CHAPTER 3

Mathurā as a Political Centre
MATHURĀ AS A POLITICAL CENTRE

Mathurā was, in tradition, the country of the Yadus and the Śūrasena. Jaina and Buddhist sources describe Mathurā as Janapada. During the Mauryan period, Mathurā’s transition to urbanism is suggested by the archaeological data. But we do not have direct literary or other evidence of Mauryan rule in Mathurā. In the post-Mauryan period we have vast literary as well as archaeological material to suggest a long succession of local rulers, and the expansion of Kṣatrapa and Kuśāṇa rule in Mathurā. The emergence of Mathurā as an important political centre in the post Mauryan period was a gradual process and this process perhaps may well be examined in terms of three well marked political phases:

1. The revival of local authority and political separation from Magadha.
2. Beginning and gradual intensification of contacts with centres of powers in the north west.
3. Emergence as a core area and eastern centre of a north-western empire, the Kuśāṇa empire.

In tracing the evolution of Mathurā as a political centre, we divide this chapter into five parts:

1. Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan phase.
2. The Phase of Local Rulers.
3. Emergence of a Political base for the Kṣatrapas.
4. Mathurā as a part of the Kuśāṇa Empire.
5. Post-Kuśāṇa Mathurā.
1. Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan Phases:

Several literary sources suggest that Mathura was an important place and it was known by its various names, such as Madhura¹, Madhupura², or Madhupuri³, Mathulā⁴, Madhusika⁵, Uttarāmadhura⁶, Indapura⁷ etc.

Vedic literature makes no mention of Mathura nor of its variants such as Madhura. The Yādavas s are not associated with this region as they are in other sources, but the Yadu as a clan is mentioned frequently.⁸ The activities of the Yādavas tribe indicate the prevalence of a lineage system. Yādavas were divided into numerous septs. The Vṛṣṇis and the Andhakas originated from the Sātvata, the Yādavas prince. We learn from the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa⁹ that Sātvata were defeated by Bharatas and the horse which they had prepared for an Aśvamedha sacrifice was taken away from him. The epic and Puranic tradition places Sātvata in the Mathura District. Andhaka reigned at Mathura, whose descendant was the tyrant King Kamsa. Kaṃsa was the maternal uncle of the Vṛṣṇi hero Kṛṣṇa, who later killed him. This roused the wrath of Jarasandha (who was relative of Kamsa) against Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa and the other members of the Vṛṣṇi clan resisted for sometime, but afterwards they migrated to Dvāraka¹⁰. The Vṛṣṇi sept of the Yādavas tribe was famous in later Vedic times as it is mentioned in the Taittirīya Samhitā¹¹ and the Brāhmaṇas¹², the

¹ Rāmāyana, uttarakānda, 108-10. The difference is due to linguistic peculiarity.
² Ibid, 70.5.
³ Harivamsha Purāṇa, Canto 95.
⁴ H.Lüders, A List of Brahmi Inscriptions, Epigraphia Indica, X, no. 1345, p. 165.
¹⁰ Mahābhārata, V, 47, 1881-82; Brahma Purāṇa, 180-212; Harivamsha Purāṇa, 57-190.
¹¹ III. 11.9.3; cited in D.C.Sircar, Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India.
¹² III. 10.9.3, Ibid.
Satapatha Brāhmaṇa¹, and the Jaiminiya Upanisad Brāhmaṇa². Tradition shows that as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa plays the role of sympathetic kinsman to the Pandavas against the Kauravas in the Mahābhārata at Kurukshetra (Mahābhārata). A characteristic of lineage society which is noticeable in the Mahābhārata is the resort to the migration, to ease tensions and conflicts particularly in relation to political power. Thus the Pāndavas built a new capital at Indraprastha and a segment of the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇi migrates from Mathurā to Dvāraka. In a sense, the frequency of exile is also partially associated with fission, since the need for exile arises out of crisis concerning legitimacy and power both in the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.³ The possibility of hydraulic changes in this area cannot be overruled, which may have required migration on a large scale such as movement of Yādavas from Mathurā to Saurāstra. Desiccation and changes in the river course would have caused major population movements.⁴

The following legend in the Harivamsa⁵ may be taken to refer to the foundation of the town. Among the descendants of Ikshvaku, who reigned at Ayodhya, was Hāryaśva, who took Madhumati, the daughter of the giant Madhura, as a wife. Being expelled from the throne by his elder brother, the king fled for refuge to the court of his father-in-law, who received him most affectionately, and ceded to him the whole of his dominions excepting the whole of Madhuvana, which he reserved for his son Lavaṇa. Thereupon Hāryaśva built on the sacred Girivara, a new royal residence, and consolidated the kingdom of Anarta, to which he subsequently annexed the country of Arupa, or as it is otherwise preferably read Anupa. In the reign of Lavaṇa son and successor of Hāryaśva, Rāma, the then sovereign of Ayodhyā, commissioned Śatrughṇa, to destroy his fort Madhubana, and erect the town of

¹ III.1.1.4, Ibid.
² 1.6.1; Ibid.
³ Romila Thapar. From Lineage to State, Delhi, 1990, p. 133.
⁴ Ibid, p. 23.
⁵ Harivamsa Purāṇa, Chapter 94.
Mathurā. After the departure of its founder, Mathurā was annexed by Bhīma, the third descendant from Yadu and son of Hāryaśva and continued in the possession of his descendants down to Vāsudeva.¹

“Śatrughṇa Lavanam hatvā chichchheda sa Madhor vanam

Tasmin Madhu-Vane sthāne purim cha Mathurām imām.

Nīveśyamāsā vibhuḥ Sumitrā-nandi-vardhanah.

Paryāye chaiva Rāmasya Bharatasya tathā iva cha

Sumitrā-sutaya’s chaiva praptayor Vaishīvavam padam.

Bhīmeneyam puri tena rājya-sambhandha-kārānat.

Svavanśe Sthāpita pūrvaṃ svayam-adhyāsitā the tathā.

[“When Sumitrā’s delight, prince Śatrughṇa, had killed Lavaṇa, he cut down the forest of Madhu, and in the place of that Madhuvana founded the present city of Mathurā. Then, after Rāma and Bharata had left the world and the two sons of Sumitrā had taken their place in heaven, Bhīma, in order to consolidate his dominions, brought the city, which had formerly been independent, under the sway of his own family.”]

The Yādavas’ association with Mathurā is stressed in the Harivamsa Purāṇa, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. These are all texts composed much later than the events which they claim to describe and the association of Yādavas’ lineage with Mathurā does not appear to have been terminated even after they had been banished to the southern direction. Assuming that Mathurā had been included in the Madhyadeśa, traditions state that Śatrughṇa, the younger brother of Rāma, attacked and killed the asura Lavaṇa, the son of Vīmadhu who had held sway over the area.² Śatrughṇa cleared the forest of

¹ Ibid, Chapter 94, 95.
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Madhuvana. The forest may have been cleared with the help of iron tools,¹ and new settlements may have been established as is evident from the texts that Śatrughnā founded the city of Mathurā.² This name is variant of Mathurā from Madhu.³ The building of a city by Śatrughnā would suggest that Mathurā began as a royal capital and later developed into a commercial centre.

Information on the Yādavas as a political force tends to be vague. They were evidently a pastoral cum agricultural society observing what appears to be a segmentary lineage system.⁴ An attempt has been made to try and identify them with the BRW culture from the archaeology of the second and first millennium BC, but the identification remains extremely tentative.⁵ Archaeological co-relations with migration raise the problem that the B &RW people moved from Gujarat towards Rajasthan and to the west of the Yamuna, not in the other direction.⁶ The major segments of the Yādavas such as the Andhakas and the Vṛṣṇis followed the ġaṇa-Saṁgha system which is attested to by both Pāṇini⁷ and Kauṭilya.⁸ Romila Thapar⁹ provides stimulating discussion of the social and political implications of the changes which coincided with the emergence of cities and states.

Literary evidence seems to suggest a transition from the jana i.e. tribal to Janapada/territorial and ġaṇa-Saṁgha (loosely translated as republican or oligarchical and often also as “tribal”) form of society in the time span represented by the Rg Veda at one end and the Aṣṭadhyāyī of Pāṇini at the

¹ R.S. Sharma, Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India, Delhi, reprint, 1992.
² Viṣṇu Purāṇa, IV.4.11. The story is repeated in the Rāmāyaṇa, VII, 61 & 62.
⁴ Romila Thapar, ‘Geneology as a source of Social History’, Ancient Indian Social History, Some Interpretation, p. 3-26, Delhi, 1978.
⁷ Pāṇini, Aṣṭadhyāyī, VI.2.34.
⁸ Arthaśāstra, XI, 14.
⁹ Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State.
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other. The time span would roughly extend from the close of the second millennium BC to the middle of the first millennium BC. The evidences point towards the fact that the whole of the Indo-Gangetic divide and Upper Ganga basin were shaping towards the beginning of the early historical period. The traditional evidence on Mathurā suggests a process of historical change from a lineage based society with the prominence of Yādavas lineage to the emergence of a *janapada*, that of the Śūrasena, named after the son of Śatrughna. The history of Mathurā as a focus of Śūrasena activity moves from the realm of speculations to a little more certainty, since it is referred to in a wide variety of sources. Mathurā in the pre-Mauryan period was the centre of Śūrasena Mahājanapada, its cultural antecedents being similar to those of other Mahājanapadas in the upper Ganges basin. (This will be true at least from the PGW phase). Jaina and Buddhist texts also refer to Mathurā and although these references are not contemporary, nevertheless what is said about the city has some significance. Jaina sources describe Śūrasena as one of the Āryajanapadas lying to the south of Kuru and to the east of the Matsya. Śūrasena *janapada* belonged to fairly well developed social and formal independent kingdom. Territory of these people gave shape to the political map of India and its adjacent land (Śūrasena).

P.L. Gupta has postulated that even before the rise of the Mauryas some of the punch marked coins were indeed issued in Mathurā for the kingdom of Śūrasena *Mahājanapada*. In his opinion, they testify to the existence of an independent state of Mathurā before the rise of the Magadha empire under the Nandas. Though this evidence is not corroborated by any other evidence nor the provenance of these coins is satisfactorily recorded, there is no doubt that

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5 Ibid.
the earliest punch-marked coins of India did circulate in Mathurā and its environment but perhaps they did so from Nanda Maurya period rather than from still earlier times as P.L. Gupta would like us to believe. Archaeologically speaking as we still lack evidence of their presence in northern India in the earliest layers of what is known as Northern Black Polished Ware culture, and the recent excavations also at Sonkh and in Mathurā itself have failed to enlighten us on this point.1 Śūrasena’s capital Mathurā was listed among the ten most important capitals of Janapadas2. A Buddhist text lists Śūrasena as one of the sixteen Mahājanapadas and states that it has close links with Maccha/Matsya3. The capital of Śūrasena was the city of Madura and was situated on the Yamuna. It was visited by Mahakaccana who stayed at Gunavana⁴. Mahakaccana delivered one of the most important Śūtras on the subject of the caste in this city⁵. In another Buddhist text the king of the Śūrasena janapada is called Avantiputta and is described as sympathetic to Buddhist teachings⁶. Twenty three Sursena kings are mentioned in Vāyu Purāṇa as contemporaries of the future kings of Magadha⁷. The Śūrasena janapada, as a territorial unit claims historical recognition and was counted among the important states of Northern India. Its status was determined not only by its being listed among the sixteen Mahājanapadas but also by reference to its political centre at Mathurā. The identity of Śūrasena was not totally submerged when it came under the Mauryan control. Mathurā, the house of the Andhakas and the Vṛṣṇis war later evacuated by them according to tradition⁸. The evidence of PGW found in

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1 H. Hartel, Excavations at Sonkh, also IAR, 1973-77.
2 Anguttara Nikāya, I.213. IV. 252.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid
5 Majjhima Nikāya, II,p.83; B.C. Law, Mathurā in Ancient India, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay, p.27, XII, 1947
6 Majjhima Nikāya, II, 83-90
7 Vāyu Purāṇa, Chapter, 99.
8 Cambridge History of India, I, p.185.
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the locality of Armarish Tila makes it clear that there was a pre-Mauryan settlement at the site of Mathurā. Both PGW and BRW have been found in the Mathurā area and at Sonkh. Such sites could perhaps provide the archaeological correlation for a settlement of the Śūrasena period.

Śūrasena continued to be an independent janapada during the Saisunaga (or Harṇyaka) dynasty of Magadha. Probably, the Śūrasena territory was incorporated in the domains of the Nandas as the Purāṇas call Mahapadma, the first Nanda king, ‘the destroyer of all Kṣatriyas’ and the sole monarch bringing all under his sole control. It implies that he overthrew all dynasties that had ruled contemporaneously with the family of Sisunāga. Among them were the ruling groups of the Śūrasena.

There is a surprising lack of evidence associating Mathurā with the rule of the Mauryas, other than that of excavations. There are no Aśokan inscriptions in the vicinity. This is admittedly a negative evidence, but nevertheless telling. Archaeological data suggest a transition to urbanism during this period and it is therefore possible that some inscriptional evidence may yet appear. It is difficult to be dogmatic about it that precisely when Mathurā became an urban settlement as urbanism is a gradual process. Since the post-Mauryan evidence does indicate urbanism, it may be assumed that the transition to urbanism took place in the Mauryan period. Mathurā must have been included in the Magadhan empire, although judging from the distribution of the major political centres in the Mauryan period its importance to the empire may have been mainly due to the trade route passing through it.

Nevertheless, the question as to why Mathurā does not have any

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1 IAR, 1973-74 p.55
2 H. Hartel, Excavations at Sonkh, 25.
3 F.E. Pratiger, The Purāṇa Texts of the Dynasties of the Kali Age, p.25 & 69.
4 H.C. Rachaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, p.233
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid, p. 138
concrete evidence of Mauryan control remains as yet unanswered and a number of partial answers can be put forward. The important administrative centres in north India were Pataliputra, Takṣaśila and Ujjaiyinī and they doubtlessly overshadowed Mathurā. It was perhaps too close to the centre of power to develop as a provincial capital\(^1\). Alternatively, it may have nurtured lineage autonomy to a larger extent than the other cities and managed to maintain its autonomy. It is significant that the classical accounts refer to Methora as a town of Surasenoī\(^2\) and do not connect it with the Mauryas although it must certainly have been under Mauryan control. The Surasenoī are described as an Indian tribe and not merely as a territorial unit\(^3\). This may also suggest that state formation in this region was less well developed, and that it was only after the hegemony of the Mauryas that it matured. The \emph{gāpa Samgha} system may have had a strong base in this area.

### 2. THE PHASE OF LOCAL RULERS

For this phase of the history of Mathurā one has to depend on the evidence of several series of coins and the nature of evidence makes the reconstruction of this phase rather hazardous. What however is clear is that these coins are comparable to several contemporary series\(^4\) in other centres and represent a political pattern which emerged within a broad geographical area which marked a movement away from the authority of Magadha.\(^5\)

To understand the process of political separation of Mathurā from

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1. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, p.17
3. Ibid, One of the passages of the *Indica*, VIII, 8,5, by Megasthenes quoted by Arrian states, Herakles is held in special honour by the Surasenoī, an Indian tribe which possesses two large cities, Methora (Mathurā) and Kleisobara and through territory flows a navigable river called Iobars (Yamuna).
Magadha and to determine whether the coins really represent lineal succession, it is important to have a broad chronological idea of the coin series. A careful record of persistent provenance of coins, now confirmed by stratified archaeological evidence, leaves no doubt that the earliest inscribed coins of Mathurā were issued by a local chief Gomitra. There is consensus among scholars that Gomitra must be placed after the Mauryas. Whether or not all the kings of Mitra ending names who ruled over the major part of Northern India after the Mauryas were collaterals, it is clear from the numismatic sources that Gomitra was the first among them at Mathurā. On a coin a legend Gomitāsa Ranaye can be explained as 'the coin of Gomitra of Rana (Raya). Quite likely, Gomitra was initially a ruler of a small principality in close vicinity to Mathurā. Later he must have shifted his power to Mathurā.

Gomitra was succeeded by at least five kings with Mitra ending names:

1. Brahmanita (Brahmamitra)
2. Drdhimita (Dridharnitra)
3. Satamita (Satyamitra)
4. Suyamita (Suryamitra)
5. Viṣṇumita (Vishnumitra)

The earliest inscribed coin of Sonkh is the coin of King Gomitra, which comes

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1 H. Hartel, "Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh", p.82.
3 The same view is expressed by S.K. Dixit, K.N. Puri, Excavations at Rairh, p. 53, no date or place of publication is given.
6 Journal of Numismatic Society of India, XXVIII, p. 42, Pl. 11.7.
8 Ibid, p. 175, Pl. XXV.16.
from level 29. From the lower layers of level 26 came up coins in large numbers of another Mitra king, Suryamitra. The upper layers of level 26 and 25 presented coins of Brahhamitra and Viṣṇumitra. Hartel’s discovery of these coins in levels lying between mid Śunga and Kṣatrapa period places them between 150 BC to the end of the 1st century BC. Their coinage does indicate a group of relationship or for that matter kinship, based on the use of common symbols used on these coins. The obverse shows the figure of Lakshmi (sometimes wrongly described as Kṛṣṇa) holding a lotus in her uplifted right hand, between several symbols on either side. The reverse usually depicts three elephants with riders. The reverse type is crudely represented and degenerates until it is almost un-recognizable. Gomitra, Viṣṇumitra and Suryamitra are also mentioned in the inscriptions of the time.

From the ancient mound at Rairh (a small village in former Jaipur state, now a part of Sawai Madhopur District of Rajasthan) copper coins bearing the name of Brahhamitra, Suryamitra and Dhruvamitra were found. The solitary coin of Brahhamitra found was similar to what is known from Mathura. Its

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Bela Lahiri, Indigenous States in Northern India, p. 164
5 J. Allan, Catalogue of British Museum Coins of Ancient India, p. cviii, n. 3.
6 For progressive degeneration see J. Allan, Catalogue of British Museum Coins of Ancient India, Pl. XLIV, 8-12.
7 These kings are identifiable with their namesakes appearing on epigraphs. At Ganeshta some three miles west of Mathura were found 24 bricks and brickbats with fragmentary inscriptions the reading of which may be restored as Gomitra Machena Kohadena Karitam, Archaeological Survey of Report, 1911-12, p. 129. The epigraphs are classified with Mora Brick Inscriptions of Yasaurata and referred to a date about closing years of second c. BC, Archaeological Survey of India Report, 1911-12, p. 128. The Palaeography of the legend on Gomitra’s coin also suggests a similar date, hence the two may be considered identical. (ii) A Mathura Inscription mention king Visnumitra who was son of Dharmamitra and the father of princess Indragnibhadra, Indian Historical Quarterly, II. P. 441H: JBR, XXX, p. 204-05. This Visnumitra may be identified with Visnumitra of Mathurā coin. (iii) there is another inscription found in private collection of H.P. Poddar. See Bela Lahiri, Indigenous States of Northern India, p. 154, which reveals the name of our rāja Gopaliputra Suryamitra. This Suryamitra must have been the same as Mathurā coins, as the characters of the coin legend appear to be similar to those of the Inscriptions.
8 K.N. Puri, Excavations at Rairh, pp. 66-68, 1931.
association with the coins of other two Mitras may indicate that these rulers were related to Mathurā. The name Suryamitra which is found on the coins of both places, adds weight to it. The coins of Suryamitra and Dhruvamitra, found at Rairh bear the name Udehiki Suyamitāsa and Udehiki respectively.\(^1\) The name Udehiki may well be identified with Udehika, Audehika or Auddehika, mentioned by Varahmihira and located at Madhyadeśa.\(^2\) It may be said that these coins were issued by the people or at the place called Udehika. We have another type of coin with the legend Sudavāpa Suyamitrāsa\(^3\) and Suyavāpa Dhuvamitrāsa.\(^4\) These two coins are very close to each other in their devices and show that Suryamitra and Dhruvamitra were the rulers of the place and principality called Sudavapa. All the coins of this series are undoubtedly the issues of two places Udehika and Sudavapa. However, these coins seem to be closely connected with Mathurā as they share common symbols\(^5\) which may be dynastic symbols the Mitra rulers of Mathurā.

It may be proposed that at the beginning of the disintegration of the Mauryan empire, small principalities had sprung up at different places, and they issued their own coins. Coins bearing the names Kauśāmbi,\(^6\) Vāranasi,\(^7\) Mahismati,\(^8\) Vidiśā,\(^9\) Tripuri,\(^10\) Ujjayinī,\(^11\) Erakina,\(^12\) Tagara\(^13\) suggest this. The coins which show the names of the localities are not confined to renowned places but

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\(^2\) Brhat Samhita, XIV, 3.

\(^3\) P.L. Gupta, ‘Early Coins of Mathurā Region’, Fig. 14.1; no. 6.

\(^4\) P.L. Gupta, ‘Early Coins of Mathurā Region’, Fig. 14.1., no. 7.

\(^5\) Ibid, Fig. 14.2. Symbol 4.


\(^12\) J. Allan, Ibid, p. xci.

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were also issued from less well known places like Baghila and Kurara in Madhya Pradesh. In the same category of lesser known localities are placenames Udehika, Sudavapa and also Upatika (coin bearing the name Upatika was found by Cunningham at Ambarikha i.e. Ambarish Tila of Mathurā). It is likely that places like Udehika and Sudavapa were situated in the vicinity of Mathurā, and later these places developed into units of the kingdom of Mathurā.

The second group of local Mathurā rulers were those who issued coins with Datta ending names. They are identified with the second group of coin finds of Mathurā. Five rulers of this group are Purusadatta, Rama datta, Kāmadatta, Uttamadatta and Bhāvadatta. A ruler Sesadatta is also placed among the Mathurā rulers. Like the Mitra rulers Purusadatta bears no title with his name, he may be the earliest in the dynasty. Next was Rāma datta whose coins are known of two varieties. One follows Puruṣadatta in having no title, the other has the title Rajño added to his name. The other three rulers follow the title Rajño. The coins of the Dattas along with those of the Mitras form a homogeneous series. This may mean that they were quite close to each other. And the finds of the Sonkh excavation conclusively show that the Dattas immediately followed the Mitras.

Another group of coins bear the name of Balabhuti. His coins are very close to the coins of the Mitras and the Dattas. A clay sealing in Mathurā Museum

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5 Ibid, p. 182, Pl. XXIII, 18.
6 Ibid, p. 177, Pl. XXIV, 15-17.
7 Ibid, Intro. P. cxi.
8 Ibid, p. cx.
bears the legend *Rajño Balabhutisya Yanyaye.* The Balabhuti of the sealing adds to our knowledge that he belonged to a place called Yanya. This brings him close to Gomitra, whose coins have the legend *Gomitāsa Ranaye,* but it is not possible to place the two close to each other in terms of time during the days of the Dattas. Raya had become independent of Mathurā for a short while, but had maintained its link with Mathurā. On the other hand, the name Balabhuti reminds us of Dhanabhuti who is known from a coping stone inscription found at Mathurā (it is suggested that Raya(?), Yanya are place names), but in the absence of the title *Rajño* in the inscription, it is difficult to relate the two.

It is with the inscribed series of coinage that Mathurā and its environs get their first specific evidence of independent identity. The process of political separation from Magadha and of the reemergence of an autonomous political centre at Mathurā may thus correspond to a phase when the Magadhan ruling lineage was itself being split up into several territorial segments. This impression is derived from the fact that in its later phase evidence of Śuṅga rule is available from such different centres as Vidiśā and Ayodhyā.

3. EMERGANCE OF A POLITICAL BASE FOR THE KṢATRAPAS

In the Kṣatrapa phase Mathurā’s political history came to be directly linked with changes in the north west. The origin of the office of the Kṣatrapas may be traced to the Achaemenid period but it became politically really significant for northern and western India only with the expansion of Scytho-Parthian power. In reconstructing the Kṣatrapa phase of Mathurā, one confronts a problem similar to that of the period of local rulers, namely the ordering of all Kṣatrapas and Mahākṣatrapas within a satisfactory chronological frame. From the epigraphic sources and numismatic sources the following Kṣatrapa names

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1 M.M. Accession No. 70.38; also, P.L. Gupta, “Early Coins of Mathurā”, p. 130.
2 A. Cunningham, ‘Mathurā’, *Archaeological Survey of India Report,* Vol. III, Pl. XVI (1871-72), p. 36, Pl. XVI, Fig. 21.
are known so far:¹ Mahākṣatrapa Rajuvula; Kṣatrapa (later Mahākṣatrapa) Śodasa; Kṣatrapa Taranadāsa, son of a Mahākṣatrapa; Kṣatrapa Hagamāsa; Kṣatrapa Hagāna, Kṣatrapa Śivadatta; Kṣatrapa Śivaghosha, Kṣatrapa Vajatatajama. It is not only the relative chronology of these Kṣatrapas that has been in dispute, the chronological position of the whole Kṣatrapa group vis-à-vis the local rulers and the Kuṣāṇas had also been subjected to debate.² However, when one considers the broad pattern of Mathurā’s history in the post-Mauryan period, it seems that the problem of relative chronology should be viewed in terms mainly of Mathurā’s link with the north-west and its final absorption into an empire originating in the north-west.³

Among the Kṣatrapas seen from this perspective, Mahākṣatrapa Rajuvula and Kṣatrapa Śodasa must have preceded the others. The date of Rajuvula’s arrival at Mathurā from the north-west does not have to be based on pure speculation. Rajuvula’s various coin series reveal his antecedents perhaps both in Takṣaśila and Sagala.⁴ His Mathurā series with the devices ‘Lakshmi’ and ‘Abhiseka Lakshmi’ and the coin legend ‘Mahākṣatrapa Rajuvalāsa’ on the obverse⁵ in lead issues initiate a wholly local series in which characteristics of Mathurā coinage continues. His son Śodasa used the above coin types in his lead and copper issues, the legend was always in Brahmi script, only varying in different specimens. The coins show that Śodasa was first a Kṣatrapa and afterwards a Mahākṣatrapa. The legend on the coins read Mahākṣatrapāsa putāsa Khatapāsa Śodasasa, Rjuvulaputāsa Khatapāsa, and

² K.A.Nilkanta Sastrī (ed.), A Comprehensive History of India, vol 2, p.263.
Sodasasa Mahâkhatapâsa Sodasasa.\(^1\) The copper coins of other groups of Mathurâ Satraps: Śivadatta, Śivaghosa, Hâgamasha and both Hâgamasha and Hagâna, on the other hand, invariably bear legends in Brahmi script and this fact would alone indicate their later position. They use the ‘standing Lakshmi’ and ‘Horse’ devices on all their coins, and it is presumable from the paucity and somewhat indifferent execution of their coin types that they ruled for a comparatively short period after Sodasa.\(^2\) Either Śivadatta and Śivaghosha were Indians bearing the foreign title Kṣatrapa or as is more probable foreigners using Indian names. The gradual Indianization of names would also indicate a date for the Kṣatrapa Śivadatta and Śivaghosha, later even than Hâgamâsa and Hagâna.

The Brahmi Inscription on a votive tablet (Āyāgapata) found at Mathurâ recording some endowments by one Amohini, a Jaina devotee, bears the name Mahâkṣatrapa Sodasa dated in year 72. It places Mahâkṣatrapa Sodasa in 14-15 A.D. at Mathurâ, if the date is assigned to the Vikrâma era\(^3\) His predecessor may thus have started his Mathurâ career towards the close of the first century BC or the beginning of Christian era.

The Mathurâ Lion Capital Inscriptions of the time of Rajuvula were written in Kharosthi script and they bear an unmistakable stamp of official association.\(^4\) Mathurâ region is considered to have remained outside the Kharosthi zone proper,\(^5\) and its use was perhaps not repeated in Mathurâ even

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2 For full description of the coins of the Mathurâ Satraps, see J.Allan, Ibid, pp. Cxi-cxvi, 183-191; A.Cunningham, Coins of Ancient India, pp. 85-87, Pl. viii.; V.A.Smith, Catalogue of Coins in Indian Museum, I, pp. 190-191, 195, 197.Cunningham seems to place Rajuvula and Sodasa before Hâgamâsa for he mentions Rajuvula and Sodasa first and then Hâgamâsa and his contemporary Magana. In his times the coins of Śivadatta were unknown.
3 Rosenfield reads it as yr. 42 instead of yr. 72. J.M. Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśâparas, p. 299 note 11. But D.C. Sircar strongly argues in favour of the reading 72. Select Inscriptions, I, p. 120, fn. 3. The date is generally assigned to Vikram era which will make, in terms of Christian era, 14-15 A.D.
5 Sten Konow, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, II, p. 30-49.
in the time of the Kuśāṇas, although it was in use in other parts of the empire. The only major example of the use of Kharosthi at Mathurā is thus provided by the Mathurā Lion capital inscriptions of Rajuvula. In fact, the ethos of the Lion capital inscriptions, engraved on the occasion of a religious benefaction on a grand scale, is that of a wholly alien elite. The benefactions, in favour of a Buddhist Vihāra, were made by the chief queen of Rajuvula and other members of his family at Mathurā but the inscriptions invoke a host of names, of Kṣatrapas and others, mostly located away from Mathurā, as references to Mahākhatrapāsa Kusulaa Padika and Yuvarāja Kharaosta would indicate. Kusulaa Padika of this inscription may be identified with Patika, son of Liaka Kusuluko of Takṣašila copper plate inscription of year 78. Kharaosta of the inscription may be identical with Kharaosta of coins bearing Greek and Kharosthi legends. An Inscription refers to the Bhikṣu Budhila from Nagarā, probably Nagarahāra, from eastern Afghanistan. And most significantly, the records invoke the whole of Śakasthana (Sarvasā Śakasthanāśa Puyae), evidently in the memory of a remote homeland. Śodasa who is mentioned as a Kṣatrapa in the Lion Capital Inscriptions, but who later became a Mahākṣatrapa as shown by his coins and several Mathurā inscriptions, was a local ruler of Mathurā. So were other Kṣatrapas listed above, known as they are only from their Mathurā type of coins. There is nothing in Śodasa’s records which is comparable to the world of Mathurā’s Lion Capital inscriptions. Even the single official appearing in his records, a Gañjavara (a term incidently of

1 A short kharosthi inscription, found at Sonkh, has also been assigned to the Ksatrapa phase; Hartel, H., “Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh”, p. 90.
2 D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, I, pp. 114-118, Group IA (I), Group II, B.
3 Ibid, Group II, G.E.
4 Sten Konow, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, II (I), pp. 28-29.
5 B.D Chattopadhyaya, “Mathurā from the Śunga to the Kuśāṇa Period: An Historical Outline”, fn 43, p. 27.
6 D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, I, p. 116, Group II F.
7 D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, I, p. 116, Group III.
8 D.C. Sircar, Ibid, I, pp. 120-123, nos. 25, 26, 26A, for Śodasa coins as Mahāksatrapa see J. Allan, Catalogue of British Museum Coins of Ancient India, p. 191.
Persian origin, was a Brāhmaṇa. The names of Śivadatta, Śivaghosa and Taranadāsa further suggest that now the Kṣatrapas were being localised.

Although there is a suggestion to that effect, it is hardly likely that the political authority of Takṣaśila had anything to do with Mathurā in the period of Rajuvula or his successors. The nature of evidence relating to this phase of Kṣatrapa rule suggests consolidation of local authority, much in the same way as the Kṣatrapa base in western India in a somewhat later period. Another parallel with western India is that the Kṣatrapa system in both areas provided for sharing of authority within the family. It has however been pointed out that what is known among numismatists as the Gondopharian symbol, occurs on the coins of Hāgamāsa, Hāgāna, Śivadatta and Vajatajama. This does suggest continuity in the links between Mathurā and regions in the north-west but the link does not necessarily have to be explained in terms of political subservience. Compared to the material of the Kṣatrapa phase at Mathurā, the evidence of political control is more direct only when one comes down to the period of the Kuśāṇas.

4. The Phase of Kuśāṇas

The identity and importance of Mathurā acquired new dimensions in the Kuśāṇa period because Mathurā became a part of a larger body politic. Four of altogether seven Kuśāṇa levels in the mound of Sonkh, through coins, other finds and circumstantial evidence can be connected with the following rulers:

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1 D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, I, p. 121 & fn. 6.
2 Early Ksatrapa History of India, see K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, A Comprehensive History of India, Vol. II, Chapter IX.
4 This is pointed out by B.N. Mukherjee, An Agrippan Source, p. 153; also B.N. Mukherjee, A Unique Satrapa Coin, Journal of Numismatic Society of India, 38, pt. 2 (1976), pp. 60-61.
5 B D. Chattopadhyaya, Mathurā from the Sunga to the Kuśāṇa Period—an Historical outline, p. 22.
However, the succession for levels 17, 19 and 20 still remains somewhat uncertain because of the inadequate nature of the evidence. Mathura remained a seat of Kuśāṇa power for at least hundred years if not more, as suggested by more than hundred and fifty epigraphs referring to Kuśāṇa rulers. It is indeed significant that this kind of evidence is not forthcoming from any other part of Kuśāṇa empire. When one considers the usually neglected but important fact that to the south of Taxila, Kuśāṇa material is sparse until one comes down to Mathura, the logic of Kuśāṇa concern for Mathura to some extent becomes understandable. Control over Mathura could provide the Kuśāṇas with a base in the south from which they could strive both to check the powerful republics, like that of Yaudheyas of this period and to maintain direct contact with two regions, the Ganges basin and the Malwa passageway. The nature of political control in this period is evident with the existence of fortification wall around the core area of Mathura which may have been a royal seat. Ramparts and moats discovered in Mathura suggest that Mathura must have been used by Kuśāṇa royalty and administration. The position of Mathura as a political centre changed significantly from Indo-Greek and the Ksatrapa period to that of the Kuśāṇas. It was no longer an area in which relatively minor political elites such as Kṣatrapas and MahāKṣatrapas could exist on their own, away from the core area of power.

1 H.Hartel, Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh, p.85.
2 J.M.Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśāṇas, p.51; H.Lüders, “A List of Brahmi Inscriptions from the Earliest Times to about 400 AD, with the exception to those of Asoka,” Epigraphia Indica.,X, Appendix.
4 B.D.Chattopadhyaya, “Mathurā From the Śunga to the Kuśāṇa Period, an Historical Outline,” p.22.
5 For description of the structure see the chapter II.
from the main seat of power. It was now properly integrated into an empire. A large number of coins and inscriptions of the Kuṣāṇa monarchs starting from Kaniska are found here. Another evidence of direct involvement of Kuṣāṇas in Mathurā is the presence of their imposing dynastic monuments. The most impressive monument seems to be the Kuṣāṇa sanctuary at Mat situated nine miles from Mathurā across the Yamuna. The dynastic sanctuary concept which was presumably of Iranian Origin, is believed not to have served any immediate local function, but it was nevertheless an important monumental feature as in other crucial areas of the empire, as suggested by Surkh Kotal Sanctuary in Bactria. At Mat, Royal images predominate. The three kings represented here were Wima, Kaniska and Huviśka, and it is possible that other important political elites physically present at Mathurā were also represented at the sanctuary. Wima Kadphises was referred to by the expression "Mahārājā Rajādhīrājā Devaputra Kuśanoputra Śāhi Vima" occurring in an inscription on the pedestal of the enthroned image of a male found in the ruins of devakula at Mat. The statue apparently represents the king mentioned in the pedestal inscription and as no other ruler is mentioned, the devakula might have been built during the reign of Vima Kadphises. This suggests that Mathurā region was included in the Kuṣāṇa empire during or before the reign of Vima Kadphises. Mat images may include one of a Mahādandanāyaka and attempts at restoration of a sanctuary which was destroyed rather early, were also made by a Mahādandanāyaka. B.N.

1 H.C.Roychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, p.473; Bela Lahiri, Indigenous States of Northern India, p.156.
2 B.D.Chattopadhyaya, "Mathurā from the Śunga to the Kuśāṇa Period: an Historical Outline," p.22.
5 J.M.Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśāṇas, p.140.
6 H. Lüders, Mathurā Inscriptions, p.135.
7 Ibid.
8 B.N.Mukherji, The Rise And Fall Of The Kuśāṇa Empire, p.314-315.
Mukherjee thinks that the presence of royal statues at Mat and also in small sanctuaries in the Swat region and in the sanctuary at Surk-Kotal would indicate that the Kuṣāṇa monarchs were actually worshipped as divinities. Rosenfield is right in thinking that the Mat sanctuary was the centre of a royal cult. But the installation of massive royal portraits in the Devakula, a term which was also applied to religious shrines at Mathura in this period, perhaps points to introduction of new type of royal symbolism under the Kuṣāṇa regime. To cite Rosenfield again, ‘overtones of material authority permeated the portraits of Kaniṣṭha and other princes celebrated in the Devakula.

For a study of the position of Mathura in Kuṣāṇa polity at Mathura we have to carefully examine the epigraphic records and coins as well as the contemporary literary texts. The names of the Kuṣāṇa rulers figure prominently in a large number of inscriptions. The donors knew the names of the reigning monarchs, and administrative heads were associated with these records of gifts or dedications for religious purposes. Though the evidence from these records is meagre, it nevertheless points to the fact that in this period Mathura had a well organised administration.

Imperial titles like Mahārājā, Rajātirājā, Devaputra, Sāhi are invariably associated with the reigning Kuṣāṇa Monarchs in their Mathura inscriptions. The Kuṣāṇa coinage bears the names of the rulers with their titles and epithets which very often correspond to those found in the inscriptions. These titles indicate that the sovereign power vested in Kingship and probably divinity of the king was a device to exploit the religious sentiments of the people.

Surprisingly, Kuṣāṇa coins and inscriptions do not give us direct evidence

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3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
about the kings' ministers (Amātya etc.), different administrative departments, or the revenue system but the evidence of the contemporary Buddhist literature is no doubt valuable in this regard. The evidence of the Mahāvastu Avadāna is suggestive of the period between the first and the third century AD. It appears that the political ideas of the Mahāvastu exerted influence upon Kuśāṇa polity. It is interesting to note that the guild of Samitikāra mentioned in the Mahāvastu is also referred to in the Mathurā Inscription of the year 28 of the time of Huviṣka. The reference to the Brahmanical deities Śiva and Skanda in the Buddhist text recalls the representation of those divinities on the Kuśāna coinage. The Mahāvastu refers to Vedic sacrifices. The Mathurā Yūpa Inscription of the time of Vaṣiṣṭha dated in yr. 24 from Isapur, now in Mathurā Museum refers to a brahman officiating on the occasion of a Vedic sacrifice.

Although we have inadequate information regarding different aspects of Kuśāna administration in Mathurā, indirect references in contemporary records may have some bearing in this regard. In an inscription of Mathurā we have evidence of erection of a Stūpa for Buddhist monk Grāmadasikā, a resident of the monastery called Venda Vihāra in the Kaniṣka year 92. This must have been erected under the royal patronage of the Kuśānas. There are two epigraphs which refer to the Vihāra of Mahārāja Rajātirāja devaputra Huviṣka, suggesting that the Kuśāṇa penetration in Mathurā was much more comprehensive than mere political control, and probably the kings took interest in construction of Vihāras. One inscription mentions that 'in yr.51 of Mahārāja I

2 A.B. Keiths' Foreword to B.C. Law, Study of the Mahāvastu.
4 Ibid, I; H. Lüders, Mathurā Inscriptions, p.126; also see chapter on Society
5 Ibid, II.
6 H. Lüders, Mathurā Inscriptions, p.126; also see chapter on Society.
8 Ibid, nos. 5 p.10, no.6, p. 12; also Mathurā Inscriptions, no.29, p.64, no.31, p.68 Ibid, no.52, p.166;
devaputra Huviska, an image of holy Śākyamuni was set up by the monk Buddhavarman for the worship of all Buddhas. Through this bestowal of the religious gift let there be attainment of nirvana by the teacher Saṃghadasa, and for the cessation of all unhappiness of his parents, of Buddhavarman, for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings. In the Vihāra of Mahārājā devaputra. The second inscription states that in the yr.77, in the Vihāra of Mahārājā Rajātirājā devaputra Huviska, the gift of monk Jivaka, the Odiyanika, consisting of a pillar base, may welfare and happiness of all sentient beings prevail, to the community of all the four quarters. The reference to the donations made towards Huviska Vihāra by local as well as foreign people is an indicator that Huviska’s rule was well established in Mathurā. We may also take note of the discoveries of a number of Jaina, Buddhist and Nāga images dated in his reign. This indicates catholic attitude of Huviska towards different religions.

An inscription of the time of Vima Kadphises states that at the time of the Mahārājā Rajātirājā devaputra, the scion of the Kuśāṇa sāhi Vema, a devakula was caused to be made, along with a garden, a tank, a well and a sabha (assembly hall), a gateway by the bakānapati of Taksuma, Humaspala. Another inscription of the time of Huviska a records the repair of the devakula (temple) of the grand father of Mahārājā Rajātirājā devaputra Huviska and a tank, by a great general where the Brāhmaṇas who were regular guests and it was repaired for the increase of the life and the strength of Mahārājā Rajātirājā devaputra Huviska. Both the inscriptions found at Mat suggest the official patronage towards the construction of the devakula. One more

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1 Mathurā Inscriptions, no.52, p.166; no31, p.68. For the list of these images see J.M.Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśāṇas, p.266-268, also refer to the chapter IV on Society at Mathurā.
2 H.Lüders , Mathurā Inscriptions, no.51, p.68.
3 For the list of these images see J.M.Rosenfield, The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśāṇas, p.266-268, also refer to the chapter IV on Society at Mathurā, Ibid, no.99, p.140.
5 Ya catra punya tani devaputrasya sahisya Huviskasya Yesa ca devaputro priyah tesamapi
inscription dated in the yr.28 of the time of Huviska records the construction of a Puryaśālā for the feeding of hundred Brāhmaṇas and a gift of cash deposited with local guilds by a person of non-local origin who was bakānapati, probably official incharge of temples. It is significant that the merit that accrues from this act of charity goes to Huviska and those to whom he is dear, suggesting official patronage towards construction of the Puryaśālā.

The integration of Mathurā in the Kuśāṇa empire marked a change in its political organisation, although it has to be conceded that our understanding of this change from the Kṣatrapa period will remain for the moment unsatisfactory. We have early inscriptions of Kaniška I mentioning the offices of the Kṣatrapa and Mahākṣatrapa in the eastern part of the empire. But except for one fragmentary inscription containing reference to a Kṣatrapa, which is assigned to the Kuśāṇa period on palaeographic reasons, we have no other inscriptive evidence. So the continuation of the office of Kṣatrapapaship in the Kuśāṇa period is questionable. In any case, irrespective of whether the office continued at Mathurā or not, the nature of imperial control vis-à-vis the Kṣatrapas in the Kuśāṇa territories in general, is indicated by one significant fact – the absence of Kṣatrapa coinage in this period.

During Mathurā’s integration into Kuśāṇa empire the crucial political elites present in Mathurā appear to have been Mahādandānāyakas. This is suggested not only by frequency of the occurrence of this designation in the Kuśāṇa period records but also the contexts in which the references occur. The royal
sanctuary at Mat, which yielded images of Vima, Kaniška and Huviśka had also portrait statue of a Mahādandanāyaka. Mathurā inscription of the time of Huviśka records the repair of a tank and a Devakula by a Bakānapati, son of a Mahādandanāyaka. Another inscription states that in the yr.28 the Mahārāja Rajāṭirājā devaputra, the scion of Kuśāṇa Śāhi Vima, a temple was caused to be made, also garden, a tank, and a well, an assembly hall, a gateway by the bakānapati of Taksuma, Humaspala. The Mathurā stone slab inscription of the year 74 records dedication by the Mahādandanāyaka Valānā. A Mathurā stone inscription of Kaniška, year 4, refers to Mahādandanāyaka Hummiyaka Canyakka whose name was given to a Buddhist monastery.

Bakānapati occurs as Vakānapati in the Mathurā inscription of yr.28. Sten Konow thinks that the term may mean the Lord of Wakhan. But as the name of the country is Vokkana in the Divyavadāna, Lüders prefers to look at Bakānapati for Vakānapati as an Iranian word denoting some functionary. H.W.Baily believes that Bakānapati was Official incharge of the temple. The terms Danḍānayaka and Mahādandanāyaka represented two grades of officials in the Kuśāṇa administration. It has been suggested that the Danḍānayakas were feudatories appointed by the Kuśāṇa kings and holding allegiance to him, who were required to render military as well as civil help.

We have reference to the military officer Balādhika in an inscription of Mathurā. The inscription records the gift of a lady Gautami who is wife of
Balādhika¹. Possibly Balādhika is the same military title which appears in the form of Balādhikṛta in the Shahpur inscription ² or it may stand for the more common title Baladhyakṣa ³.

We have reference to the term Viśvaśika, four times in the Mathurā inscriptions and Lüders suggests that it is the title of a high functionary during the Kuśāṇa period. In the three inscriptions Viśvaśika Vakamihiira is mentioned along with his son Horomurndga, making donation for the protection of their sovereignty ⁴. In another inscription Viśvaśika Ayala is mentioned as a donor for religious merit ⁵. Vakamihiira, Horomurndga and Ayala are all foreign names indicating the presence of persons of foreign origins, holding important administrative positions, during Kuśāṇa rule in Mathurā.

We have reference to an Aśvavārika (troopers) in a donative record ⁶. Presence of soldiers, and guards, employed by the army and general administration in Kuśāṇa Mathurā may be inferred from the appearance of sculptures of armed male figures ⁷. We have references to petty officials of Indian origin such as Grāmika⁸, Padrapala,⁹ or the Vohārika¹⁰.

Vohārika may have had association with judicial administration in the Kuśāṇa period ¹¹. Our knowledge of the provincial administration of the Kuśāṇa empire is inadequate, but we have references to the villages which were the lowest unit

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⁴ H.Lüders *Mathurā Inscriptions*, no.60, 61 & 62, p.91-93.
⁵ Ibid, no.64, p.99
⁷ See J.M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kuśāṇa*.
of territorial administration. *Grāmika* as it appears from Indian literature was mainly responsible for maintaining law and order in villages and for collecting royal dues.¹

In the Kuṣāṇa period the *'Grāmika'* was the incharge of administration of a village². A Mathurā Jaina Inscription of the year 40 records the dedication of an image by the mother Simhadatta, first wife of the *Grāmika* (Village headman) Jayadev³. The Mathurā Jaina Inscription of the time of *Mahārajātirājā devaputra Śāhi* Vāsudeva, dated in the year 84, records the setting up of the Jaina image by the wife of a *Grāmika*⁴.

These records make it evident that the official designation *'Grāmika'* was in vogue and the position of the village official was recognised in the Kuṣāṇa times. Further, it may be assumed that the post of a *Grāmika* was hereditary. The central government had normally no interference with regard to appointment of these village officials. Though Mathurā was a city, the reference to the *Grāmika* may suggest the kind of interaction which the villages in the region of Mathurā had with the city.

5. Post Kuṣāṇa Mathurā : The Nāga s at Mathurā.

It is not known when Mathurā slipped out of the Kuṣāṇa control. It was included in the Kuṣāṇa empire down to at least the reign of Vāsudeva, but probably not after 200 AD, when it seems to have passed to the Nāgas. The Purāṇas state that Vidišā (in Madhya Pradesh)⁵, Kantipura (not satisfactorily identified)⁶, Mathurā⁷ and Padmāvatī (Padma Pawaya)⁸, were strongholds of the Nāga power. It is stated further that seven Nāga kings had ruled at

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² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid, no. 69a.
⁵ H.C.Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, p.425
⁶ Mention is made in *Skanda Purāṇa*, chapter 47 p.4
⁷ See H.C.Roychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, p.425
⁸ Ibid. Coins of a Maharāja or Adhirāja named Bhāvanaga have been found at this place.
Mathurā and nine at Padmāvatī when the Guptas were rising to power. The prevalence of Nāga rule over a considerable portion of northern and central India including Mathurā in third and fourth centuries AD, is amply attested by epigraphic evidence. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription, written as enology after the death of Samudragupta¹ refers to king Gaṇapati Nāga. It also speaks of another Nāga King Nāgasena, while several Vākātaka records mention Bhāva Nāga, sovereign of the Bharasivas, whose grandson’s grandson Rudrasena II was a contemporary of Chandragupta II, and who accordingly must have flourished before the rise of the Gupta empire². It is stated that the greatest Nāga king was perhaps Chandramāta, ‘the second Nikhavant’:

"Nṛpān Vidiśākāṁs c=āpi bhaviṣyāṁstu nibodhata
Śesasya Nāga -rājasya putrah para puraṇjayah.
Bhogī bhaviṣyate (?) rāja nrpo Nāga -kul ōdvahah
Śsadācandras tu chandrāṁśo dvitiyo Nakhavāṁs tathā. "³

His name reminds us of the great king Chandra of the Delhi Iron Pillar Inscription. But it is by no means clear that the two were identical ⁴. Bhāvanāga was evidently an important monarch and the dynasty is described as performing ten Āsvamedha sacrifices and as being “besprinkled on the forehead with the pure water of (the river) Bhāgīrathī that have been obtained by their valour”⁵. It thus appears that at least for some times under Bhāvanāga the region extending from Gwalior to the Ganges was united under one rule. The act of performing Āsvamedha sacrifices by the family indicates that they were not a feudatory line owing allegiance to the Kuśānas.⁶ Some post Kuśāna coins with the names of Sisuchāndata (Sisuchandradatta!) and Virasena are attributed

¹ Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, II, p.214
² H.C Roychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, p.425.
³ Dynasties of Kali Age, p.49.
⁴ H.C. Raychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, p.425
⁵ J.F. Fleet, Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their successors, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,III, Calcutta1888,revised by D.R.Bhandarkar ,Delhi,1981,p.241
to Mathurā, probably from the consideration of provenance\(^1\). Sisuchandradata is known from a unique rectangular coin bearing the legend *Rajño Sisuchandradataśa* in incuse on the obverse, and elephant in the right’ on the reverse\(^2\). The only affinity that the coin bears with the known coins of the early rulers of Mathurā is the type ‘Elephant’ which was previously used by Uttamadatta and Bhāvadatta. But from its general character – fabric, shape, size, and epigraphy – it seems to be not far removed from the coins of Virasena\(^3\). Sisuchandradata seems to be connected more with Virasena in time, than with the earlier Dattas of Mathurā and as Virasena’s coins are chiefly found in Mathurā, Sisuchandradata’s coin is also assigned to that place\(^4\). We do not know if Sisuchandradata belonged to the Nāga Family of Mathurā. His name however does not suggest anything, nor has his coin any similarity with the known Nāga coins. Three types of coins have been attributed to Virasena:

1. Type I with the legend Virasena in shallow incuse on the obverse and probably a bull on the reverse. This coin is square in shape. These coins have no similarity with Mathurā coins and are supposed by Smith to belong to an earlier Virasena\(^5\).

2. Type II bears the legend Virasena and tree in railing between two *Nandipadas* on the obverse and a rude standing figure of Lakshmi holding in right hand, stalk of flower growing beside her, on the reverse\(^6\). The reverse design has some affinity with the local obverse type of Mathurā, although there is no similarity in style. These coins were not only found at Mathurā but also at Kanauj and to the South and East of Mathurā.\(^1\) The issuer of these coins is identified with *Śrīmś Virasena of Jankhat* (Farukhabad district) inscription

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\(^1\) Bela Lahiri, *Indigenous States of Northern India*, p.166


\(^3\) *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1900, p.115.


which is dated in his 13th regnal year\(^2\). To Smith, Virasena ruled in the Central Doab, between the Ganga and the Yamuna\(^3\).

3. Coins of type III bearing the circular legend, \textit{Mahārājā Śrī Virasena} on the obverse has two varieties, according to the shape and the reverse design—the round coins of variety A depicting a couchant bull to the left in a dotted circle\(^4\) and the square coin of variety B showing a trident axe\(^5\).

These were found along with Nāga coins of Padmāvatī and their type, fabric and size show close affinities with the Nāga coins.\(^6\) If the coins of all the three types were issues by one and the same king, we assume that Virasena belonged to the Nāga family of Mathurā, referred to in the Purāṇas, and that he ruled over a wide area including Mathurā, Kanauj and Padmāvatī.

K.P.Jayaswal identifies him as the second ruler of the Nāga Dynasty of Kāntipuri (identified by him with Kantit between Mirzapur and Vindhyachal) founded by King Nava (identified with Nava of the Kauśāmbi coins). He is said to have reconquered Kauśāmbi and Mathurā from the Kuśāṇas and established two branch lines at those places, while the main line i.e., the Bhairavas continued to rule at Kāntipuri\(^7\). Moreover from the epigraphy of his coin legends and his Jhankat inscription, he is assigned a date, later than the second century, very possibly to the later part of the third century AD\(^8\). Thus Virasena who flourished a little earlier than the rise of the Guptas, does not seem to be the founder of any of the Nāga houses either of Padmāvatī or Mathurā; for as stated in Purāṇas, there were at least seven generations of Nāga princes at

\(^1\) Ibid, p.clv.
\(^3\) V.A.Smith, \textit{Indian Museum Catalogue}, p.191.
\(^5\) Ibid, pl.vii.9.
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Bela Lahiri, \textit{Indigenous States of Northern India}, p.168.
\(^8\) \textit{Epigraphia Indica}, XI,p.86
Mathurā, before Samudragupta\(^1\). We have information about Ganapatināga whose name has been included in the list of kings in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription who violently exterminated Ganapatināga and in view of this statement Ganapati may be regarded as the last Nāga king whose kingdom was annexed to the Gupta empire\(^2\). With this once again Mathurā was embraced into the larger body politic of the Magadhan empire and remained one of the smaller principalities of the Gupta empire. Chandragupta II Vikrāmaditya’s three inscriptions\(^3\) have been found from Mathurā. His first inscription belonging to his fifth regnal year is inscribed on an octagonal red sandstone pillar which was found near the Rangeshwar Mahadev temple. It records the installation of two Śiva images known as *Upamiteśvara and Kapileśvara*, by certain Uditachārya. The next two were found from Katra Kesavadeva. One of them indicates that the king performed an act of religious importance. Though these inscriptions do not talk of political events, they indicate that Mathurā was ruled by Chandragupta II Vikrāmaditya. During his time Fa-hien(AD 399-411)\(^4\), the Chinese pilgrim, came to India. At Mathurā he found twenty monasteries (Samgha Rāma) on either side of Yamuna in which 3000 monks lived. He saw six Stūpas built in the memory of Sārīputra, Ānanda and Maudgalāyana and three for the *Tripitakas - Suttas, Vinaya and Abhidhamma*. But the excavations at Mathurā and Sonkh clearly indicate the decline of trade and commerce, diminishing of habitational area, indicating that though Mathurā became again a part of the Magadhan empire, the Guptas had shifted their attention from Mathurā to Pataliputra, suggesting the decline of the political authority of Mathurā.

Some generalisations about the pattern of political history of Mathurā may be made:

\(^1\) *Dynasties of Kali Age*, p.53.
\(^3\) Ibid.
a. Mathurā, because of its location on the fringe of the doab region, close to Rajasthan, and because of its semi-pastoral character, became the nucleus of a political region which was different in character from the doab regions. Even as a Mahajanapada it must have been different from Kośala, Magadha etc. At the same time, it was never isolated; it drew bigger powers towards it and also communities which would come and settle here.

b. Mathurā’s location subjected it to two major pulls: (i) north-west and (ii) the Ganges basin. During the ascendency of the major powers in the Ganges basin, it became a part of the major powers; the Mauryan empire and the Gupta empire. And during the ascendency of the north-west or northern powers, it became part of that orbit: Śaka-Kuśāṇa, Kuśāṇa etc. Only, in phases of absence of major powers, Mathurā could enjoy a measure of autonomy.