_ to land grant which reflects the changing modes of production.

The idea of _dāna_ was well demonstrated in the epigraphical sources. Besides containing _prasāstis_, recording gifts was the core objective of the inscriptions. _Dāna_ items in the early medieval period, as seen from the epigraphical records, included land, wells, gardens, construction of temples etc., of which the land grant records form the majority of the inscriptions that the notion of _dāna_ gained prominence in the early medieval period is evident from the spurt of land grants in this period. It was assigned a pivotal role in understanding the socio-economic history of the period. It was one of the processes through which new dynasties were claiming legitimacy and ritual sanction. Vijay Nath states that the feudal aspect was evident from the term ‘_mahā_’ in the context of _dāna_. It emphasized on the magnificent form of gift-giving. Land grants were seen as a watershed between the state-controlled Mauryan economy and the feudal economy. In the present context we will discuss _dāna_ under four sections: the first deals with the concept of _dāna_ and its understanding in Indian context. The second subdivision deals with the references to _dāna_ in the _Matsya Purāṇa_. The third segment looks at the epigraphic evidence from

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the Vākāṭaka and the Kalacuri inscriptions. The last section compares the evidence and
draws tentative conclusions.

I

The existence of gift exchange in a society has been a matter of discussion among
scholars. Marcel Mauss states that to begin with, giving gift was obligatory but later on it
became reciprocal. P. Bordieu suggests that the concept of the gift was a form of capital
in which individuals invested, in order to carry through their projects. Socially, it
promoted economic and political security. Thus it should be viewed as a rational
adaptation to an ‘economy of insecurity’ and ‘symbolic taxes’ by which conflicting
groups mobilized the loyalties of their members. Thus it was more of a public affair
rather than a private one.

Gift-giving was a two-way process; giving and receiving. The latter did not imply
receiving the same gift: rather, it was generally held that the donor received whatever
he/she gave in much larger proportions. John F. Sherry describes it as a form of
reciprocity or exchange, which integrated society. Mauss sees the gift as a total social
fact. He holds that the gift meant reciprocation in material terms. But he did not take into
account the nature of the Indian gift. Parry points out that dānadharma contradicted the
universal norm of reciprocity as it required no repayment. Axel Michaels proposes that
dāna had a soteriological goal. Thus reimbursement was in terms of gratification and
washing off sin and not material benefit.

Belk attributes four functions to the gift- communication, social exchange, economic
exchange, and socialization. Its ritual aspect was defined in terms of the difference
marked between those who gave gifts and those who did not. Its ritual symbolism was

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9 Ibid.
evident in its rules regarding when, what and where the gift was given along with eloquent mantra, emphasized in the Purāṇas. That it was relevant as a method of social bonding was also explicit. It was a marker of status for both the donor and the recipient as was evident from the dānastutis in the Rgveda. It not only emphasized on the ritual, but also institutionalized the social position of the individual. It was symbolic of success and an investment whose return was expected, although not in a literal sense. In a way, gift-giving had three main characteristics- reciprocity, acquiring social status and a strong competitive spirit.

Dāna was described and discussed in several early Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas, Mahābhārata, Arthaśāstra attributed to Kautilya and other similar early texts. It became a subject of nibandha by the 10th century CE. Some of the prominent works were Lākṣmidhara’s Dānakalpataru, Ballālasena’s Dānasāgara, Hemādri’s Dānakanda, Cāṇḍeśvara’s Dānaratnākara, Viśvabhaṭṭa’s Dānasāra, Govindānanda’s Dānakriyākaumudi, and Bhaṭṭa Nīlakanṭha’s Dānamayūkha. Besides it was a subject of discussion in the Purāṇas. The epigraphical records provide excellent sources to understand the nature of dāna over a period of time.

Vijay Nath documents three stages in the form of gift; firstly, the early Vedic offering i.e. dāna and daksīṇa, second, the gift freely given out of one’s surplus to a beggar or mendicant monk from about 5th century BCE observed in the Buddhist notion of dāna, and the third, the ritualized obligatory gift bestowed out of a sense of moral duty and indebtedness i.e. rna, from around 3rd century CE i.e. dāna.

During the Rgvedic period, the cow symbolized wealth; as a result there were references to the cow being given as dāna. Besides the cow, horses, cattle, slave girls, chariots, camels, treasure-chest, garments, robes, measures of gold and metals etc. were mentioned as gift items. The quantity of gifts was exaggerated in the text. The idea was that in return for the gift, the donors would reside in the heaven, be victorious in all battles and

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13 Ibid.

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would live with their brides in eternal bliss. This vision of a hero’s paradise reflected the patriarchal nature of the society. Another important aspect was the functional items of wealth. Land was not mentioned in the list, since land did not feature as wealth during this period. Thus the purpose of the dāna, was magico-religious, as the benefit accrued was supernatural. The intention of giving gifts was not only symbolic but also to confer status on both; the yajamāna, i.e. rājanya or ksatriya, and the recipient i.e. the brāhmaṇa. It was also a means of economic exchange.

By the later Vedic period, the terms dāna and daksinā were common. Dāna was a gift and daksinā was specifically the sacrificial fees given to the priest. The expression was also used in terms of gifts given with the right hand. The wife of sacrificer was also known as daksinā, thus the term was linked with sacrifice. Heesterman holds that daksinā was a part of the economic system and not a salary or a sacrificial fee, as it was not only given to the brāhmaṇa performing the ritual but also to the one who observed it. But Nath contends that it was a kind of compulsory gift to the officiating priest as it was given after the sacrifice and the amount to be paid was also predeterminded. Dāna was complete and fruitful only when it was associated with daksinā. In the later Vedic period, dāna and daksinā had become more channelized. The position of the brāhmaṇas was well established as they were referred to as gods on earth. And the idea was that they should be appeased through gifts. Land and gold were to be given as dāna, but bovine animals were still prominent. During this period the concept of iṣṭa and pūrta also developed which got formalized by the period of the Dharmashastras.

By the period of the Dharmashastras, the notion of giving gifts was legalized with rules and regulations. Jaimini (500-200 BCE) mentioned that dāna was transference of one’s
ownership. There was reference to dāna to be given according to one’s means, but it was a formalized practice by this period. Dāna was recognized as an important method to cleanse sins. It had to be given with respect and good feelings towards the recipient; otherwise the donor would not get the desired result.

The distinction between iṣṭa and pūrta categories was well formed. Spiritual merit that was acquired by giving gifts at the time of sacrifice was isṭadharma. The gift that was given outside the sacrificial altar was pūrta. Charitable work such as the dedication of wells, tanks, temples, groves, food and also gifts on occasion of eclipse, on the twelfth day of the month, etc. were pūrta. Thus dāna was iṣṭa or pūrta according to one’s means and should be given to a worthy person with a pleased attitude, according to Manu. Dāna could be performed even by women and śūdras, while śūdras could perform only the pūrta dharma.

By the age of the Purāṇas, the concept of debt to the forefathers, gods and sages i.e. rna had gained a stronghold, along with the belief that the debt could be repaid through dāna. Not giving a gift was considered as a sin which a householder should avoid. Six distinct constituent elements were referred to in the context of dāna- dātā, donor, pratigrahīta, recipient, śraddhā, attitude, deya, appropriateness of the gift, tīthi, proper time, and deśa, proper place. Axel Michaels points out seven distinct features of dānadharm: first, the recipient should be a brāhmaṇa, who should be a snātaka, śrotṛiya i.e. one who knew the Vedas. He should not be a hypocrite or a self-centered brāhmaṇa. Second, dāna was to be given in a liberal spirit only then would the donor get punya, merit. Third, acceptance of the gift in the proper place and time alone made it a religious offering. Fourth, there was the danger associated with dāna in terms of loss of knowledge or tejas,

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25 Cited in Kane, op. cit.
which only a worthy recipient could withstand. Thus dāna was to be given to a virtuous recipient. Fifth, the proper dāna had no material reciprocation i.e. its benefit was to be religious. Sixth, the transactions were hierarchical and asymmetrical, as the recipient was higher in status than the donor. And lastly, in times of emergency, āpad, brāhmaṇas could accept anything from anybody.

Another aspect of dāna which distinguished it from yajña and homa was pratigraha i.e. acceptance of the gift. The act of giving was complete only when the gift was accepted mentally, vocally or physically. The Mitāksara mentioned that one should accept a deer skin by touching it on the hairy side, the cow by its tail, an elephant by the trunk and the horse by its mane, a female by touching her head and land by enjoying its produce. It was further enumerated by the law books that pratigraha meant not just acceptance, but had to be reciprocated with unseen spiritual results i.e. punya.

The Dharmasastras also mentioned people who were considered fit to be pātras i.e. appropriate for receiving donations and those who were not. In the list of those who were not to be given dāna, the emphasis was on the brāhmaṇas who were hypocrites, did not know the Vedas, those who presided over the sacrifice for śūdras, those suffering from disease, sellers of the Veda, wicked people etc. These categories were not to be given dāna on any condition. The stress was on giving grants to the needy. Time and again importance was placed on the honor in giving gifts to a deserving person as it was felt that then both the donor and recipient would go to heaven.

There was a vivid discussion of things which were considered deya i.e. fit to be given. These were divided into three categories: first, superior kind which included food, curd, honey, protection, cow, land, gold, horse, and elephant. The next category consisted of learning, house for shelter, domestic supplies, and medicines. The inferior categories consisted of shoes, swings, carts, umbrellas, vessels, seats, lamps, wood, fruits, and other objects. Dharmaśāstric writers differed on what was to be regarded as atidāna i.e. best

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gift, but the list of gifts which could be given was similar.32 There were provisions in the law books which stated that one should give only what he owned and that too within his means. There was also discussion on what could not be given such as, what was borrowed, property jointly owned, children, son and wife, entire property etc. Dāna was further divided into nītya, daily, naimittika, on special occasions such as an eclipse or penance and kāmya, with a desire for things or persons such as crop, progeny, victory or wife. Another category was dhruvadāna, permanent gift, for example a well or garden.33 Dāna was also divided into sāttvika, rājas, and tāmasa according to the Bhagavad-gītā.34

The proper time for gifts was laid down in the Dharmaśātras.35 Special stress was laid on the gift given on the first day of the ayana i.e. the passage of the sun to the north or south, eclipse of the sun or moon, new moon day, twelfth day, sankrānti and other such tithis. Generally gifts were not to be given at night except during eclipse, marriage, birth of a child and sankrānti. With reference to proper place there was mention of increase in denomination of benefit depending on the place where the gift was made. Gifts given at home would yield ten times as much merit, in the cow-pen hundred times, at tīrthas a thousand times and infinite times if made near a Śiva-liṅga. There was also mention of places such as Prayag, Kuruksetra, Puskara, Benaras, forests and banks of rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada etc. and other such places. The benefit of making gifts in these places was proclaimed as infinite.

The concept of dāna was well-perceived in the Buddhist literature as well, but it was different from the Dharmaśātric view. The notion of giving and receiving was central to the Buddhist doctrine of dāna. The relationship between the renunciant and the householder was based on dāna. Pali literature referred to dāna as dharmadānam (gift of spiritual blessing) and āmisadānam, gift of temporal blessings.36 It was used more in the sense of charity/alms rather than ritual gift. According to the Dharmaśāstras, dāna was a samskāra where the focus was on the type of gift, donor, time and place rather than the

33 Ibid, p. 848.
34 Ibid, p. 849.
virtue of giving the gift. Buddhist doctrine was more concerned with the inner transformation for both the donor and recipient.\(^{37}\) Dāna was designated more towards householders. There were three ways by which they could get merit—dāna, sīla, moral habit and bhāvanā. Of these, dāna was considered the best way of gaining merit. According to the Buddhist theory, dāna should be given because of anukampā i.e. compassion.\(^{38}\) In contrast, the Mahābhārata mentions desire for merit, fear, profit, free-choice, and pity to be the reason for giving gifts.\(^{39}\) According to Kalpana Upreti,\(^{40}\) there were reasons for the glorification of dāna in Buddhism. First, the monks were dependent on dāna for their survival and second for the benefit of society as a whole. The dukkha, sorrow of the poor could be minimized to some extent by regular or occasional dāna.

II

The concept of dāna was discussed in the Matsya Purāṇa. Time and again the text dealt with the issue of dāna along with its rules and regulations. There was detailed description on the procedures to be followed during the process of giving gifts. The gifts of various kinds of cows and hills are mentioned in chapters 72-92. In chapter 205-207 the dāna of cow, black deer skin and bull was mentioned. In chapter 274-289 the sixteen mahādāna were discussed. Vijay Nath suggests a link between the ceremonialism of the mahādāna and the rise of new dynasties considered typical of the Kali yuga.\(^{41}\) The ritual symbolism attached to mahādāna made it an effective means of elevating ritual status; as a result they were used by members of newly established dynasties of the Western Deccan.\(^{42}\) Besides, dāna was referred to in the context of śrāddha, tīrthas and vrata. The dāna as discussed in the Purāṇa was not just an act of giving, but was linked with certain rules about when, how and to whom it should be given. It also mentioned the various recitations that had to be made while the gift was bestowed. Thus the ritualistic nature of


\(^{38}\) Ibid, p. 199.


\(^{42}\) Ibid, p. 417.
the gift was to be maintained along with its function as a process of socio-economic exchange. The emphasis was on the gift, the recipient, and benefit to be accrued due the act of giving. According to the Matsya Purāṇa giving alms and reading the Vedas were the best ways of atonement from sins. It enabled the learned to go to Brahmā through contemplation and attain final beatitude (MP, 39.27-28). The benefit of dāna was supposedly more spiritual, although worldly benefits were also enumerated. There were references to long life, health, progeny etc. The text mentions at the same time that one should give donations according to one’s resources.

The significance of the cow as a gift can be perceived from the importance given to it in the text. The dāna of a cow was expected to relieve one from all sins. According to the Purāṇa, ‘...For this reason the gift of a cow is said to be the best gift of all charities, because a single cow protects the donor from all great sins. A cow should be given to a good brāhmaṇa’ (MP: Akhtar, 105.22).

The gift of the cow was not just in a literal sense; there were ten sorts of cows that were to be given to a brāhmaṇa. The Matsya Purāṇa discussed the benefits of guḍa dhenu as a gift which was to be given along with pronouncing mantras, with the donor benefiting from the removal of all sins (MP, 72.2). This dāna formed a part of the aśokadvādaśī vrata where guḍa dhenu had to be offered to the recipient. The goddess Lakṣmī was supposed to have taken the form of a cow and was worshipped. Interestingly, after invoking the goddess as Lakṣmī, the cow was described as Rudrāṇi, the favorite of Śiva. Thus the sectarian differences between Vaishnavism and Śaivism were not highlighted. The desired benefits were health, wealth, and removal of sin. There was reference to various types of cows- guḍa dhenu, made of raw sugar, ghṛta dhenu, of clarified butter, tila dhenu, of sesame, jala dhenu, of water, kṣīra dhenu, of milk, madhu dhenu, of honey, sarkara dhenu, of sugar, dadhi dhenu, of curd, rasa dhenu, of syrup and a living cow (MP, 82.18-19).

Next there was reference to sumeruparvata dāna, where ten hills were to be given. Interestingly the Matsya Purāṇa states that, ‘the blessings conferred by this form of charity cannot be attained otherwise, not even by reading of, or listening to, the Purāṇas, Vedas, performing sacrifices and worshipping or erecting temples for the devas’ (MP:
Akhtar, 83.3). Thus, making dāna was projected as the foremost religious act, although
the benefit from reading, hearing or advising others regarding various vrata, tīrtha and
even some narratives were enumerated throughout the text. But the gift of the ten hills
was incomparable according to the Purāṇa.

The ten hills that were to be made and given as gift were- of grain, salt, raw sugar, gold,
sesame, cotton, clarified butter, jewels, silver and sugar. The proper time and the way of
giving the gift were mentioned. Eclipses, sacrifice, marriage, full moon, the twelfth day
of the bright fortnight were some of the relevant days for making the gift. Besides these,
cows were to be given as dāna. The resultant benefit was the realm of the gods, where the
donor was expected to go in a beautiful chariot with apsarās and gandharvas, besides
attainment of health, beauty, bliss, birth as an emperor, liberation from sins etc. The
benefits that were supposed to accrue were patriarchal; interestingly they were not just
spiritual but also included goals such as being born in a king’s family. The gods referred
to were both Viśnu and Śiva.

Another fascinating aspect was the story of a sex worker, Lilāvatī, which was narrated in
the context of the dāna of a hill of sugar (MP, 92.23-31). It mentioned not just a veśyā
but also a śūdra who was a goldsmith. Lilāvatī was supposed to have attained liberation
from her sins and went to the realm of Śiva. The goldsmith was born as a king,
Dharmamūrti who was a friend of Indra and had killed a thousand daitya (MP, 92.17).
And his wife Bhānumatī was a woman of matchless beauty like Lakṣmī. Thus as result of
the dāna they attained health, beauty, wealth, and kingdom. The text not only proclaimed
the benefits of the dāna irrespective of caste and profession, but also highlighted the
result of actions done with a pure heart.

The next reference was to the gift of a calving cow to a brāhmaṇa (MP, 205.1-9). The
cow had to be decked with gold, silver and pearls. The donor was to get the benefit of
giving land along with four oceans. This was expected to liberate his father, grandfather,
and great grandfather from hell, from where they would go to the Goloka and
Brahmaloka. Surprisingly, the benefit included, a lady “whose face is like moon and
whose color is like burnished gold, her breasts are bloated, waist slender, and eyes are

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like lotuses.” (MP: Akhtar, 205.9). Thus the benefit projected was much more ‘attractive’ than mere atonement from sins.

Black deer skin was another gift item that was commended, especially to be given to an agnihotri brähmana (MP, 206, 1-31). The deer skin had to be decorated with gold, silver, pearls, and other jewels. It was expected to relieve the donor from all sins, especially those committed by speaking falsely about a cow and virgin. There was also mention of the sin from lust for other women. The benefit accrued from the charity was expected to make the donor conquer all realms, he could go wherever he wanted like a bird, his father and son would not perish and he would never be separated from his wife. He would never lose wealth. Thus, all his wishes would get fulfilled. The benefits from charity generally began with spiritual returns but accomplishment of worldly desires was anticipated at the same time.

In the gift of the bull, the color of the bull to be given was specific for each caste (MP, 207). Hence, brähmanas were to set free red, tawny, white, or black bulls, the kṣatriya a red bull, while the vaisya should free a golden bull and the śūdra should free a black bull. But the benefit in return was supposed to be the same for all the castes. The donor would attain emancipation. This probably cannot be taken as a proper gift as the bull had to be set free; thus there was no mention of a specific recipient.

The Matsya Purāna, while narrating a story relating to the Narmada and Tripurā (during the reign of demon, Vanāsura), mentioned the virtuous women of the country (MP, 187). It further mentioned the dānadharma for women. For women the gift items were not gold, land, cow or other material objects. They were to give trees such as the āmra, badarāni, kadamba, campaka, aśoka, aśvattha, pippala, neem and mahua etc. The benefit from such grant was all the more patriarchal, as it was neither spiritual nor worldly but physical. As a result of the grant, the breasts of the women were supposed to take the form of wood-apple, her thighs that of the plantain tree; she would become adorable like the aśvattha tree and sweet smelling like the neem. She would become illustrious like the campaka and free from sorrow like the aśoka tree. She would turn sweet like the mahua and soft like the leaves of the banyan tree (MP, 187.31-32). Giving these trees she would acquire saubhōgya i.e. prosperity. The text further mentioned that giving pumpkins and
creepers was not considered good. The dāna was to be made after observing particular fasts. The result from the dāna was not atonement of sin, emancipation, health or wealth as in the case of other gifts. But it was supposed to result in the gain of physical beauty for women. This would again show the patriarchal nature of the text as the expectations of men and women were supposed to be different.

The most explicit discussion on dāna was in the context of mahādāna mentioned in chapters 275 to 289 of the Matsya Purāṇa. The result of the sixteen mahādānas was freedom from rebirth. It was regarded as a dispeller of all ills and was supposed to remove the effect of bad dreams. The sixteen mahādānas were tulā-puruṣa, hiranyagarbha, brahmāṇḍa, kalpaḍāpa, gośahasra, kāmadhenu, hiranyaśva, aśvaratha, hemahastī ratha, paṇca-lāṅgalaka, dharādaṇa, viśvacakra, mahākalpalatā, saptasāgara, ratnadhenu, and mahābhūta-ghata mahādāna. The Agnipurāṇa mentioned ten mahādāna viz. gifts of gold, horse, sesame, elephants, maids, chariots, land, house, a bride, and dark-brown cow.43 The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned elaborate preparations such as the specifications of maṇḍapa i.e. altars, decorated with flowers, fruits etc., besides the time and place that were to be considered. Further, the brähmaṇas who were taking part in the ritual as well as the nature and qualifications of other recipients were also emphasized. Besides the mahādāna, the brähmaṇas taking part in the ritual were to be given grand gifts including cows, gold earrings, girdles and rings, clothes and bedstead etc. Vijay Nath opines that the mahādāna rituals were an attempt to place the ceremony at the rank of Vedic sacrifices. Thereby it played a legitimizing role and became instrumental in sacralizing political power.44

The tulāpuruṣa mahādāna i.e. weighing a person against gold or silver which was then distributed among brähmaṇas was considered the best (MP, 274.19). The gift was to be distributed among the poor, worthy, helpless besides brähmaṇas. The benefit from the mahādāna included rule over a loka for one manvantara, becoming illustrious like the sun, a place in the realm of Viṣṇu, being adorned by apsarās for many kalpas. The donor

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would later take birth as an illustrious emperor and would conquer a thousand kings after performing sacrifices. By reading, hearing, or observing the ordinance one would go to heaven and would be adorned by Indra (MP: Akhtar, 274. 77-78).

The *hiranyakarbhā mahādāna*, golden womb was regarded as the dispeller of all sins (*MP*, 275). The term signified a life-giving process. The donor was said to be born again in divine form as virtuous and truthful. This concept of the *hiranyakarbhā* was well used by later kings to claim status. Among the items to be given was a cow decorated with ornaments, a gold seat, besides gifts of sandals, shoes, umbrella, cāmara, seats, utensils, villages etc. according to the donor’s capability. One who performed this *mahādāna* was expected to go to Brahmaloka and live there for *koṭi kalpa* and would be worshipped. He would reside in the realm of *lokapālas*, freed from all sins and would be adorned by siddhas, sādhyas and apsarās. He would liberate himself and his paternal relations from hell. Even by reading, hearing or advising this ordinance one would go to the realm of Viṣṇu, become lord of the devas like Indra and the leader of wise men.

The *brahmāṇḍa mahādāna*, Brahmā’s egg, again was regarded as a dispeller of all sins (*MP*, 276). Among the gifts to be given during the rite were cows (ten in number), gold, cloth, milking vessels, sandals, umbrellas, looking-glass, seats, eatables, sugarcane, lamps, fruits, garlands etc. All the gifts were to be divided into two parts- one was to be given to the preceptor and the other part was to be divided among the rest of the brāhmaṇas. The performer was liberated from all sins and was expected to go to the realm of Viṣṇu in a chariot and would be adorned by nymphs. The donor would also liberate his maternal as well as paternal family. By reading or hearing about this ordinance in a temple, one would go to the realm of Indra where he would enjoy the company of apsarās. This was one of the few instances were reference was made to liberation not only of the paternal but also of the maternal family.

The *kalpapādapa mahādāna*, golden tree, also known as *kalpavṛkṣa*, was again regarded as dispeller of all sins which would fulfill all desires (*MP*, 277). The guru, preceptor was to be given the *kalpa* tree, while small trees were to be given to other brāhmaṇas. The donor would get the benefit of the *aśvamedha yajña*; he would be adorned by apsarās, siddhas, cāranas, and kinnaras. He would liberate his family, present and future
generations. He would go to the realm of Viṣṇu in a vimāna i.e. chariot. Later he would go to the city of Nārāyaṇa. As in the case of the previous mahādāna, one who reads or remembers this mahādāna would go to the realm of Indra where he would live with the apsaras. By giving this gift the donee would get the benefit of sacrifices which had lost their relevance and were not practised anymore as seen earlier.

The gosahasra mahādāna was also regarded as dispeller of all sins and as a method of fulfilling all desires (MP, 278). It included decking up ten cows with ornaments, along with a bull. According to the means of the donor the number of cows could go up to a hundred. It was specifically mentioned that giving one cow to many was sinful. For health and prosperity many cows were to be given to one man. Thus by giving the dāna of a thousand cows he would go to the realm of Śiva and get the usual benefits. Then after performing a hundred asvamedha sacrifices he would attain the realm of Viṣṇu and would be liberated from bondage.

In the kōmadhenu mahādāna, a cow and a calf were to be made of gold (MP, 279). It was to be given along with fruits; the best gift would consist of a thousand fruits. Along with it a black deer skin was to be given. The desired objective was bliss and liberation. It had to be given to a brāhmaṇa of noble lineage, with good qualities and handsome appearance. The donor would then go to the realm of Indra. This seemed to be a simpler dāna as compared to the earlier ones.

The hiranyāśva mahādāna, golden horse, was expected to confer innumerable benefits to the donor (MP, 280). The donor had to provide for black deer skin, sandals, shoes, umbrellas, seats etc. The preceptor should be given the golden horse and the cow was offered to other priests. As a result of the mahādāna the donor was freed from all sins and would attain the realm of Viṣṇu and would be honored by siddhas. On reading or hearing this ordinance and especially if a poor man yearned to perform it, he would be liberated from all sins and would go to the realm of Sūrya where he would be worshipped by celestial women. Thus, performing the ritual was not the only way of emancipation; even yearning to perform it would lead to the atonement of all sins.

The aṣvaratha mahādāna, golden chariot, was again viewed as a dispeller of all sins (MP, 281). All the usual things had to be procured: umbrellas, flowers, grains, bedstead
etc. The donor was expected to get final beatitude after being liberated from all sins. He would become famous and attain the realm of Śiva where nymphs like “black bees drink the aroma of his lotus face” (MP: Akhtar, 281.15). One who read or heard this ordinance would never go to hell. The metaphoric description used was unlike Purānic lore.

By performing the hemahastī ratha mahādāna the donor was expected to attain the realm of Viṣṇu (MP, 282). A chariot of the shape of puspaka (the mythical chariot mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa) was to be made of gold, studded with precious stones. The dāna was to be given along with the usually prescribed gifts. As a result the donor would go to the realm of Śiva and would be liberated from all sins. Even a sinner would attain good form and would liberate himself and his family.

The pañca lāṅgalaka mahādāna, plot of land measuring five ploughs, was also a dispeller of sins (MP, 283). The text states that any market place, town or village should be given on the occasion of an eclipse. Land should be given along with five pairs of oxen decorated with ornaments. One who gives a hundred nivartana of land would be liberated from all sins. The donor along with his father, grandfather, and friends would go to the realm of Śiva where gods, demons, gandharvas and siddhas would fan him. By giving oxen, plots of land along with yokes etc. the donor would be freed from all sins and would obtain the position of Indra.

The dharādāna, golden earth, was expected to remove all ills and sins (MP, 284). The donor was expected to make a replica of the earth i.e. Jambudvīpa along with hills, rivers etc. The usual paraphernalia had to be provided along with it. The donor would go to the region of Nārāyaṇa and would liberate his family for twenty-one generations. One who read or heard about the gift would be liberated from all sins and would go to the realm of Śiva.

The viśvacakra mahādāna, golden wheel, was regarded as a dispeller of all heinous sins (MP, 285). The donor was assured of going to the realm of Viṣṇu and attaining the eternal form with four hands, and would remain among the apsarās for three hundred kalpas. The siddhas would salute him and women would find him attractive. One who would worship the cakra would attain prosperity, wealth and long life. Enemies would be
destroyed and most heinous sins would vanish. The donor would never go through the cycle rebirth and death.

The gift of the mahākālpalatā, golden creeper was expected to fulfill all desires and work as the destroyer of all sins (MP, 286). Unlike other dāna, where generally gods were invoked and sometimes goddesses were mentioned, this was in honor of the consorts of the lokapālas. Nine goddesses were mentioned- Brāhmī, Indrāṇī, Gadinī, Nārītyā, Vārunī, Patākinī, Śamkhiṇī, Māheśvarī and Āgneyī. The images made were to be in their girlhood form and should be shown as bestowing gifts. Besides the images, cows and vases were to be given as gifts. They were referred to as kalpalatā vadhūs, which would dispel all sins and yield desired objects. The benefit accrued was liberation of hundred generations and the donor would be adorned by apsarās. One who reads, hears or sees the dāna and the dikvadhūdāna would go to the realm of Indra.

In the saptasāgara mahādāna, seven oceans, the desired object was wealth besides liberation from sin (MP, 287). One who would give away the seven oceans would go to the realm of Viṣṇu and would be venerated by the gods. He would liberate his family from sins and send them to heaven from hell. Vijay Nath holds that this dāna was an attempt to reaffirm the ritual status of seafaring merchants.45

The ratnadhenu mahādāna was expected to yield great benefits and would lead to goloka (MP, 288). Besides the usual goods, a cow was to be given to the guru. The donor would be freed from all sins and go to the realm of Viṣṇu. Then in a chariot along with his sons and grandsons he would go to the region of Śiva. The last dāna was mahābhūta-ghata, golden vase, and was expected to destroy all sins (MP, 289). The expected gain from the gift was wealth. The donor would get liberated from sin and would attain beatitude. He would go to the region of Viṣṇu and would be adorned by the apsarās.

In the end the Matsya Purāṇa mentions that one who would perform the sixteen mahādānas would never be reborn. One who would hear about them along with his wife

and sons in a temple of Viṣṇu would attain the realm of Viṣṇu and would remain there for one kalpa (MP: Akhtar, 289. 17).

The nature of the sixteen mahādāna represented an attempt to incorporate various trends. The desired wish was expiation of sins. It projected a gloomy scenario which could be resolved only by performing the mahādāna. The benefit of the ritual was cosmic as well as material in terms of wealth, long life, beauty, etc. That patriarchal ideals inspired many of these rituals as is evident in the expressed desire to gain beautiful forms and to be adorned or desired by nymphs. Besides Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva there was mention of lokapālas and their realms. And interestingly, there was also reference to the consorts of lokapālas. The name of some of the goddesses and their mounts, like Gadini on the buffalo, Nairtā on deer would reflect tribal affiliations and their popular aspects. The guru or preceptor was the chief beneficiary of the dāna and the rest was to be given to the other priests. The guru had a wide role as a chief legitimizing agent and this depiction of the guru as a ritual specialist had a Tantric orientation. Vijay Nath pointed out two roles played by the mahādāna. The first objective was to provide ritual validation for power and social status to the elite sections of the society, especially those from obscure tribal origins. The second purpose was to increase the client base for the Brāhmaṇical traditions. In other words, it was an attempt to popularize the Brāhmaṇical religion.

Besides these explicit references, the Matsya Purāṇa referred to dāna in the context of tīrtha and śrāddha as discussed in the earlier chapter. Giving charity at a sacred place according to one’s means would enhance merit and make the donor entitled to live in heaven till the dissolution of the world (MP, 106.10). With reference to Kasi, it was stated that one who would give away everything in charity and perform sacrifices and then bathe in the water of all tīrthas would attain Śiva in Kasi (MP, 183.18). Charity given in Bhūgūṭītīrtha would lead the donor to heaven. Although visiting a sacred place itself would lead to expiation of sins, charity given at these places had a special

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relevance. Tirtha was one of the best places for dāna. Thus the aim clearly was to popularize the sacred places along with the concept of dāna.

In the context of śrāddha, of all the kinds of dāna mentioned in the Matsya Purāṇa the recipient was specified as the brāhmaṇa. The number of recipients could vary according to the capability of the donor. The Purāṇa, as seen in the earlier chapter, was explicit on whom to invite and who should not be invited, besides specifying the time of such rituals. The boon expected from the pitr, the deceased paternal ancestors, was health, wealth and progeny. The recipient brāhmaṇa was only a medium through whom the forefathers were satisfied. Special items were occasionally listed; for instance in the daiva or sādhāranā śrāddha which was recommended even for śūdras, dāna included cows, land, gold and clothes (MP, 17). Similarly for the vrddhi or ābhuydāyikam śrāddha which again could be done by śūdras, dāna of clothes and gold was suggested. It was offered for both paternal and maternal forefathers (MP, 17). In the ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha, a well-decked bed, a well dressed image made of gold was to be given along with a bull and cow. A pitcher of water and nice eatables were also to be provided (MP, 18). Thus the gifts were simple in comparison to those associated with the mahādāna rituals. These rites were to be performed by the general masses unlike the mahādāna, which were for the elite sections of society.

The Matsya Purāṇa indirectly dealt with the pūrta dāna of water reservoir and planting trees. There is a discussion on building water bodies such as tadāga, tank, kūpa, well and vāpi, square-well (MP, 58.1). The procedure included performing various rituals such as homa and installing various gods like Varuṇa, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Lakṣmī, Ambikā etc., construction of the maṇḍapa and inviting brāhmaṇas. The donor would get the benefit of the agniṣṭoma yajña by consecrating a tank during the rainy, vrṣṭi and śarat i.e. autumn season, while one would get the benefit of the vājapeya and atirātra yajña by constructing a tank during the season of hemanta and śiśira. If the tank was constructed in the vasanta season then one would reap the benefit of the aśvamedha while during the grīṣma, summer one would get the benefit of the rājasūya yajña. Besides these benefits, one who performs these ceremonies goes to the realm of Śiva and later to the region of Viṣṇu.
The planting and maintenance of trees was also a pūrta activity according to the Sūtra, Smṛtis, Āgamas and Purāṇas.⁴⁹ The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned the procedure to lay groves, pādapa (MP, 59.1). The ritual included the gift of golden fruits, milch cow, bed and other objects of daily use. The performance of this ceremony would lead to fulfillment of all the desires of the performer (MP, 59.17). One who plants a tree would reside in heaven for thirty thousand years of Indra. Further the person would liberate his past and future generations and would never be re-born. As in other rituals, one who hears or relates the prescribed ceremony would go to the realm of Brahmā and would be venerated by the gods (MP, 59.20).

In the context of dāna, cows, clothes, land, bull, grains and other utilitarian items were to be given. Thus the Purāṇas emphasized on pūrtadharma. The benefit accrued was atonement of sins, health, wealth, happiness, and long life, besides being able to reside in the realm of various gods and to be adorned by āpsarās.

III

The gift of land was highly valued in earlier texts. It was important not only to give but also to record it for future kings. According to Yājñavalkya, “...the king should issue a permanent edict bearing his signature and the date on a piece of cloth or a copper plate marked at the top with his seal and write down thereon the name of his ancestors and of himself, the extent of what is gifted and set out the passages that condemn the resumption of gifts.”⁵⁰ The inscriptions issued by kings, queens and other elite men and women were thus in the accordance with the Dharmaśāstras.

Epigraphic records demonstrate the relevance of dāna in the early medieval context. The records were replete with land grant donations made generally to brāhmaṇas. The record of grants has played a pivotal role in understanding early medieval society and economy. Scholars are divided on the nature and purpose of the land grants in terms of political developments. R.S. Sharma sees land grants as the force which ushered in feudalism while Om Prakash opines that land grants brought about feudalization, ruralization,

regionalization, stagnation, and backwardness of the early medieval society, economy, and state.\textsuperscript{52} Scholars such as B.D. Chattopadhyaya hold a different point of view. According to him land grants were a means of legitimization and expansion to outlying regions.\textsuperscript{53} An important role was played by brāhmaṇas, who were the recipients, in spreading Brāhmanical culture and legitimizing the new emerging polities.

The medieval era according to Cynthia Talbot is a period of progressive change characterized by the extension of agrarian settlement, a rise in the number of religious institutions, an expansion of commercial activities and an evolution of political systems and networks.\textsuperscript{54} R.S. Sharma holds that the political essence of feudalism lay in the organization of the whole administrative structure on the basis of land, the economic essence lay in the institution of serfdom in which peasants were attached to the soil held by landed intermediaries who were placed between the king and the actual tiller and who in turn paid rent in kind and labor to them.\textsuperscript{55} The system was based on the self-sufficient economy in which things were mainly produced for the local use of the peasants and their lords and not for the market. The most striking development of the early medieval period was the practice of land grants to brāhmaṇas from the 1\textsuperscript{st} century CE. From the Gupta period onwards, villages were given to the donee/s together with the fields and its inhabitants, along with fiscal, administrative, and judicial rights and exemptions from royal interference. B. D. Chattopadhyaya regards political integration as a counterpoint to the decentralized polity of the feudal model and as a key feature of the early medieval period. It implies the transformation of pre-state polities into state polities and thus marked the integration of local polities into structures that transcend the bounds of local polities.\textsuperscript{56} The development was based on a series of processes for example, the extension of agrarian society through the peasantization of tribal groups, improvement of trading network, expansion of caste society, the emergence and spatial extending of ruling lineages by the process called ksatriyization, increasing hinterland with a network of

\textsuperscript{56} Chattopadhyaya, B.D., \textit{The Making of Early Medieval India}, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 1994, p. 35.
religious institutions patronized by royalty and land assignments to officials and attempts to centralize administrative functions, particularly revenue collection.\textsuperscript{57}

Grants documented in inscriptions can be classified under the following heads—plots of land, villages, resources for the construction of temples, tanks, gardens etc. Sometimes the grants were combined, i.e. a grant of land along with the construction of a temple and so on. James Heitzman points out that a network of temple donations was a two way process: on the one hand the local leaders established their links to royalty and on the other, the king through these grants legitimized his rule.\textsuperscript{58} The items of the grant were not as elaborate as mentioned in the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa}. The stated purpose of most of the grants was the accrual of religious merit for the donor and sometimes for her/his parents. In many cases, grants were given for the religious merit of the mother, as in the Patna Museum grants where Pravarasena II mentioned that the benefit of the \textit{dāna} was religious merit for his mother, Prabhāvatīguptā, \textit{matr bhaṭṭārikā}.\textsuperscript{59} The occasion of the grant could be a lunar or solar eclipse or any other special occasion such as victory in a battle or \textit{srāddha} etc. Sometimes it was linked with other religious activities such as taking a bath on a certain day or breaking a fast. Some records do not provide any explicit reason for the grants. We will illustrate these similarities and differences by a closer examination of the Vākāṭaka and Kalacuri inscriptions in terms of the nature of the grant, the occasion on which it was made and the benefits that were supposed to accrue from it.

In the inscriptions of the Vākāṭaka dynasty (Eastern and Western branch), of the total thirty-four records, sixteen document gifts of villages. Other records mentioned plots of land, temples, lakes, caves, \textit{dharmaśṭhāna} i.e. place of worship according to V.V. Mirashi. A.M. Shastri translates the term as court of justice.\textsuperscript{60} Villages were granted by the king, whereas the ministers and feudatories gave land, cave etc. Probably giving villages was a royal prerogative. It was also interesting to note that only one record mentioned the construction of a shrine, although many records referred to temples. The ratio of the various items of gift can be represented as follows:

Chart 5.1: Ratio of the Vākātaka gifts:

Refer Appendix 5.1 for details.

It represents the percentage of each item of gift. Thus, 29 per cent of the recorded gifts were of land, 47 per cent were villages, temples accounted for 6 per cent, and lakes/tanks 9 per cent, and gifts such as caves and vihāras and dharmasthāna (listed as ‘other’) accounted for 9 per cent. (Many inscriptions referred to more than one item of donation; therefore these percentages are not related to the number of inscriptions.)

Of the grants by kings most of which were villages, some deserve special attention. For instance, the Wadgaon Plates of Pravarasena II\(^6\) mentioned 400 nivartana, an area of land, but its measure was different in different ages and localities,\(^6\) was given to a brāhmaṇa. The Yavatmal grant of Pravarasena II\(^6\) mentions that the grant was already enjoyed by the recipient. This showed that sometimes the grants were recorded later. The Pandhurna Plates of Pravarasena II\(^6\) records the grant of land 2000 nivartana of land in a village that was granted earlier by Pratihārīsen I. The grant was given to several brāhmaṇas whose gotra and sākhā were mentioned. This was against the norm as a grant once given was not to be taken back according to the Dharmaśāstras.\(^6\) The Pauni grant of Pravarasena II\(^6\) also referred to land being taken back and 50 nivartana given in exchange.

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\(^6\) Wadgaon Plates of Pravarasena II, CII, Vol. 5, pp. 53-56.
\(^6\) Yavatmal Plates of Pravarsena II, ASCI, pp. 63-65 and 95.
\(^6\) Pandhurna Plates of Pravarasena II, CII, Vol. 5, pp. 63-68.
\(^6\) Pauni Plates of Pravarasena II, ASCI, pp. 69-71 and 98.
In the case of donations by women, all three grants by Prabhāvatīguptā were of villages. Her records show her unique position in the dynasty as has been discussed earlier. Prabhāvatīguptā issued grants with her own seals, used titles, and recorded the Gupta genealogy which marked out her position as different from that of other Vākāṭaka queens. She gave villages, unlike other queens, which implied her control over land. From the Poona plates we learn that she granted a village to an ācārya.67 The Riddhapur plates, record that she granted a village along with one house-site and four huts of farmers to brāhmaṇas.68 The Miregaon inscription of Prabhāvatīguptā mentioned the grant of a village to five brāhmaṇas.69

The Masoda plates of Pravarasena II,70 record that land was donated at the request of mahādevī or the chief queen. We may note that this grant was similar to those made by Pravarasena II. In this grant it was specially mentioned that the land i.e. 300 nivartana, which was not previously donated was now being given. It further mentioned twenty-five house sites. It was divided into two, one was given to Mahāpuruṣa71 who was ‘apratigrāhi’ i.e. one who does not accept gifts. The rest of the land was given to nineteen brāhmaṇas. The Ramtek inscription records a donation made by the daughter of Prabhāvatīguptā, Atibhāvatī and mentioned the construction of a temple of Nṛsīṁha, named as Prabhāvatīśvamin, obviously a form of the deity named after her mother, and a tank Sudarṣana, literally, beautiful. The temple was built in memory of Prabhāvatīguptā. Cynthia Talbot holds that naming the deity of a new temple after an individual was a method of honoring the person.72 There are instances of places and deities being named after the king; for instance the capital Pravarapura and the deity Pravaresvara named after Pravarasena II. But there were very few references to places or deities named after queens. The fact that the deity in this case was named after her would underline Prabhāvatīguptā’s special position in the dynasty.

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69 Miregaon Plates of Prabhāvatīguptā, VSI, pp. 91-93.
70 Masoda Plates of Pravarasena II, ASCI, pp. 67-69 and 97-98.
71 According to Shrimali this may mean that the land was given to a Vaishava religious establishment, ASCI, p. 112 (ft. 95).
Of the grants by minister or others, grant of land were recorded in three inscriptions, while one referred to the grant of a village. Of these the Chammak landgrant,73 deserves special notice. It records grant of 8000 nivartanas of land to a thousand brāhmaṇas of whom only forty-nine were mentioned. The grant was given at the request of some Kondarāja, son of Satrughnarāja. That Kondarāja could grant such a huge amount of land implied that he had some control over land and resources. At the same time, his political status was not clear. The Indore plates74 need mention, as they contain a reference suggesting that part of the grant was already donated. The other half of the grant was made by a merchant, Candra after purchasing it. The Pattan Plates75 which were granted at the request of some Nārāyaṇarāja mentioned 400 nivartana of land to be used as a charitable feeding house associated with the temple of Mahāpuruṣa. Thus the donor had specified the purpose of the grant explicitly. The Hisse-Borala inscription76 mentioned the construction of a lake called Sudarśana. Of the various items of gift, plots of land and villages were most commonly documented in the records of the Vākāṭakas. Other gifts formed a small proportion. The reason for such documentation could be that the gift of land was regarded as a mahādāna.

**Chart 5.2: Gendered Distribution of the Vākāṭaka Grants:**

![Chart 5.2: Gendered Distribution of the Vākāṭaka Grants](chart.png)

Refer Appendix 5.1 for details.

The graph above shows the percentage of the items plotted along lines of gender. As can be observed, kings gave mainly villages and land and even queens gave land. In the case of ministers and feudatories in the category of other elite men, the donations were largely of plots of land and caves. Thus, while they controlled resources, these were not necessarily identical with those of the rulers. The grants by elite women other than queens, on the other hand, (which included the grant by Prabhāvatiguptā’s daughter) were primarily of lakes and temples. None of these grants mentioned land. This would indicate that the resources to which elite men and women had access were not identical. This was more visible in the case of men and women other than the royalty.

In the Vākāṭaka inscriptions generally the occasion on which the gift was made was not mentioned. Of the grants by kings, the Tirodi Plates of Pravarasena II mention that the grant was made on the eleventh day of the month of Māgha from a place called Narrattangavari. According to V.V. Mirashi the grant was made from a tīrtha after a fast on ṣhāttilā ṇekādaśī which was believed to be an auspicious day according to the Padma Purāṇa. The Wadgaon inscription mentioned that the grant was given on an equinox. The Pandhurna Plates mentioned in its third set that the grant was made for the tilavācana i.e. śrāddha in favour of a brāhmaṇa named Somārya.

Of the grants by women, all the grants of Prabhāvatīguptā were given after the observance of the fast on ekādaśī. The Poona and Riddhapur plates mention fasts on Prabhodini-ekādaśī in the month of Kārtika, while the Miregaon plates mentioned that the grant had been made after breaking the fast in the month of Pauṣa. Observing the fast on the ekādaśī was considered very pious. Even the Dharmaśāstras mentioned giving gifts on the twelfth day i.e. after breaking the fast on the ekādaśī. The grant by the unnamed queen of Pravarasena II for whom the title Mahādevī was used, did not mention any special occasion; similarly, occasions was not mentioned in the record of the grant by Prabhāvatīguptā’s daughter, Atibhāvatī.

77 Tirodi Plates of Pravarasena II, CII, Vol. 5, p. 50.
78 Cited in V.V. Mirashi, CII, Vol. 5, p. 49.
80 Pandhurna Plates of Pravarasena II, CII, Vol. 5, pp. 63-68.
It is possible that conforming to the Brāhmanical pattern was more important for kings and queens, who wanted to represent themselves as upholder of traditions. That might be the reason that they mention the occasions on which they made grants. Other elite men and women do not follow this pattern or they were not expected to portray themselves as conforming to these norms.

In terms of the desired return of the grant, Vākāṭaka grants followed the Dharmaśāstric norm and mentioned religious merit as the purpose of the gift. Most of the grants mentioned religious merit, life, power, prosperity, and well-being in this world and the next as an objective for donations. The Tirodi and Patna/Balaghat Plates of Pravarasena II\(^81\) mentioned that the merit accrued was also for his mother, mātr-bhaṭṭārikā. The Mandhal plates ‘A’ of Prthivīsena II\(^82\) also mentioned that part of the merit was for his mother, Ajjihikabhaṭṭārikā. The grants by Prabhāvatīgupta mentioned religious merit in this world and the next. Other grants mentioned similar reasons for giving gifts.

Records of ministers and other elite men also reveal a similar pattern. In the Mandhal plates of Pravarasena II\(^83\) 1/3\(^{rd}\) of the merit accruing from the grant was for Ajjihikabhaṭṭārikā, the mother of Narendrarāja, probably the prince. The Hisse-Borala inscription mentioned that the grant was made for the welfare of all creatures. The Ajanta Cave inscription of Varahadeva\(^84\) mentioned religious merit for both the mother and father. And the Ajanta cave XVII\(^85\) mentioned that the grant had been made for the welfare of all people. This grant seemed to be made according to the Buddhist thought on dāna which was ideally meant for the benefit of all. Both grants mentioned donations of caves to monks.

Out of the total sixty-four Kalacuri inscriptions, records of the construction of temples or images constructed and gifting of villages were most common. The chart below shows the proportion of the items of gift mentioned in the records.

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\(^{81}\) Patna/Balaghat Plates of Pravarasena II, \(CII\), Vol.5, pp. 69-72.
\(^{82}\) Mandhal Plates ‘A’ of Prthivīsena II, \(ASCI\), pp. 71-74 and 100.
\(^{83}\) Mandhal Plates of Pravarasena II, \(ASCI\), pp. 60-63 and 89-91.
\(^{84}\) Ajanta Cave Inscription of Varahadeva, \(CII\), Vol. 5, pp. 86-94.
\(^{85}\) Inscription of Ajanta Cave XVII, \(CII\), Vol. 5, pp. 103-12.
Of the total number of gifts that were recorded, land constituted 5 per cent, villages 28 per cent, temples or images 29 per cent, wells or tanks 13 per cent, gardens 10 per cent and other gifts 15 per cent which included granary, some tax given as gift etc. It is evident that the focus of gifts had shifted by this period and a change could be noticed as compared to the Vākāṭaka grants. Large grants are virtually absent, although gift-giving remained significant. Gifts given could be of a village or only an image installed or a maṇḍapa constructed or a granary or a grove. Another feature of the Kalacuri records was joint donations; it could be the king, queen, minister or a feudatory or merchants who made donations which were recorded in one inscription. What is likely is that there were no sharp differences in status amongst these categories. It is also likely that the kings used this mechanism to strengthen their ties with people who may have been influential in the locality.

Unlike the Vākāṭaka grants, gifts were not given to caturvidyā brāhmaṇas but to Śaiva ascetics and to brāhmaṇas but their qualifications were not mentioned. Śaivism had developed as the most important religious faith in this region. Reference to Vaiṣṇavism and other sects were there but grants to Śaivites formed the bulk.

Some of the grants which deserve special attention are enumerated. Of the grants by kings, the Gurgi Stone Inscription of Kokalladeva II86 mentioned the construction of a temple of Śiva with Umā and Kārtikeya and Ganeśa with Sarasvatī on the gate. It also

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mentioned the grant of a city with citizens along with many villages by King Keyūravarṣa. The grant was given to Śaiva siddhāntas. In the grant of the village, four boundaries were mentioned and the record cited specifications according to the Dharmaśastric norms. The grant was given along with mango and madhūka trees, water, land, pits, barren land, including mines of iron and salt along with woods, meadows, and pastures. Another characteristic feature of the grants was the mention of various public works done by the donor. For instance, the Ratnapur stone inscription of Jájalladeva I, year 866 mentioned the town established i.e. Jájallapura and monasteries, garden, grove of mango trees and lake constructed by the king. The inscription also mentioned the grant of a village in honor of the installed deity. A group of pātala trees were donated to the monastery. The Pāli stone inscription of Jájalladeva I also mentioned the kirti of the king and referred to repairing of the mandapa of the Śiva temple.

There were only two records which mentioned grants made exclusively by queens. The Bhere-ghat stone inscription of Narasimhadeva mentioned a donation by Ālhaṇadevī, the mother of the king. She donated a garden and two rooms to a temple of Śiva referred to as Vaidyanātha. A matha, a hall of study and the income from two villages, were given to the Pāṣupata ascetics. The Bhere-ghat Gauri-Śaṅkara temple inscription of Vijayasimhadeva mentioned mahārajī Gosaladevī but since the inscription was fragmentary the donation is not clear. It was probably related to the construction of the temple mentioned.

Unlike the Vākāṭakas, donations made by elite women other than queens were recorded in the case of the Kalacuris. For instance, the Sarnath stone inscription of Kāṇa recorded a gift by Māmakā, wife of Dharmeśvara. She was a follower of Mahāyāṇa Buddhism and got a copy of the Aṣṭasāhasrikāraṇī to be made and made some donations for the recitation of the text. According to the Dharmaśastras, donating manuscripts especially of the epics, Purāṇas and Dharmaśastras was a prominent gift. It is likely that these ideas

were prevalent within other religious traditions as well, as in this case it was a Buddhist
text which was to be copied.

A large number of inscriptions referred to donations and various public works by
ministers and feudatories. These referred to not only the donations by the ministers but
also by their wives. The Rewa stone inscription of Karna\(^3\) was a *praśasti* of Karna and
his minister, Vappulla. The inscription recorded the installation of *lingas*. The temple of
Viṣṇu, called Śrīvatsta was built and was surrounded by four small shrines, of which one
was of Lakṣmī- Nārāyaṇa. It also recorded the grant of a garden with a hundred mango
and other trees. Another five-shrine temple of Śiva known as Vappuleśvara was the
constructed, where the image of Umā-Maheśvara was donated by Nayanāvalī, wife of
Vappulla. The Akaltara stone inscription of Ratnadeva II\(^4\) was again a *praśasti*. It
recorded a grant by Vallabharāja, a feudatory, on the outskirts of the town. It mentioned
construction of the temple of Revanta and a tank, called Vallabhasāgara. Interestingly,
this tank was compared to *Saugata-mata*, the Buddhist doctrine. Another aspect worth
noticing was the naming of the deity or tank on the basis of the donor’s name. It was not
the king, rather the minister who claimed status and honor through this device, which in
the earlier period was practiced only by the royalty. The Ratnapur stone inscription of
Prthivīdeva II, year 910\(^5\) again mentioned donations by Vallabharāja. It recorded one
tank excavated at the insistence of his wife Śvetalladēvī. This inscription, besides other
works, mentioned the donation of a lake which was called Ratneśvara-sāgara. Another
interesting record was the Sheorinarayana stone inscription of Jajalladeva II, year 919,\(^6\)
which referred to a collateral branch of the Kalacuris. It records donations of Āmanadeva
II, Vikannadeva, his uncle and a queen Rāmbhallā. It recorded the gift of a village named
Ciṅcelī for the expense of incense, lights, and other materials for the temple of Śiva
known as ‘Candracūḍa’. A temple of Durgā was constructed by his uncle, Vikkanadeva.
Sarvadeva erected a temple of Śambhu in Sonthiva, and also recorded the donation of a
tank and garden. In Pandaratalai, Āmanadeva I established a charitable feeding house, an
orchard and a tank. In Patharia, Rājadeva built a temple of Śiva called Purabhida along

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with the gift of a mango-grove and tank. The queen Rāmbhalla got a tank excavated along with the donation of a mango grove in the village Pajani.

The joint donations were given by the king along with the queen and prince or with ministers. The Karitalai stone inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II was a joint donation of the king, queen, prince, minister and some merchants. Villages were given by the king, Lakṣmaṇarāja II and queen, Rāhadā while Śaṅkaragana III (son and successor) gave two plots of land of which one yielded twelve khandins, a land measure. The minister Someśvara recorded the construction of a temple of Viṣṇu. Vallesvara gave a village and a field. Then the record mentioned several taxes donated to the deity. The superintendent of the city and town donated a part of his income of two days to the god along with a jar of corn. The guild ‘desi’ gave 1 ½ times the 1/22nd portion of five spirituous liquors as well as 1/4th of goods carried in the regions. The chief of the vagulikas i.e. seller of betel leaves, gave fifty leaves while the payatis gave another fifty leaves. The whole mandala gave alms at four threshing floors. Thus not just villages were granted but small traders granted some part of their income in honor of the deity and recorded it along with the donations made by the elites.

The Bilhari stone inscription of Yuvarājadeva II mentioned the construction of a temple of Śiva called Nauhalesvara by the queen, Nohalā. Lakṣmaṇarāja II invited the Śaiva ascetic Hṛdayaśiva and gave him a monastery named after Vaidyanātha, i.e. Śiva also described as Nauhalesvara. The king Yuvarājadeva II made it compulsory for the traders and manufacturers to pay tax at the market place for the monastery and its occupants. There was also a reference to a fair held in honor of the deity.

The graphic description of the gendered distribution of the grants shows that the king donated all the items mentioned in the list below. In the grant by queens, temples were more prominent. The gifts by other elite men were very similar to those made by the kings. But the proportion of items of gifts was different in each case. The distribution of gifts given by other elite women show that the majority of the records mention construction of tanks.

97 Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakshmanaraja II, CII, Vol. 4, Pt. I, pp. 186-95
Chart 5.4: Gendered Distribution of the Kalacuri Grants:

Refer Appendix 5.2 for details.

The graph indicates that while both elite men and women resorted to the device of giving gifts the control over resources was gendered. Although women other than the queen could make donations their access to resources was the least. By contrast other elite men which included ministers and feudatories accessed various resources and gave a large number of donations. The position of the queen was similar, but very few inscriptions mention gifts by them and the range of resources granted was also limited.

Another important aspect was the link between giving gifts and the place chosen for these. This aspect was not explicit in the case of the Vākāṭakas. Of the Kalacuri grants by kings, the Banaras Plates of Karna\textsuperscript{100} mentioned the śrāddha performed at Prayag. Of the places mentioned as sacred in the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa}, Prayag was considered the best place for the performance of the śrāddha. The Goharwa Plates of Karna\textsuperscript{101} mentioned that the grant was given after taking a bath in the Ganga at Arghatīrtha. It referred to a ghāṭ at Allahabad called Karnatīrtha. The inscription also records a grant after the performance of the śrāddha but it was not specified. Many inscriptions such as the Khairha plates of Yaśahkarna,\textsuperscript{102} recorded that the gift was given on the occasion of the \textit{uttarāyāna sankrānti}. The inscription referred to worship at the temple near the Godavari River.

\textsuperscript{101} Goharwa Plates of Karna, \textit{CII}, Vol. 4, Pt. I, pp. 252-63.
Kahila plates of Sodhadeva\(^{103}\) referred to the *uttarā́yana-sankrānti* and the donation being made after taking a bath in the river Gandaki. Many of the records mentioned that the donations were made on occasions such as the lunar or solar eclipse. For example, the Bilaigarh plates of Prthivīdeva II,\(^{104}\) year 896 mentioned a grant made on the occasion of a solar eclipse. The Jabalpur plates of Jayasimha,\(^{105}\) mentioned a gift given after a lunar eclipse subsequent to taking a bath in the river Reva. The Amoda plates (2nd set) of Prthivīdeva II,\(^{106}\) mentioned *akṣaya-trītīyā tīthi* as the occasion on which the gift was given. The Amoda plates of Jājjalladeva II,\(^{107}\) referred to a donation made after the king was attacked by an alligator. The occasion of the grant was generally on the days mentioned in Dharmaśāstras as good for making gifts such as *sankrānti*, eclipse, or *śrāddha*. As noted above, a grant was also given when the king was saved from a calamity such as an alligator’s attack.

The grants by women do not mention any specific occasion for making donations. In the grants by ministers only some mention the occasion when the grant was made. The Simra stone inscription of Karnā\(^{108}\) recorded a commemorative stone erected by Janāda. The Koni stone inscription of Prthivīdeva II,\(^{109}\) which was a *praśasti* of the minister, mentioned a solar eclipse as the occasion on which the king gave land to Puruṣottama, the recipient. The Jabalpur stone inscription of Jayasimha,\(^{110}\) referred to donations by Vimalaśiva, and also mentioned a solar eclipse. It also mentioned *tīrtha* such as Gaya, Gokarna, Prabhāsa, where Vimalaśiva paid off his debts to the gods. The Rewa plates of Jayasimha,\(^{111}\) recorded a grant by mahārāṇaka Kirtivarman, a feudatory, probably on the occasion of the *śrāddha* of his father, although the term was not used. The Rewa plates of Vijayasimhadeva\(^{112}\) recorded a grant given by Salakṣaṇavarman after bathing and worshipping Śiva at Kakaredī. Among the joint donations, the Karitalai inscription of

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Lakṣmaṇarāja II mentioned a lunar eclipse when Śaṅkaragaṇa III gave a grant while it mentioned a solar eclipse when other villages were granted.

Overall the Kalacuris inscriptions shows a gendered pattern as women do not mention the occasion on which they gave donations but the Dharmāśātric practice was followed by the king and frequently by other elite men as well.

Giving a gift was important but equally relevant was the reciprocation of the grant. The inscription generally mentioned the desired return as religious merit, unlike the Purāṇas which mentioned worldly returns as well. The stated purpose of the donations was religious merit for the donor or whoever else specified. The Saugor stone inscription of Śaṅkaragaṇadeva I recorded that the grant was for the religious merit of his parents. The Banaras plates of Karna mentioned the reason as welfare of all people. Other grants by kings mentioned religious merit for parents as an objective. The grants by women do not mention such objectives. In the joint donations recorded in the Bilhari stone inscription of Yuvarājadeva II it is mentioned that Nohalā built the temple for her religious merit. Of the grants given by ministers or feudatories, the Makundpur stone inscription of Gāṅgeyadeva declared that the donation was given for bliss and good fortune. One of the most fascinating records was the Alha-ghat inscription of Narasimhadeva which mentions a grant by rāṇaka Chihula. The purpose of the grant was specified as ensuring that the whole jāṭi of rāut, who lived in Kausambi, would be freed from worldly bondage. It also referred to religious merit, wealth, pleasure and liberation. The purpose of the grant recorded in the Sheorinarayana stone inscription of Jājalladeva II was world peace, maṅgalajagatāmastu. The Umariya plates of Vijayasimhadeva recorded a gift by rāṇaka Kumārapāla. The religious merit was supposed to accrue to his wife, Mokhā. This was probably the only reference to a grant where religious merit was conferred to the wife.

120 Umariya plates of Vijayasimhadeva, EI, Vol. 41, pp. 34-38.
The epigraphic records thus mentioned a variety of items as gifts but as these records belong to the elite section of society, the concept of dāna as practiced by the masses cannot be known through an examination of the inscriptions. Overall a gendered trend can be noticed which was more pronounced in the case of the Kalacuri grants.

IV

A comparison of both the sources i.e. inscriptions and the Matsya Purāṇa regarding the concept of dāna show that they were in coherence with Dharmśastras. The act of dāna was practiced as a traditional religious rite which also played the role of strengthening the network between various social groups. Both the sources point out the relevance dāna had in the early medieval period. Donations were dealt with extensively in both the sources, although there were certain differences in the way in which these were represented. For instance, the cow was an important item of gift according to the Purāṇas but none of the inscriptions mention gift of cows. Perhaps these were not regarded as worthy of being recorded on a permanent basis or had lost their relevance. What were considered worthy of record were gifts of land, temples, and tanks etc. Also noteworthy is the difference in social categories that made donations. The Purāṇas mentioned all kinds of people, and provided for a range of gifts to be given according to one’s means. It also mentioned that the poor could perform the ordinances with only flowers; even then they could reap the benefits of the offerings. But the inscriptions as records of the elite section of society mentioned only major gifts. Gifts such as grain, flower, fruits etc. as mentioned in the Purāṇa were not recorded in the inscriptions.

If there were differences between the Purāṇa and the inscriptions, there were also differences between the Vākāṭakas and Kalacuris which would reflect changes over time. In the Vākāṭaka inscriptions, grants of land were most significant while the Kalacuri records mentioned an extensive list which included a copy of a text, granary, certain taxes, and sometime fairs organized in honor of the deity besides the usual grant of land. Thus it was not only land, constructions of temples and tanks and gardens which were important but small donations were also recorded. By the time of the Kalacuris, gifts of mango groves, and a hundred trees besides gardens were recorded as public works done by the donor. The gendered pattern of the donations can also be noticed. The grant of
village/s was the prerogative of the king and sometimes the queen also granted land as well but not other members of elite groups. The Kalacuri records show a gendered pattern of donations in terms of the range of donations given. This would suggest that the control/access to resources were gendered.

Of the mahādānas mentioned in the Purāṇas, there was only mention of the *tulāpurusā mahādāna* which was performed by Yaśahkarnaṇadeva121 and Narasimhadeva122 of the Kalacuri dynasty. These references explicitly mentioned Purānic rituals. Besides the *tulāpurusā dāna* was closely connected to the claim of legitimacy by the royalty. However the inscription did not mention the procedure of the *dāna* but it mentioned that the king performed the above rituals among others. The kings or sometimes the non royal elite men were compared to the *kalpavrśa*,123 one of the mahādāna. The Vākāṭakas, however, do not refer to such Purānic rituals.

The chart below shows the transition in the forms of wealth and what was considered deya i.e. fit to be given.

**Table 5.1: Itemization of Gifts:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matsya Purāṇa</th>
<th>Inscriptions Vākāṭakas</th>
<th>Kalacuris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Land and village</td>
<td>Land and village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images of gods and goddesses</td>
<td>Temples</td>
<td>Temples and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>Tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees and orchards</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>Trees and gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Caves</td>
<td>Certain taxes, part of income etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy of the Purāṇas124</td>
<td></td>
<td>Copy of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bull</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black deer skin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household items such as bed,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utensils, looking glass etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewels- pearl, silver etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold and items in gold and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silver.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal items- shoes, fan,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umbrella, garments etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

123 Appendix 2.2.
124 The copy of the Purāṇas to be given as a gift was not mentioned in chapters on *dāna* but in Chapter 53 of the Matsya Purāṇa.
The list is not on the basis of the relevance given to each item in the sources. It only portrays the change in the list of goods. As we have seen, these variations were probably related to chronological differences: they were also connected with differences amongst those who participated in the process of gift exchange. In the Purāṇa there was an emphasis on household items and personal items as gift. Besides there was a suggestion that gifts were to be offered to one who was needy and had a family. The Purāṇa, time and again mentioned that the brāhmaṇa along with his wife should be given gifts. Sometimes it also mentioned that a brāhmaṇa with a large family should be given donations. But the inscriptions do not mention the economic conditions of the recipient.

The Purāṇa mentioned nothing specifically about who should make a gift. The Dharmaśāstras mentioned it as the duty of every householder to give gifts. The Vākāṭaka records mentioned most of the gifts as being made by the king, some by queens and a few by ministers. The majority of the gifts were given by the king and he gave villages. Of the grants by queens the gift was of village as in the case of Prabhāvatīguptā. Regarding elite women it was only the daughter of the queen who made the sole grant of a temple, that too in the memory of the queen, Prabhāvatīguptā. The gift by the ministers was of plots of land, caves etc. In the Kalacuri records the trend was quite different as there were grants not only by the king and queen but a large number of grants were given by the ministers and feudatories who gave a variety of items as gift. There were gifts by other elite women, which included not only wives of the ministers and feudatories but also a grant by a woman whose social status was not explicitly mentioned. It only mentioned the name of her husband. Thus women could make grants on their own. This would also indicate that they had control over resources. Another very interesting feature was the joint donation. There were donations jointly made by the king with the queen, prince or minister or even merchants. Thus the social network portrayed in these donations was unique. These donations not only mentioned the various donors with different status but also the recipients as well as the scribe and executor of the grant.

Regarding the time and place of gift, the inscriptions followed the Purāṇic instructions. The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned that grants could be made during eclipses, sankrānti, śrāddha and other occasions such as marriage, birth etc. There was reference to grants to be made at tīrthas. The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned that one should take a bath after the
eclipse and give donation of rubies and cows \((MP, 67.22-23)\). One who would perform this ritual would attain bliss and never take birth again. Even by reading or listening about this observance one would go to the realm of Indra, liberated from all sins and would be glorified. As a matter of fact many inscriptions in both the Vākāṭaka and the Kalacuri dynasty mentioned grants made during eclipses. However there was only one reference to grants during an eclipse in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions. The Kalacuri records mentioned grants during a solar or lunar eclipse in ten inscriptions. Similarly the Kalacuri inscriptions mentioned the performance of the \(srāddha\) ceremony. The Vākāṭaka inscriptions record donations after breaking the \(ekādaśi\) fast by Prabhāvatīguptā. In the Kalacuri dynasty there was mention of a grant after taking a bath in a holy river. Another frequently mentioned occasion was \(sankrānti\). There were records of many grants on the occasion of \(uttarāyana-sankrānti\). There was also a mention of a grant being made after the king was attacked by an alligator. Thus giving gifts after any important event was a trend as was mentioned in the Purāṇa. There were references to \(tīrthas\) in both the text as well as the inscriptions. The Vākāṭakas did not mention any of the \(tīrthas\) mentioned in the Purāṇa. But the Kalacuri dynasty records mentioned Prayag, Kasi, Gokarna, and other \(tīrthas\) as places of importance.

The desired return from the act of giving gifts can be seen in terms of spiritual and worldly returns. Thus the expectation was not just of religious merit but included health, wealth, beauty, long life etc. Both the sources mentioned prosperity, religious merit, and emancipation. The Purāṇa mentioned the desire to be born as a king or in a royal family. Another frequently expressed desire was to achieve the realm of a god. There was rarely mention of the realm of the goddess; these too were confined to the context of \(vratas\). Another recurrent desire that was expressed was to be adorned or desired by the \(apsarās\), beauty of form and obtaining access to beautiful women. As Daud Ali has points out, the concept of beauty had gained prominence in early medieval period and royalty was desired not only in terms of noble birth or status but in handsome form.\(^{125}\) It may be because of this concept that not just the kings describe themselves as beautiful and desired in their \(prāśastis\) but the Purāṇas also mentioned it as a desired reward of the

various rituals. It did not specify clearly whether the desire was to obtain a beautiful wife. Another desire that was mentioned was not being alienated from one’s family, specifically one’s wife and son.

The inscriptions generally referred to religious merit as the purpose of the grant. They also mentioned other desires such as prosperity, life, victory, power etc. As one can see, these did not always coincide with the specific desires expressed in the text. The chart below places the most frequently expressed desires under each source.

Table 5.2: Expectations from Donations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matsya Purāṇa</th>
<th>Inscriptions Vākāṭakas</th>
<th>Kalacuris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation and liberation from hell along with forefathers.</td>
<td>Well being in this world and next</td>
<td>Freedom from bondage of the tribe of rāuts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and long life.</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Fortune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth in the family of a king</td>
<td>Victory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>World peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realm of gods</td>
<td>Welfare of all creatures</td>
<td>Good for all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adorned by apsarā</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected by gods, siddhas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispeller of effect from bad dreams.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical beauty esp. for women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never estranged from wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Purāṇas mentioned a long list of returns expected because of the various rituals to which dāna was connected, which was somewhat different from the ideals represented in the inscriptions. In the case of the latter, donors had a unilateral purpose of making a grant that was mainly to legitimize their position.

The gift and its reciprocation changed over time and was gendered in its pattern. Control or access to resources differed among elite men and women. What was given as a gift reflects what was considered significant in the society. The Purāṇas, as they addressed a wider audience mentioned not just the mahādānas but also the simpler gifts of grain, clothes, bedding and even flowers etc. The inscriptions, representing the interest of the

elites mentioned land, villages, temples, wells, gardens, images etc. The attempt of the elite was to legitimize its position and gain status from these donations. The joint donations of the Kalacuri period would suggest that non ruling elite claimed a higher status, but there were differences as well. The Kalacuris mentioned the traditions as reflected in the Purāṇa but the Vākāṭakas do not adhere to the textual traditions. To conclude Purānic traditions were practiced in the early medieval period especially in the context of dāna. However, they were modified to suit the interests of the elite sections of society, whose practices are most clearly documented in the inscriptions.