Chapter- 1
Gender, the *Matsya Purāṇa* and Inscriptions from Central India: Sources and Questions

Gender identity can be seen in terms of the representation of women and men in a variety of domains: economic, social, political, religious, and cultural. Gender studies gained prominence from the mid-twentieth century. It was only later that gender emerged as an analytical tool. With postmodern thought, feminism/ gender studies gained eminence as a method of analysis of the particular, local and culture specific. More specifically feminist thought was marked by a refusal to accept the existing hierarchical construction of the relationship between women and men as natural. Gender was seen as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes. It was also seen as a symbol of power. Feminist history, besides its focus on the domestic sphere also explores the multiplicity of women’s roles and identities imposed by race, sex, and class. It is in this context that the ways in which women and men are represented/ represent themselves acquires significance. More specifically, in order to study regional social formations, understanding gender relations becomes pertinent.

Gender identity can be seen, in historical terms as the ways in which the identities of men and women were constructed, in a region i.e. Central India, as in the present study. The focus will be on textual as well as epigraphical sources so as to compare the different identity markers, in political, social, economic, and religious fields that emerge from an examination of two related yet distinct categories of sources.

In many situations, women’s identity was sought to be fixed and understood in terms of her gendered being, defined essentially by her sexuality and her reproductive value. Studies of women have generally been restricted to the family; she was described as a wife, mother, and daughter, in other words, confined to the household. Her contribution to society was relegated to the background and her role was seen only in procreation.

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Women were perceived as a passive social category. In historical writings, early scholars such as A.S. Altekar⁵ trace the position of women from the RgVedic to medieval times, in terms of her position in the family. The inclination was to notice a downward trend in the status of women. Later the position of women was linked to changes in the modes of production. Vijay Nath traces a decline in the position of the women from the Vedic period, linking this with the changing role of women in economic production.⁶ Amongst other things, she suggests the reason for the decline was linked to foreign invasions and new religious trends. Other scholars such as Saroj Gulati discuss the status of women as a mother, daughter, wife, and widow.⁷ She rejects reasons such as foreign invasions, Brāhmanical austerities, lack of education etc. to account for the decline in the position of women. She attempts to explain the decline in the status of women through what she understands as the socio-economic degeneration of the period. She deals mainly with textual sources and the use of inscriptions is limited. Further, in her work, women were categorized as a homogenous class. Kirit K. Shah has based his work on inscriptive sources and categorized women in terms of royal, familial, religious, and professional identity.⁸ Thus, from a monolithic category, women or specifically elite women were grouped into a different kind of framework. The emphasis was on the donative capabilities of women in different geographical areas, which focused on their control over resources.

In politics, women's role was limited to being the wife of the reigning king and the mother of the next ruler. Textual sources do not refer much to women in the political sphere, suggesting that her role was marginalized. Women as rulers were hardly discussed. At the same time inscriptive sources implicitly or explicitly mentioned women. The reference was not only as the wife of the donor but sometimes as the donor herself. The role of women in political history has not received much attention in secondary works. Her role was limited to that of the wife of the king, mother of the

⁶ Nath, Vijay, 'Women as Property and their Right to Inherit Property upto the Gupta Period’. Indian Historical Review (henceforth IHR), Vol. 20.
successor and rarely as the daughter of the king. Tripat Sharma\(^9\) holds that women of royal families played an important role in the politics of the period. He refers to the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatīguptā who held an important position. Scholars such as R.K. Sharma mention the relevance of marriage and the status of women, suggesting that the eloquent titles used for women show their high position in the dynasty.\(^{10}\) He further points out that in many land grants, the queen was addressed among the royal officers, which would imply that she played an important role in the administration as well. Other insights can be drawn from the work of Cynthia Talbot, where the case of Rudramādevī, the queen of the Kākatiya dynasty is discussed at length.\(^{11}\) Talbot draws attention to the fluidity in society, which made it possible for a woman to exercise power through the adoption of masculine titles, attire, and attributes. She emphasizes the direct role played by women in politics of the region, and tries to provide a structural and contextual explanation for the same. There was evidence for the emergence of elite women who had power, especially in the Deccan and Kashmir. It was possible that elite women in these regions were successful in claiming power because of cross-kin marriages which led to the integration and consolidation of ruling lineages.\(^{12}\) More recently Devika Rangachari has provided a regional survey of gender relations in Kashmir, Kanauj and the Bengal-Bihar region.\(^{13}\) She uses textual as well as inscriptional sources to corroborate her research. She points out that Kashmir shows an early social formation which, besides the ‘decentralised polity’ and ‘fluctuating social processes’, gave women a viable position in terms of the state structure.\(^{14}\) In Kanauj, emphasis was laid on the Gāhādāvāḷa queens who could actively participate in administration such as Rālhādevī and Pṛthvī-Śrīkā, wives of the king Madanapāḷa. Besides them, other royal and non-royal women also claimed a distinct identity. The Pratihāra royal women were mentioned in the genealogies but were not active as donors as can be noticed from the inscriptions of the dynasty. In


\(^{11}\) Talbot, Cynthia, ‘Rudrama-devi, the Female king, Gender and Political Authority in Medieval India’, in David Shulman (ed.), *Syllables of the Sky*, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 1995, p. 399.


\(^{14}\) Ibid, p. 193.
contrast to the two regions, Kashmir and Kanauj, there was a difference in the Pāla-Sena inscriptions, as women do not find much space therein. Overall Rangachari’s work emphasizes on the agency of women in social and political processes without which history of early medieval north India would be distorted.

In the sphere of economic history, women have been discussed in the context of property regulations, especially strīdhana. It generally included movable property such as utensils, jewellery etc. Women, according to the early Dharmasūtras did not have access to property in terms of land. Later, women could have a claim to the property but did not have the right to alienate it. As compared to the normative texts, inscriptions portray a different picture as there is evidence of women as donors. The land grant charters provide a good source to understand the economic powers and their gendered nature. Giving donations to brāhmaṇas and building temples, wells, gardens etc. were open to women. The act of dāna suggests access to and control over resources. Cynthia Talbot posits that women who acquired political prominence did have some kind of economic power.¹⁵ As daughters and wives of privileged men, high-born women enjoyed considerable social prestige. They also often had control over significant economic resources either in their own rights or as agents for their children. K.K. Shah¹⁶ also opines that the property rights of women in theory did have some substance in reality, especially when the woman happened to be a queen or belonged to the aristocracy. But again the focus remains on queens/elite women as the subjects of analysis.

Strategies for using inscriptions to study gender relation are carefully developed in Leslie C. Orr’s work Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God: Temple Women in Medieval Tamil Nādu.¹⁷ The shift she traces includes both royal women and temple women amongst others. The monograph compares the position of temple women, tevarātiyar with that of other women and also with men associated with the temple, using inscriptions of the Cola period. Orr studies the terms used for the temple women and links it with their status and domestic activities. The study explores their power of

making grants as compared to men, who were also associated with the temple. Orr suggests that the grants were a method to acquire position, property, and privilege and the study reflects the ways in which such claims were gendered.

In terms of dāna, the position of the sex workers has been discussed by many scholars. Women such as sex workers could give donations to non-Brāhmanical sects, especially in honor of the Buddha. Inscriptional evidences points to the access and control over resources by sex workers.¹⁸ The studies on sex workers and their role in history, such as Moti Chandra's *The World of Courtesans* use textual sources while discussing the categories and position of sex workers.¹⁹ Sukumari Bhattacharji explores the subject as an institution in social as well as economic terms. She identifies sex workers in terms of status on the basis of age, skill, physical attributes besides others.²⁰ Changes in women's position were seen as a part of the urban culture of the first millennium. Chitrarekha Gupta looks at the rural-urban dichotomy and woman’s status. She uses both inscriptional and textual sources to understand the divide in the context of women’s position and identity. She holds that women do not seem to have exercised control over resources in either rural or urban areas.²¹

In the social context, women were seen as the wife of the householder, gṛhapatnī. Discussions on marriage, selecting the bride and other rituals associated with nuptial rites are abundant in secondary works. The ability of women to procreate was regarded as significant and a gendered explanation to the notion of reproduction was provided.²² Motherhood, as portrayed in literary texts, was conceptualized in patriarchal terms, where the role of a wife was to produce sons.²³ This is evident, for instance, in the work of Jaya

Tyagi, who describes the gendered construction of the *groha*, household in early India.\(^{24}\) She suggests that the ritual acts in the *Gṛhyasūtras* were a method to claim legitimacy but at the same time they represent the inherent tensions which were gendered in nature. The *graha* was envisaged as a spatial construct to keep women under patriarchal control.\(^{25}\) S.W. Jamison looks at the position of women in the Dharmaśāstras.\(^{26}\) She marks out the position of women in the early Dharmaśāstras in terms of their role in the religious sphere. In later texts the concern shifts to control of women’s sexuality and various rules were laid out to restrict them. Jamison points out that the texts implicitly refer to women’s ‘subversive mental independence’.\(^{27}\)

With respect to other social relations, Uma Chakarvarti\(^{28}\) analyzes the connection between the caste hierarchy and gender, drawing attention to the attempt of the Brähmanical texts to control female sexuality. The Brähmanical texts defined the *Kali yuga* in terms of women failing to perform their duties, which among other things led to miscegeny and thereby social crisis. Lower class men were seen as a threat to upper caste purity and had to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher caste. Control over sexuality of the wife was a way to maintain masculine identity.\(^{29}\) When the structure to prevent miscegeny failed, the entire edifice of the social order collapsed. According to Chakravarti, women were seen as gateways to the caste system. The normative texts emphasized on *strīdharma* and *strīsvabhāva* i.e. duty and nature of women. The *strīdharma* was formulated to control the sexuality of women and bound them to the world of culture.\(^{30}\)

The space given to women in the religious field was limited. References to the position of women during the Vedic period were limited to her position as *grhapatni*. Her role was to


\(^{26}\) Jamison, S.W., ‘Women “Between the Empires” and “Between the Lines” in Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Between the Empires. Society in India: 300 BCE to 400 CE*, Oxford University Press, New York: 2007 (reprint).

\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 213.


accompany her husband in various rituals. The Purāṇas reflect a change in perspective and women now had access to religion. The Purāṇic tradition reflects the acculturation of local cults and traditions, which were prevalent among women.31 At the same time, we may note that the non-Brāhmanical sects gave a wider scope to women.32 I.B. Horner points out that Buddhism provided a space for women and led the way towards their emancipation.33 The Purāṇic endeavor to include women and śūdras into their fold was probably a response to it. There was also an attempt at ‘spousification’ of the Purāṇic male deities.34 The goddesses were shown in their familial roles of a mother and wife. Simultaneously, women outside the family set up were perceived as dangerous. Women especially celestial women, apsarās were seen as a threat to ascetics. In terms of the Bhakti tradition, women seemed to have some place as could be seen from the Tamil poems of Antal.35

Thus women from being seen as a passive or even non-existent category have now been recognized as significant in attempts to understand historical change. The present work looks at the Purāṇic traditions, specifically the Matsya Purāṇa and epigraphical, the Vākāṭaka and Kalacuri inscriptions to reconstruct gender identities in Central India. The attempt in the present study is to understand historical change from a gender perspective. The Purāṇas represent mytho-historical literature36 and emphasize on an ideal society from the point of view of brāhmaṇas. Inscriptions, especially land grants as in the case of the Vākāṭakas and the Kalacuris, represent the perspective of the ruling elite of a specific region. The attempt in the present study is to compare these two sources to analyze their perspective on the issue of gender identity so as to add to a deeper understanding of early medieval society. The present chapter has three sections: the first looks at the Purāṇa as a

36 Desai, N.Y., Ancient Indian Society, Religion and Mythology as Depicted in Mārkandeya Purāṇa, Faculty of Arts, M.S. University Borada, Baroda: 1968, p.1.
source. The second section examines the epigraphical records. The third section outlines the framework of the rest of the thesis.

The Purāṇas constitute a large corpus of texts. They are dated from approximately 3rd – 16th century CE. They have been traditionally considered as sacred as the Vedas and have been described as the ‘fifth Veda’. However, present-day scholars have explored them from different perspectives. For instance, Vijay Nath perceives the composition of the Purāṇas as a strategy for Brāhmaṇization in a feudal setup. She suggests that the Purāṇas represent a process of acculturation of tribal groups within the Brāhmaṇical fold. The texts were, in fact, to a great extent instrumental in internalizing the process of Sanskritization. Kunal Chakrabarti in his study on the Bengal Purāṇas holds that the Purānic texts represent a Brāhmaṇical attempt to construct an ideological system, which was region specific.

Traditionally, it was held that the Purāṇa was a single corpus which was later divided. It was possible that legends in the form of gāthās and ākhyāṇas were present and compiled as a single corpus. The division into eighteen mahāpurāṇas was a late development. Scholars such as N.M. Kansara mark out two traditions; the first called the classical stage of the Purāṇa that precedes its compilation and the second stage of the Purāṇa Samhitā. The Purāṇas were supposed to contain the pañca-lakṣaṇa, five characteristics, which included, sarga, creation, pratisarga, re-creation, vanśa of gods and sages i.e. genealogy, cosmic cycle, manvantara and accounts of royal dynasties, vanśāṅucarita. According to S.G. Kantawala, the Purāṇas record continuity and change in contemporary society in

37 Hazra, R.C., Studies in Purānic Records on the Rites and Customs, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi: 1987, p.1
the form of the themes dealt therein. Conventionally, the Purāṇas are supposed to contain accounts of creation, dissolution and re-creation, divine genealogies, cyclic periods of Manu, royal genealogies, and means of livelihood, incarnation of gods, beatitude, as well as discussions on the concept of the individual, soul, and Brahman, the ultimate reality. Over and above these topics, they glorified Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, and other deities and also contain discussions on righteous conduct, dharma, economics and polity, artha, erotics, kāma, geography, bhūmīsamsthāna, sāṃti-rules and teaching, architecture, iconography and iconometry, gifts and great gifts, mahādāna, vows, principle of literary criticism, myths, and legends etc. Thus, they were encyclopedic in character. To S.C. Banerji the Purāṇas dealt with popular beliefs and practices.

Vijay Nath locates the Purāṇas as a means of acculturation in the context of the feudal setup with a self-sufficient and closed village economy, land grants etc. According to her, the method of acculturation was effective, as was evident from the degree of popularity the Purāṇas gained, especially in the outlying regions such as Orissa, Gujarath, Rajasthan, Northeast and the Deccan, where tribal populations were predominant. In fact, many of the major Purāṇas such as the Matsya, Bhāgavata, Skanda, and Mārkandeya were probably composed in these regions. There are eighteen mahāpurāṇas but the list differs in different Purāṇas. In the Kūrma Purāṇa the Vāyu Purāṇa was mentioned instead of the Agni Purāṇa. In the Matsya Purāṇa and the Agni Purāṇa, the Vāyu Purāṇa was replaced by the Śiva Purāṇa. The Varāha Purāṇa replaced the Garuḍa Purāṇa and the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa with the Vāyu and the Narasimha Purāṇa, while the Mārkandeya, Viṣṇu, and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa omits the Vāyu Purāṇa.

The eighteen Purāṇas were divided into three classes on the basis of the sāṃkhya theory of trinity of qualities, guṇas viz. tāmasa, sāttvika, and rājasa. The six tāmasa or Śaiva Purāṇas are the Matsya, Kūrma, Liṅga, Vāyu, Skanda and Agni. The sāttvika or Vaiṣṇava

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Purāṇas are the Viṣṇu, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma, and Varāha. The rājas or Brahma Purāṇas are the Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivarta, Mārkandeya, Bhavisya, Vāmana, and the Brahmā Purāṇa.

P.V. Kane classified the Purāṇas into three main categories: first, encyclopedic such as the Agni, Garuḍa, and Nārada. The second group such as the Padma, Skanda, and Bhavisya dealt with tīrthas. The third category included the sectarian texts, such as the Liṅga, Vāmana, Mārkandeya, and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.48

The Matsya Purāṇa enumerates the eighteen Purāṇas and the result of donating the text to a brāhmaṇa. The emphasis was not only on the number and content but also on donating or copying the text. According to the text, the Purāṇa was told to Marici by Brahmā (MP, 53.12). The first Purāṇa mentioned was the Brahma Purāṇa which consisted of thirteen thousand verses. The result of writing or donating the text along with a cow and water, in the month of Vaishākha, on a full moon day was happiness and attainment of the realm of Brahmā. The Padma Purāṇa was revealed during the Lotus kalpa when the universe was created and consisted of fifty-five thousand verses. By giving the Purāṇa along with a golden lotus and sesame in the month of Jaiśthya one would reap the benefit of the aśvamedha sacrifice. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa was written by Parāśara in the Varāha kalpa and contained twenty-three thousand verses. The gift of the Purāṇa along with a cow and ghṛta in the month of Āṣāḍha on a full moon day would purify the donor from all sins and he would go to the realm of Varuṇa and rest in peace. The next Purāṇa mentioned was the Vāyu which contained the glory of Rudra in the Śveta kalpa and was also known as the Vāyaviya Purāṇa. It had twenty-four thousand verses. One who gives away the text along with a cow, sugar, and ox to a brāhmaṇa who has a large family on the day when rākhi was tied, in the month of Śrāvaṇa, would reside in the region of Śiva. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa described the Gāyatri worship and various dharmaś and enumerated the men of the Sārasvata kalpa. It contained eighteen thousand verses and one who would write or donate it to a brāhmaṇa along with a golden lion on a full moon day in the month of Bhādrapada would be emancipated. The Nārada Purāṇa contained twenty-five thousand verses and described Nārada in the Brhat kalpa. One who

would donate the text along with a cow on a full moon day in the month of Āśvin would attain bliss and would be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa contained nine thousand verses. One who writes or gifts the Purāṇa along with a golden elephant on a full moon day in the month of Kārtika would get the benefit of the puṇḍarīka sacrifice. The Agni Purāṇa belonged to the Īśāna kalpa and contained sixteen thousand verses. The gift of the text along with a golden lotus, cow and sesame on the full moon day in Mārgaśīrṣa would get the benefit of performing sixteen thousand sacrifices. The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa where Brahmā described the history of Aghora kalpa and other stories contained fourteen thousand and five hundred verses. The gift of the Purāṇa along with a jar of sugar on a full moon day in the month of Pauṣa would lead to the benefit of performing the agniṣṭoma sacrifice. The Brahmanda-varta Purāṇa described the Rathāntara kalpa and was related to Kṛṣṇa, and contained eighteen thousand verses. The one gifting it to a brāhmaṇa on a full moon day in the month of Māgha would go to the region of Brahmā. The Liṅga Purāṇa which extolled the glory of Śiva contained eleven thousand verses. The gift of a cow and sesame along with the text on a full moon day in the month of Phālguna would lead to the donor attaining the form of Śiva. The Varāha Purāṇa contained twenty-four thousand verses extolling the Boar form of Viṣṇu and was linked to the Mānava kalpa. The donation of the Purāṇa along with a golden garuḍa, cow, and sesame on a full moon day in the month of Cāitra to a brāhmaṇa with a large family would enable the donor to go to the realm of Viṣṇu. The Skanda Purāṇa described the Satpuruṣa kalpa and the glory of Skanda and Mahēśvara and contained eighty-one thousand verses. One who gifts the text along with a golden trident when the Sun goes to the twelfth zodiac, would go to the realm of Śiva. The Vāmana Purāṇa contained ten thousand verses and by donating the text one would go to the realm of Viṣṇu. The Kūrma Purāṇa extolled the Kūrma incarnation of Viṣṇu and contained eighteen thousand verses. Gifting the text along with a golden turtle at the time of an equinox, one would reap the benefit of giving away a thousand cows. The Matsya Purāṇa contained fourteen thousand verses and described the seven kalpas. One who writes and gifts the text along with a golden fish and cow at the time of the summer solstice would get the benefit of gifting the earth. The Garuḍa Purāṇa contained eighteen thousand verses. By gifting the text along with a golden bird, one would attain the region of Śiva.
The last, *Brahmanda Purana* contained twelve thousand and two hundred verses. One who writes and gifts the Purana along with a yellow woollen garment and a golden cow would get the benefit of performing a thousand rajasuya sacrifices (*MP*, 53.13-56). Overall the emphasis was on gifting the text to a brahmana and in accordance with ritual specifications. The gift was specified in terms of the month as well as the time. Another important aspect was the resultant benefits which were spiritual in nature. Thus the text mentioned the number and the unique content of the various Puranas. The *Matysa Purana* in the process also mentioned the Upapuranas as subsections of the principal eighteen Puranas.49

Hazra opines that the Puranic *pañca-lakṣaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* had originated from the *Pariplava ākhayāna* narrated during the āsvamedha sacrifice.50 The hotṛ on these occasions recited the stories and covered the contents of the Puranic *pañca-lakṣaṇa*. As practice of the sacrifice and rituals associated with it died out, the priests turned into bards. They intermingled with the kṣatriyas and the new caste sūta emerged. According to traditions, the Purāṇas were said to be the work of Vyāsa. He was also called Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana.51 He later taught the lore to his disciple sūta Romaharṣaṇa. The Purāṇas also claimed that before Vyāsa, the text was narrated by Brahmā to the munis. In order to solve the complex situation of the original narrator, legends mention three layers.52 The first was narrated by the deity to the muni. The second tradition refers to the different traditions of the munis and the third layer was associated with Vyāsa and his disciples. According to legends, the sūta was born from the sacrificial fire during the reign of Prthu.53 The *Agni Purana* described the sūta as paurāṇika and a dvija different from other sūtas. The origin of the paurāṇika sūta from the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya lute players of the āsvamedha was well documented in early texts54 as during the sacrifice these

54 Ibid, p. 32.
traditions were brought together and systematized. Therefore, the traditions may have originated in these rituals.

The early texts were orally transmitted and the role of the bard as story tellers was prominent. The bards were known as Vyāsa, Sūta, Māgadha and Lomaharṣaṇa/Romaharṣaṇa. Conferring the authorship to Vyāsa was an attempt on the part of the authors to claim a higher status. This was a generic name which meant the ‘Vedic arranger’.

The sūta represented the bardic tradition and marked a turning point in the evolution of the Purāṇas. The bards responded to the needs according to the region, time, and situations and hence the content of the Purāṇas increased. The bards also introduced their own popular culture and extended the Purāṇic traditions to all, irrespective of gender and class. In terms of social status, the position of the sūta was ambiguous. The sūta was the bard and was extolled as the narrator but later described as the result of a pratiloma union. Romila Thapar holds that as the genealogical section was incorporated, the social status of the original narrator was lowered.

The Purāṇas are perceived as sacred texts and have been used to reconstruct religious history. Studies have focused either on the entire group of the Purāṇas or on a single Purāṇa such as in S.S. Dange’s work on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and others. The Purāṇas were used as a source to understand political history by scholars such as Pargiter. He holds that the Purāṇas were the Sanskritization of the Prakrit texts. In his works on the dynasties of the Kali yuga he uses the Purāṇas as historical material and constructs the political chronology of early India. This was one of the early attempts to include the Purāṇas as a source for historical reconstruction. Pargiter gives the list of the kings of the Ikṣvākus, Magadhas, Pauravas, Śuṅgas and other ancient dynasties. His attempt was to use the genealogical tables mentioned in the Purāṇas and reconstruct the history of the dynasties not known from other sources. He also used this source to date the

56 Ibid, p. 46.
57 Ibid, p. 60.
Mahābhārata war and the Kali yuga dynasties. R. Morton Smith also uses the Purāṇas as a source to determine the ancient chronology. He mentions the early dynasties of the Pauravas, Ikṣvākas, Mauryas, and Śuṅgas besides others. The use of the Purāṇic material was simple and did not contain much analysis. The main emphasis was on the construction of the chronology of the early kings by using the Purāṇas. Scholars such as Om Prakash move beyond the dynasties and look at the political ideas in Purāṇas. He emphasizes on the Agni, Matsya, Viṣṇudharmottara, Kālikā, Bṛhaddharma, and Nīlamata Purāṇas. He looks at the issue of kingship, nature of states, divine right etc. as mentioned in the Purāṇas. Romila Thapar also uses the genealogical section of the Purāṇas and attempts to reconstruct the political history by focusing on the solar and lunar dynasties. She reiterates that it was important to understand the need to record and the process of legitimization. Although the Purāṇas contain fables, they remain relevant as a source to understand social relations.

Many attempts were made to understand society as represented in the Purānic corpus. N.Y. Desai uses the Mārkanḍeya Purāṇa to explore social history. The discussion ranges from society to religion and mythology. There is mention of marriage, the caste system, family, besides other aspects. She also discusses the position of women as portrayed in the text. She mentions the references to education, marriage etc. in the Purāṇa. Desai uses the Purāṇas stereotypically to show that women were accorded a higher position in society.

Other scholars such as Vijay Nath use the Purāṇas as a source of social rather political history. She looks at the context of dāna and how the Purāṇas have emphasized on the concept of dāna, tīrtha, vratas and their attempt to include women and śūdras into the Brāhmaṇical fold. The attempt is to look at the social forces acting in a feudal set up.

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Kunal Chakrabarti uses the Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas from Bengal and emphasizes on regional trends. He looks at the Purāṇas as an ideological construct of the region.

Very few scholars who have examined the Purāṇas have systematically adopted a gender perspective. Amongst these, Tracy Pintchman notices the gender dynamics in the study of the Purāṇic cosmogony. She uses the texts to understand gender roles in the social realm. She looks at the myth of sarga, primary creation, and secondary creation, pratisarga in various Purāṇas from a gender perspective.

The Matsya Purāṇa is one of the oldest Purāṇas and contains details of the Purāṇic pañca-laksāṇa. P.V. Kane holds that it was one of the best preserved Purāṇic text and was dated to around c.200-400 CE. Some scholars date the text between c. 300-600 CE. R.C. Hazra makes a detailed analysis of the chapters and dates them separately. The chapters were dated between c. 3rd-11th centuries; however Kane holds that the Matsya Purāṇa was compiled before the Guptas came to power as the text does not mention any details about them. The region of compilation and circulation was around the river Narmada. It has the largest amount of śruti material and attempts to hold a balance between sects of both deities, Viṣṇu and Śiva. However Hazra holds that it was a Vaiṣṇavite text. Some scholars hold that the Matsya Purāṇa borrowed from the Vāyu Purāṇa especially on the topics of vamśa, manvantara, and vamśānucarita. And the date of its first compilation was around the 3rd-4th century CE.

The text is voluminous, with fourteen thousand and sixty-two stanzas in two hundred and ninety-one chapters. The contents of the text are rich and diverse. It starts with the

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creation myth and describes the matsya avatāra of Viṣṇu. It mentions the solar and lunar dynasties, besides other minor dynasties. The text deals with various vrataś, tīrthaś, and rituals besides śrāddha. Tīrthas such as Prayag, Kasi, and Varanasi as well as sacred rivers such as Ganga, Narmada etc. are described in detail. The vrata in honor of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śūrya, Pārvatī, Lakṣmī and other deities are mentioned. The text also mentions in detail issues related to kingship which includes chapters on the king, prince, ministers besides the various fines and punishments for offences. In these chapters the categorization according to caste was noticeable. The text also mentions the dynasties of the Kali yuga such as the Ikṣvākus, Mauryas, Śuṅgas, Śakas etc. The Matysa Purāṇa contains a huge amount of Dharmaśastric data. Besides these, the text also extols deities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Śūrya. Details on Pārvatī, her birth, marriage etc. are described; however, details of other goddesses were not mentioned. It also deals with topics such as omens, construction, and consecration of images of gods and goddesses, house building, gifts etc. Legends regarding women as well as men such as those related to Kaca, Yayāti, Bali, etc. were mentioned. There are references to some women such as Devayānī, Sarmiṣṭhā, Śukra’s mother etc. Interestingly, the women who were mentioned as having a voice of their own had an asura origin. In various rituals mentioned, the stress was on acquisition of merit and expiation of sins. In some chapters there was reference to mokṣa, liberation, besides the acquisition of artha, i.e. material wealth.

It is likely that the Matysa Purāṇa represents a compilation of regional and other ideas, beliefs, and practices that may have circulated amongst large sections of the population. The inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas and the Kalacuris on the other hand, represent the beliefs and practices that were highlighted by rulers, and/or members of the elite section in the same region. Our attempt will be to see the extent, to which these representations coincide, the ways in which they differ, and to try and understand the patterns which may emerge.

II

Epigraphical records are seen as a cultural practice of early medieval period. The most notable feature of the ‘age of inscriptions’ was the impulse to document religious gifts

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in a permanent form. The gifts were recorded on stones as well as on copper plates to ensure their longevity. The majority of the inscriptions were religious endowments. Talbot correlates inscriptions with political changes and points out that in the case of Andhra the period of political stability saw an efflorescence of inscriptions. This could be seen in the eloquent titles and epithets used to describe the king and the dynasty. Epigraphical records are significant, although scholars point out problems regarding their accuracy. Another problem with this source is that many records are fragmentary or damaged; thus details are not always forthcoming.

Inscriptions are of many types of which prominent are panegyric and donative. K.K. Shah opines that inscriptions were an ideal source material and in terms of nature and purpose were either a donation or a dedication. Most of the inscriptions are a mixture of both the types. Usually the inscriptions begin with a panegyric, describing the king/donor and the dynasty, followed by the details of the grant along with the rights and exemptions conferred on the donee. Then, the genealogy of the donee, along with his achievements is mentioned. It is then followed by the names of the officials/social groups to whom the grant is addressed and the scribe, executor etc. Finally, the date and occasions of the grant accompanied with the seal of the king could be generally noticed. While this is the general structure, not all grants follow this pattern.

According to R.S. Sharma, the most striking development of the early medieval period was the practice of making land grants to brāhmaṇas, which started from the 1st century CE onwards and were recorded in the epigraphs. From the Gupta period onwards, villages were given to the donee/s together with the fields and inhabitants along with fiscal, administrative, and judicial rights and exemptions from royal interference. There was a decline in commodity production, urban centers and foreign trade, resulting in the growth of a self-sufficient economy in which metallic currency became relatively scarce.

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He sees land grants as the marker of feudalism. Land grants were seen as one of the causes of decentralization.\textsuperscript{80}

B.D. Chattopadhyaya, in contrast, sees land grants as a method of regional consolidation. According to him, land grants helped to bring newer areas under cultivation. By giving it to \textit{brāhmaṇas} and other religious institutions, allegiance was sought from that area and it was also a source of revenue in the future.\textsuperscript{81}

The distribution of the inscriptions of the Vakaṭakas covers present day Maharashtra. Most of the inscriptions are found in northern Maharashtra. Three principal river systems, the Tapi, Godavari, and Krishna drain the entire region. Except the Tapi which drains into the Arabian Sea, the rest of the rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal. The temperature does not change significantly. The region is characterized by black cotton soil or regur.

The inscriptions of the Kalacuris were found in the present Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh area. In Madhya Pradesh, the Jabalpur region has the maximum number of inscriptions. The Narmada - Son are the major river system of the region. Its subsidiaries such as the Ken and Karnauti drain into the Ganga. The climate is monsoonal in character. The soil of the region is sedimentary and the region around the Narmada is alluvial.

In Chattisgarh, a cluster of inscriptions was found in the region around Raipur. The Mahanadi forms the major river system. The climate is tropical with dry winters. The plains have chiefly tropical red and yellow soils.

In the last quarter of the 3rd century CE, Central India saw the emergence of a local power, which succeeded the Sātavāhanas, the Vākāṭakas. From a minor ruling dynasty they became a major power by the 4th century CE. The Vākāṭakas claimed to be \textit{brāhmaṇas} of the \textit{viṣṇuvrddhi gotra} and their first king was Vindhyāsakti. The Purāṇas (\textit{Vāyu}, \textit{Brahmāṇa}, \textit{Viṣṇu}, and \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇas}) referred to the Vākāṭakas as ‘vaideśika nṛpa’.\textsuperscript{82} Pargiter holds them to be ‘dynasties of Vidiśā’. But all of the dynasties


mentioned in the texts were not linked with Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh, even remotely. According to A.M. Shastri, it probably meant ‘kings of various regions’.

The place of origin of the Vākāṭakas is contested among scholars. K.P. Jayaswal traces their origin from Bijnaur-Bagat a village in Bundelkhand. Altekar says that the Purāṇas mention Vindhyaśakti, founder of the dynasty, as the ruler of Vidisa, modern Bhilsa near Bhopal. Purikā as the capital was connected with Vidarbha i.e. modern Berar and Asmaka, by ancient geographers. Therefore, it was presumed that the nucleus of origin of the Vākāṭaka principality lay in the Western – Central province or Berar.

V.V. Mirashi advocates a theory of a South Indian origin for the Vākāṭakas because of the mention of a gahapati, householder named Vākāṭaka in a fragmentary inscription datable to around c. 3rd century CE engraved on a column at Amaravati in the Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. This view was not accepted as it was a personal name and not a clan name. The person was described as a simple householder and not as a ruler or high official. And Amaravati was a famous Buddhist place where people from far and wide came and gave grants. A.M. Shastri believes that Vindhyāśakti and his son and successor Pravīra or Pravarasena I founded the dynasty and hailed from the Vindhya region. K.V. Ramesh traces the origin of the Vākāṭakas in Akola, district Basim. He says that the term was Vākādu, which was the Dravidian form of the Sanskrit word Vākāta which, in Dravidian meant ‘a forest’.

The historiography on the Vākāṭakas starts with A.S. Altekar and R.C. Majumdar’s The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age, which emphasizes on the relationship between the Vākāṭakas and the Guptas. A number of books deal with the political history of the Vākāṭakas. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan series edited by R.C. Majumdar in its volumes, The Classical

Age, and The Struggle for Empire deals with the chronology and the military conquests of the rulers. S.R. Goyal discusses the relationship of the Vākāṭakas with the Bharaśivas and also with the Guptas. ⁸⁹

K.M. Shrimali analyzes the economy of the Vākāṭakas through the inscriptions. He highlights the existence of an agrarian economy as there was no mention of trade in the records. The absence of coins issued by the dynasty also represented their rural character. ⁹⁰ Further, excavations reveal that the flourishing urban centers of the Sātavāhanas declined during the Vākāṭaka rule. K.M. Shrimali regards the large number of land grants i.e. nearly 80 percent of the total grants, to be the main feature showing the agrarian character of the Vākāṭaka period. According to him, two centuries of the Vākāṭaka rule in parts of Central India and Northern Deccan with its non-monetary small-scale village and relatively declining urban economy presented a milieu in which the beginning of feudalism must have found its roots. ⁹¹

R. Vajpayi discusses the archaeology in the Vidarbha region and shows that urbanism which was in the ascent in the period of the Sātavāhanas shows pulls of de-urbanization in the Vākāṭaka period. ⁹² He argues that the lack of trade and commerce led to the growth of feudal tendencies and the fragmentation of land and state power.

In keeping with the feudal model, R. Vajpeyi studies the Chammak land grant of Pravarasena II to show the inherent social crisis with the rise of brāhmaṇas as landed intermediaries. ⁹³ He focuses on the condition of the grant dictated to the grantee and the inbuilt tensions. According to Sircar, the condition of the grant instructed that the grantee should wage war against the killers of brāhmaṇas, while Fleet, Kosambi, and Mirashi hold that the conditions specify that they do not wage war. This condition, according to Vajpeyi, points to social tensions in the region. Vajpeyi sees it as the factor, which contributed to the transformation of the ancient economy and polity into the feudal

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system in the Vākāṭaka kingdom in the 5th century. It inserted the powerful feudatories and brāhmaṇa fief-holders as intermediaries between the state and the peasantry which led to the rise of a new class of landed aristocracy. This class had tremendous resources and it could create socio-economic tensions in rural areas.94

Moving away from the feudal model, Nandini Sinha Kapur looks at the territoriality and legitimization in the process of state formation in Vidarbha.95 Her focus is on the inscriptive records during the reign of Pravarasena II. She shows that Pravarasena II was reaffirming his position in this region by giving land grants to brāhmaṇas. She notices three phases in the emergence of a state under the Eastern Branch. The first phase relates to the early formative period before Prabhāvatī-gupta, the second coincides with the reign of Prabhāvatī-gupta as a regent and the third phase of political and territorial integration during the long and stable rule of Pravarasena II.96

Hans T. Bakker studies the iconography during the Vākāṭaka period. He distinguishes Ramtek as an important Vaiṣṇava site besides other regions of prominence. He makes an analytic study of the political history from Rudrasena I’s period to Hariśena’s reign.97 In another work he looks at the political power and religious trend in Vidarbha.98 In this work he makes a comparison between the Vākāṭaka and the later Yādava period. He shows that the Vākāṭakas acquired the agrarian surplus and developed a power base with a proper administrative structure.99 Through religious and military control they established dominance over the region and ensured stability for a long period.

From a minor power, the Kalacuris gained prominence after the 5th century CE. They established themselves in Central India. The Kalacuris, like several other contemporary Rajput dynasties called themselves ‘candravāṃśīs’ and traced their descent from the Haihayas Sahasrārjuna, the son of Kārttavīrya. B.D. Chattopadhyaya says that the origin

96 Ibid, p. 35.
myth of a dynasty was a method of claiming legitimization. Thus for the Kalacuris claiming descent from Soma, Atri, Manu etc. was a way of claiming legitimization and also a method of proving their long ancestry.

D.R. Bhandarkar talks of the foreign origin of the Kalacuris and refers to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Harivaṃśa where the Haihayas were said to have taken the help of the Śaka, Yavana, Pārada and Khaśa tribes, who were all foreigners, to defeat king Bāhu. R.K. Sharma and V.V. Mirashi do not accept this explanation of foreign origin. According to V.V. Mirashi simply because they took help from foreigners does not prove their foreign origin. He further points out that Kārttavīrya and Bāhu were characters of the Vedic period whereas the Śakas and Yavanas belonged to a much later period.

Not much work has been done on the Kalacuris, who succeeded the Traikūṭakas. Of the few prominent works, D. C. Ganguli deals with the establishment of the Kalacuri dynasty and discusses the relationships of Kokalla I with other kings. Rahman Ali deals with the chronology of kings and their achievements in his book on the art and architecture of the Kalacuris. R.D. Banerji in Haihayas of Tripuri and their Monuments discusses the chronology of the kings and their military conquests. He also deals with their relationships with other kings especially the Rāṣṭrakūtas. As far as political history is concerned, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan series volumes, The Classical Age, The Struggle for Empire, and The Age of Imperial Unity, edited by R.C. Majumdar deal with the chronology and the military conquests of the rulers of the dynasty. S.K. Majumdar in his work characterizes the Kalacuris as a military state. By their military power they annexed a large number of territories and could retain hold over them. The Kalacuri copper plate grants mention a large number of military officials, which, according to him would characterize them as a military state. R.K. Sharma deals with the political, social,

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102 Ibid.
and religious structure under the Kalacuris.  

He has made a detailed study of the inscriptions and looks at the structure of the state under the Kalacuris.

The economy of the Kalacuris, like the Vākāṭakas, was based on agriculture. Some kind of internal trade was mentioned in the inscriptions, as there was reference to taxes to be paid for sale and purchase by the shops called vithi.  

There was mention of fairs organized, which would reflect a different kind of economy. However, the evidence for trade in the inscriptions was not adequate enough to label it as a trading society. The Kalacuris issued coins as early as 6th century CE, which included the silver coins of Krṣṇarāja and also the gold coins of Gāṅgeyadeva and Jājjaladeva.  

Minoti Chakravarty has looked at the religious life of the Kalacuris which included the Brāhmaṇical as well as non-Brāhmaṇical deities evident from the inscriptions and sculptural remains. She traces the beginning of the various cults from the Gupta period to the Kalacuri times and reflects on the religious traditions along with the mention of the various fairs and festivals held during that time in the region. She emphasizes on the religious tolerance of the Kalacuris.

For the present study, thirty-four inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas were studied; of these two are in fragmentary condition. The Vākāṭakas had two branches: one ruled from Nandivardhana-Padmapura-Pravarapura, mentioned as the Eastern branch, after Bakker. The other branch ruled from Vatsagulma, and will be treated as the Western Branch. Of the total, twenty-six inscriptions belong to the Eastern branch and eight to the Vatsagulma branch. In the Western branch there were no grants which mentioned donations by women.

As can be noticed from the chart below, most of the grants, i.e. sixteen, were given by kings of the Eastern branch. Other men include ministers and feudatories of the Vākāṭakas, three grants belonged to the Eastern branch and four to the Vatsagulma/ Western branch. Of the grants by the queen there were three grants by Prabhāvaṭiguptā. The grants by other women in the present chart refer to the grant by the

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111 Appendix 1.1.
daughter of Prabhāvatīguptā. The joint donation, two from the Eastern branch mention grants by the king as well the minister.

**Chart 1.1: Distribution of the Vākātaka Grants**

![Chart showing distribution of Vākātaka grants](chart.png)

Refer Appendix 1.1 for details.

The Bahamani plate of Bharatabala, which was held to be a grant by the feudatory of Narendrasena of the Eastern branch, is not counted. A.M. Shastri points out that after the discovery of the Mallar plates of Śūrabala alias Udīrnāvīra which showed that the Bahamani plates were also issued by the same king and not by his father Bharatabala alias Indra as was believed earlier, therefore we need not consider it. In the inscription there was an inadvertent omission of the prose portion introducing Śūrabala after the description of Bharatabala. So the word ‘narendra’ may have referred only to Śūrabala as the king and in no way, refer to the Vākātaka king Narendrasena. Moreover, Śūrabala, Udīrnāvīra and Narendrasena were separated chronologically and a relationship between the two was not possible. Hence the inscription has been omitted for the present study.

The Kalacuris were divided into four royal lineages on the basis of their inscriptions. They were the Kalacuris of Tripuri, Saryupara, Ratnapur, and Raipur. The inscriptions of the Kalacuris of Raipur belong to a period after 15th century CE, therefore they are not

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considered for the present study. The inscriptions of the Tripuri branch were found from the 8th century CE onwards. There are a total of sixty-four inscriptions of the Kalacuris that have been used the present study. Of these, thirty-five records belonged to the Tripuri branch, two records were of the Saryupara branch and rest of the twenty seven belonged to the Ratnapur branch.

**Chart 1.2: Distribution of the Kalacuri grants**

Unlike the Vakataka grants, most of the records i.e. twenty in the total of thirty-five grants of the Tripuri branch mention donations by other men which included donations by ministers, feudatories, traders and Saiva ascetics. The Ratnapur records mention most of grants by kings i.e. fourteen. The elite women of the Tripuri branch gave grants while in other dynasties there was no mention of donations by women. In the joint donations two inscriptions of the Tripuri branch grants were jointly given by the king, queen and prince or a minister, while in the Ratnapur branch three records mention grants by the king and the minister.

The early medieval period saw an efflorescence of Sanskrit as the language of inscriptions. Earlier inscriptions used Prakrit as the mode of communication.

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114 Appendix 1.2.
115 Two inscriptions are not counted for the chart as they are fragmentary and the part mentioning the donor is lost.
Rudradāman’s Junagadh inscription was the first long epigraphic text in classical language and style. Sanskrit earlier was limited to literary works. It was during the Gupta period that Sanskrit was utilized as an administrative language in epigraphs. The use of Sanskrit was seen as a method of legitimization and continuation of Brāhmāṇical traditions. It was seen as a marker of status. Richard Saloman says that the gradual Sanskritization of inscriptions reflects on the one hand, the formalization of inscriptions and on the other hand, the spread of Sanskrit into the administrative realm, which was fully accomplished under the Guptas and their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{116} Sheldon Pollock describes Sanskrit as the ‘language of the gods’ which was ritualized and monopolized. With the beginning of the Common Era, Sanskrit emerged from the sacerdotal environment and became the medium of the ruling elite.\textsuperscript{117} He emphasizes on a Sanskrit cosmopolis which had a homogenous language of political poetry besides other cultural practices.\textsuperscript{118} This process can be noticed in the use of Sanskrit in the Vākāṭaka and Kalacuri records.

The Vākāṭakas used Sanskrit as the language and the box-headed variety of southern alphabets as script in their inscriptions. For the Eastern branch, all the records were in Sanskrit. Of Pravarasena II’s records, only the Pandhurna plates contain some Prakrit words, while the rest of the records are in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{119} For the Vatsagulma branch, the inscription of Vindhyāśakti II i.e. the Basim plates is partly in Prakrit and partly in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{120} It is interesting to note that the genealogical part with which common people had not much to do was in Sanskrit, while the rest, which was in the form of an address to the people was drafted in Prakrit. It could be seen as a stage when Sanskrit was taking over Prakrit. Another interesting point in this respect was that the Prakrit used had similarity with what is now known as Maharashtri and also other dialects of Prakrit. Shastri holds that it represented a stage when the dialects had not been localized.\textsuperscript{121} In

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{120} Bāsīm Plates of Vindhyāśakti II, \textit{CII}, Vol. 5, p. 93.
terms of language there was no difference between those used by men and women. Using
the same language for records would perhaps imply a claim to similar status.

In terms of the scripts, the Poona plates of Prabhāvatiguptā contained an admixture of
northern and southern alphabets.\textsuperscript{122} The northern variety predominated, which was seen
as an effect of the Gupta relationship. But A.M. Shastri says as Prabhāvatiguptā’s other
grants such as the Riddhapur and Miregaon inscriptions were in the box-headed variety;
the choice of the script depended solely on the scribes.\textsuperscript{123} The ruling patron was only
interested in getting his/her grants and other details properly recorded. While this is
likely, it is interesting that it was only in the grant by a queen of north Indian origin that
the use of the northern script was noticed. It may indicate that Prabhāvatiguptā wanted to
create a separate identity for herself. Apart from Prabhāvatiguptā, no other grants by
women show variations in terms of the script.

The language used in the Kalacuri inscriptions is Sanskrit and the script is nagari. In the
Banaras plates of Karṇa, Prakrit was used in verse 12.\textsuperscript{124} The Choti-Deori inscription of
Śaṅkaragaṇa also shows influence of the local dialects.\textsuperscript{125} The Alha-ghat stone inscription
and the Sarnath stone inscription had incorrect Sanskrit and also show the influence of
the local dialects.\textsuperscript{126}

In the case of script all the inscriptions use nagari except the Choti-Deori and Sarnath
inscriptions, which are in proto- nagari script. The Choti-Deori inscriptions belonged to
the 8\textsuperscript{th} century CE, one of the earliest Kalacuri records. The Paikore stone pillar
inscription of Karṇa was written in the proto-Bengali script of the northern Indian
alphabets.\textsuperscript{127} It is possible that this script was used as Karṇa asserted his claims over Vaṅga. The Sarnath inscription of Karṇa mentioned the grant given by Māmakā, who
belonged to an elite family, used proto- nagari. This may indicate either that the donor
did not have access to the script used by the ruling class or that she preferred to use the
earlier script.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] Poona Plates of Prabhāvatiguptā, \textit{CIH}, Vol. 5, p. 5.
\end{footnotes}
In the matter of language and script, the Vākāṭaka inscriptions show a transition from Prakrit to Sanskrit while the Kalacuris used only Sanskrit, which showed that Sanskrit had acquired high status and was also the means of claiming legitimacy. There was uniformity in the use of language and script in the records of men as well as women in both the dynasties, except in the case of the Poona grant of Prabhāvatīguptā. Men and women using the same method of dating, language, and script in records showed that probably they shared a common administrative culture. They used the same official method to record their grants. In this respect even the feudatories and ministers also followed the trend of the ruling class. This would indicate that the ruling elite shared a common culture and identity markers in this respect. This uniformity shows a deviation from the Sanskrit plays where women were shown using only Prakrit, which was a non-elitist language. Therefore, the use of Sanskrit in the records of donations by women implied their access to the elite language.

There are many methods of dating. These include regnal years of the contemporary ruling king or dynastic years such as the Gupta era, Kalacuri-Cedi era and also eras such as the Vikrama era, Śaka era etc. It was generally noticed that the mode of dating chosen shows a claim to a long tradition and to continuity which could be interpreted as a claim to status as a strong ruling dynasty. The emphasis was on continuity through the use of long traditions. Dating in terms of dynastic eras would show a comparatively loose political structure, as these were confined to a specific locality. The emphasis was on the dynasty and not imagined links with older traditions. Regnal years were considered more limited in nature and were probably used by minor ruling powers. It did not portray continuity and was restricted to the ruling king. However, occasionally strong rulers such as Aśoka used regnal years. Using long-established eras could be suggestive of claims to legitimacy and not necessarily a strong state. Dates also sometimes mention seasons or months. Dating in terms of seasons seems to have been a regional feature while dating in months was a practice used throughout the subcontinent.

The Vākāṭaka inscriptions are generally dated with the mention of *tithi*, month or season along with regnal years. S.B. Dikshit says that the word *‘tithi’* denotes the 1/13th part of
the lunar month. It could be translated in English as a ‘lunar day’. In some inscriptions the date of issue was lost; hence these were dated on the basis of the paleography. Nine inscriptions were dated in terms of seasons i.e., four in summer, four in the rainy season, and one in hemanta or autumn. It was interesting to note that all the records of the Vatsagulma/ Western branch were dated in terms of seasons along with four records of the Eastern branch. Of the Eastern branch inscriptions, fourteen were dated in terms of months. Of these, six mentioned the month of Kārtika, October-November, three Jaiśthya, May-June, two Vaiśākha, April-May, and one each mentioned Āśvina, September-October, Māgha, January-February, and Phālguna, i.e. February-March. The Miregaon inscription of Pravarasena II, which records the donation of Prabhāvatīguptā was the sole instance of dating in terms of a month as well as season i.e., hemanta Pusyaṃāsa. The Hisse-Borala inscription of Devaśena was dated in the Śaka years. The date of this inscription was Śaka 380 corresponding to the year 3020 of a cyclic reckoning in astronomical terms and reference to the planetary position of the Great Bear, saptarśi in Uttara nakṣatra. It is the first instance of this dating method. It is the only known record of the Vākāṭakas to be dated in Śaka era. Both men and women of the Vākāṭakas followed the same dating pattern of mentioning the regnal year of the ruling king. Women also used the regnal year of the king. It shows that they derived their status from the king and did not have power to use their own regnal year. Prabhāvatīguptā who ruled as a regent used the date of the reigning year of the prince or the king. Thus she did not claim an independent status as a ruler.

The Kalacuri inscriptions were mostly dated in the Kalacuri-Cedi era i.e. about 249-250 CE, the date probably marked the beginning of the rule of the Abhira king Īśvarasena. Kielhorn dates it as 247-248 CE. According to Mirashi, of the various dates 249-250 CE is most suitable. The Kalacuris in their inscriptions gave details such as titthi, month, as well as the dynastic year. We do not find any inscription dated in terms of season.

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129 Miregaon Charter of the Reign of Pravara Sena II, Year 20, FSH p. 91.
Of the sixty-four Kalacuri records, nine inscriptions do not mention dates. Twelve mention only the year of grant and the remaining twenty-eight mentioned months such as Māgha, i.e. January-February, Bhādra, August-September, Āśvina, September-October, Kārtika, October-November, Phālguna, February-March, Śrāvaṇa, July-August, and Pauṣa, December-January. Three inscriptions were dated in the Vikrama era. These were the Alha-ghat inscription of Narasimhadeva and Rewa plates of Vijayasimhadeva of the Tripuri branch, and Ratnapur stone inscription of Prthivideva II, Year 1207\textsuperscript{132} of the Ratnapur branch. The Koni stone inscription of Prthivideva II, Year 900, mentioned a solar eclipse in that year which cannot be verified astronomically.

Dating methods, language and script are the implicit identity markers in an inscription. Every region has its own characteristic method of dating as well as specific language and script used. By studying them, regional practices can be ascertained. As is evident, these implicit markers are to some extent common to both men and women.

III

As noted earlier, the Matsya Purāṇa is a didactic text which deals with a wide range of topics. The portions which could be related to the inscriptions have been compared to understand the ways in which the identities of men and women were constructed. The attempt here is to understand the process by which traditions are incorporated and how far they are gendered. The Purāṇa and the inscriptions are two different kinds of sources but are comparable. The Purāṇas were an attempt to establish and spread Brāhmaṇical culture and tradition but at the same time their authors accepted the trends prevalent in the region. The attempt in the thesis is to trace and formulate the traditions in Central India. The inscriptions provide relevant data for the regional study. There are many reasons why the Vākāṭaka and Kalacuri inscriptions can be compared with the Matsya Purāṇa. Going by Hazra’s study it was the Narmada region where the Purāṇa was compiled and hence was one of the common factors between the two sources. The Kalacuris specifically were connected to the region as Tripuri and Mahismati were linked

\textsuperscript{132} Scholars are divided on the date of the record. Kielhorn dates it to 1247 i.e. 1189-90 CE, while Mirashi dates it to 1207 i.e. 1149-50 CE. For the present study Mirashi’s dating is used.
to the Kalacuris according to the Purāṇas as well as the inscriptions. Tripuri has been identified as the region near Tewar, modern Jabalpur.\textsuperscript{133}

Besides, the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa} is one of those Purāṇa which cover a whole range of topics from kingship, \textit{vrata}, \textit{dāna}, \textit{tīrtha}, genealogy, \textit{śraddha}, marriage besides religious beliefs. The \textit{Matsya Purāṇa} was a text which described both the cults of Viṣṇu and Śiva which makes it particularly suitable for a comparative exercise.

For the present study, I will discuss the different facets of inscriptions and compare these with the evidence from the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa}. A comparison with the Purāṇas will also enable us to see the extent to which the Brāhmaṇical ideals were accepted or modified by the regional elites. The attempt will be to focus on the markers of gender identity using the two sources.

The first chapter will deal with the political aspect and look at notions of kingship. The attempt will be to see whether women find any place in the concepts such as kingship and how men and women claim different identities. I will compare the attributes of kings as described in the Purāṇa and the inscriptions, focusing on differences in time as well in terms of the two sources. The \textit{Kali yuga} was a concept which was used in both the sources but the way of dealing with it was different. The approach will be to look at the way in which this concept was formulated and the place of women in it, if any. At another level, the status and power claimed by the elites could also be noticed from the titles used in the inscriptions. Comparing the titles used by men and women allows us to reconstruct the ways in which gender identities were represented.

In the second chapter I will examine how the identities of men and women were constituted in terms of genealogy and marriage patterns. Here the attempt will be look at the selective process in the kinship structure. It would be relevant to look at the position of women in the kinship pattern through genealogy and references made to marriage alliances.

In the third chapter the expressions of religious beliefs and practices as seen in inscriptions and what the Purāṇas prescribe is analyzed and compared. The Purāṇas adhere

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to one of the sects- Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva or Śakta. Through myths and legends they glorify the virtues of the gods and sometimes the goddesses. I will compare the representation of gods and goddesses, myths etc. in the Purāṇas and inscriptions. The approach here is to look at the trend as a method of appropriation of various belief systems in society which was at the same time region specific, and to explore how far these methods were open to elite women and men.

The last chapter deals with gifts and donations and how they were gendered. Giving donations were regarded as a part of religious duty. It is relevant to understand the trend and to relate the practice of donations in the Purāṇa as well as the inscriptions. Gifts were seen as a method and process of legitimization and attaining social prestige. The extent to which donors in the region adopted these strategies or deviated from them will be analyzed. Who grants to whom, is important as it shows as to what were the sources of legitimacy open to men and women. I will compare the identities of the donees in inscriptions with those projected in the Purāṇa.

Finally, I will attempt to summarize the findings that emerge from a comparison of these two distinctive sources—highlighting the ways in which gender relations were visualized in early medieval central India. The comparison, as mentioned earlier, will be along lines of access to political power, the place within genealogies and marriage alliance, participation in religious rites and rituals, and, finally, gift-giving as donors and donees.