CHAPTER - V

NALAS OF PUŞKARI
Contemporaneous with the Māṭharas, a number of powerful royal families raised their heads in other parts of Orissa, notable among whom were the Nalas. To the west of the Māṭhara kingdom lay the Trikaliṅga territory which also seems to have been known as Mahākāntāra comprising the modern Baster-Koraput and Kalahandi region. It was in this territory that the early Nalas rose to power. Mahākāntāra served an important buffer territory between the dominions of the Vākāṭaka and the Māṭharas, and as such the Nalas played an important role as a buffer between the Vākāṭakas, and the Māṭharas.

The Nalas claimed their descent from the Nishādha king Nala of epic fame and this is supported by the Vāyu and Brahmanda Purāṇa where it has been stated that the descendants of Nala would rule over Kośala. Pargiter places these princes in the third century A.D. But if Varāha was the earliest king of the dynasty, they must be referred to the fourth of fifth centuries A.D.

1. Pargiter, F.E. Dynasties of the Kali Age, p.51.
The kings of this dynasty are known to us from the two copper plate grants, two stone inscriptions and as many as 32 gold coins issued by them. The copper plates were found at Kesaribeça³ in Koraput district of Orissa and Rithāpur⁴ in Amarāvati district of present Maharashtra, while the stone inscriptions were discovered at Poḍāgarh⁵ in the Koraput district and at Rājm⁶ in the Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh. On the basis of these finds, B.V.Krishna Rao⁷ traces the dominion of the Nalas from the river Wain-Gaṅgā in the west to the Indravati in the south and from the Easternghat in the East to Mekhala region in the north. This territory was no doubt occupied by the Nalas at the height of their power, but their original land was not so extensive. Fleet⁸ has said in connection with a Chālukya inscription containing a reference to Nalavādi viṣaya that probably the territory of the Nalas lay adjoining the Bellary Kurnool district on the Tungabhadrā. The Aihole⁹ inscription of

4. ibid, vol.XIX, pp.100-104.
6. ibid, vol.XXVI, pp.49-56.
Pulakesin mentions them as the ruler of an eastern kingdom. Since one copper plate charter and one stone inscription of this dynasty have come to light in Koraput district and all the gold coins of this dynasty, as far as they are known to us, were found in Baster district, it may reasonably be suggested that the Baster-Koraput region formed the territory over which the Nalas ruled.\footnote{OHRJ, vol.XI, p.95.}

The original capital of the Nala kingdom was Puškari; and the Poḍāgadh Rock Inscription indicates that the township was located close to Poḍāgadh. It is known from this inscription that the town was once destroyed by the enemies and was then in a deserted condition, but it was subsequently repopulated by Skandavarmaṇ. 'Poḍāgadh' literally means a burnt fort and the very name suggests the destruction of the place apparently at the hands of the enemies. The surroundings of the rock inscription, though thickly wooded, present the ruins of an old town with scattered pieces of sculpture, groups of Sati-stones, broken temples and old temples conveying the impression that Poḍāgadh, now forlorn and desolate, was a very prosperous and populated town in the past. N.K. Sahu is inclined to identify this place with Puškari, the old capital of the Nalas. According to him, the place was very likely destroyed and reduced to ashes some time after Skandavarmaṇ who had restored it after earlier
destruction of the town. The final destruction of it might have taken place sometimes during the early medieval period.\(^{11}\)

Some scholars\(^{12}\) are inclined to suggest on the basis of the Rithāpura Inscription of Bhavadattavarman, that the king issued the grant from Nandivardhana. On the basis of the Poona plate inscription of Pravābatigupta of the regnal year 13, however, it can be said that Nandivardhana was the capital town of the Vākāṭakas. The Rithāpur inscription of Bhavadattavarman only indicates that the Nala king succeeded in occupying the Vākāṭaka capital for some time during the protracted struggle between the Nalas and the Vākāṭakas. The genealogy of Nala kings has not yet been satisfactorily worked out. P.L. Mishra has identified king Mahendra of Kośala referred to in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta as Mahendravarman who must have belonged to this (Nala) dynasty.\(^{15}\) The above mentioned view of Mishra, however, has been discarded by scholars who have refused to identify king Mahendra of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription with the Mahendravarman of Nala dynasty.\(^{16}\)

However, the suggestions put forward by S.N. Rajguru\(^{17}\) were
later accepted by N.K. Sahu about the Nala king who has been mentioned in the Bhitā Seal bearing the legend...

...Mahāmaheśvara mahāsenāti-sruṣṭa rājashya briṣadvjashya Goutamiputrashya....

But the thesis requires watchful attention. Dr. Sahu has identified the king as Vṛṣadvaja and, considering his matronymic appellation (i.e. Goutamiputrashya), assigned him to the Baster-Koraput area rather than the Bīṭā-Allahabad region where his seal might have gone in the train of Bhavādattavarman's campaign against Nandivardhana and his march from the later place to Prayāg where he donated grants to Brāhmaṇas. The king mentioned in the Bhitā seal should be read as 'Sri Vindhyavedhana' as suggested by D.C. Sircar, according to whom the relationship of king Vindhyavedhana with the early Nalas cannot be determined, though the king was a southerner like Bhavādattavarman and Arthapati. Moreover, as Vindhyavedhana's emblem was the 'bull' (Vṛṣabhā-dhvajasya) and not the 'tripataka' he cannot be included in the genealogical list of the Nalas.

The gold coins of the Nala kings, discovered in the village Edeña in Baster district have thrown important light on the genealogy of the family. Out of the 32 gold coins so far available to us, six large-size, one middle-size and twenty-two small-size coins belong to a king named Varāharāja while one large coin belongs to Sri Arthapatirāja. Bhavadattavarman is known to us from the Riṭhāpur copper plates, while Arthapatirāja is known as king Arthapati from the Kesarībeqā and Riṭhāpur copper plate inscriptions. The king Varaharāja to whom belong the majority of the Edeña coins, is however, not known to us from any epigraphic record.

V.V.Mirashi who has edited these coins is of opinion that Varaharāja's coins appear to be the earliest and those of Arthapati the latest of the whole lot.

Towards the close of the Riṭhāpur copper plate grant of Bhavadattavarman, there is mention of the Mahārāja Arthapati who executed the charter for the increase of the religious merit of his father and mother. Y.R.Gupte took Arthapati to be an epithet (meaning the lord of wealth) of Bhavatā himself. According to Mirashi, it is unlikely that

25. ibid.
27. ibid.
Bhavadatta would say in one part of the record that the gift was made asking blessings for himself and his wife, and in another part of it that it was intended for the increase of religious merit of the father and mother. Arthapati was, therefore, different from Bhavadatta. The title 'Mahārāja' prefixed to his name in the Rithāpur plates and the issue of his coins in his name clearly indicate that he succeeded his father Bhavadatta.28

In the Podagadh stone inscription king Skandavarman has been described as the noble son of king Bhavadatta, the foremost (scion) of the glorious Nala family. It may be pointed out that the Rithāpur grant of Bhavadattavarman and Arthapati, as well as the Kesaribedā charter of Arthapati, was composed by Janturdās, the son of Chauli, who in turn was very likely the son of Chulla. Thus Bhavadatta had two sons Arthapati and Skandavarman who successively ruled one after the other.29 King Bhavadattavarman has been taken to be a contemporary of the Vākāṭakas ruler, Narendrasena who was defeated and was ousted from his capital by him. Prithivisena II, the son and successor of Narendrasena succeeded in retrieving the fortunes of the family and he probably defeated and killed Arthapatirāja. A.S. Altekar has tentatively fixed the date of

these two Vākāṭaka monarchs from 440 to 460 A.D. and from 460 to 480 A.D. respectively. In the light of this, the rule of Bhavadattavarman may be assigned to the period from 440 to 465 A.D. and that of Arthapatirāja to the period from 465 A.D. to 475 A.D. Skandavarman who succeeded Arthapati ruled during the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. and thus became the contemporary of the Vākāṭaka ruler Harisena (of the Basim branch) whose rule has been assigned to a period from c.475 to 510 A.D.

Another group of Nala kings is known from a stone inscription of Vilāsatuṅga, engraved on the left side of the Manḍapa of the Rājivalochana temple of Rājim in the Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh. The Prasasthi was composed probably by Durgagola and it was incised by the artisan (Sutraḍhara) Durgahastin, son of Jalalahastin. The inscription reveals that Vilāsatuṅga was probably a son of Viruparāja who was the son of Prithivirāja. The inscription was considered by Cunningham on palaeographic grounds to be not later than the eighth and ninth century and was referred to about the

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Beglar (ibid, VII, p.152) thought that the inscription contained two dates - one 870 or 879 and the other seven hundred and odd, the unit and being mutilated. But Mirashi has pointed out, what Beglar supposed to be the figures 870 or 872 is only the word 'Utkirnna' in line 22 (EI, vol.XXVI; p.51, Fn.2).
middle of the eighth century by R.G. Bhandarkar\textsuperscript{33}. Mirashi\textsuperscript{34} has assigned it to about 700 A.D. as the Nala kings mentioned in this inscription seem to have established themselves in the Raipur district some time after the Somavamsis king, Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna who has been generally assigned the period from 595 to 650 A.D.\textsuperscript{35} The inscription reveals that Vilāsatunga was probably the son of Viruparāja who was the son of Prithivirāja. The genealogy of the Nala kings may be presented thus:

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<tr>
<td>Varāharāja</td>
<td>440 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhavadattavarman</td>
<td>440 to 465 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arthapatirāja</td>
<td>465 to 475 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skandavarman</td>
<td>475 to 500 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prithivirāja</td>
<td>690 to 715 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viruparāja</td>
<td>715 to 725 A.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilāsatunga</td>
<td>725 to 750 A.D.</td>
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\textsuperscript{33} PRAS, WI for 1903-04, p.48.
\textsuperscript{34} Local citation, p.51.
\textsuperscript{35} Bhartiya Vidya, vol.XX-XXI, p.355.
POLITICAL HISTORY

The earliest known king Varāharāja is known to us from a large number and variety of gold coins issued by him. Of the thirty two gold coins, as many as twenty-nine bear his name. They clearly indicate that he was an independent ruler of this dynasty and had a long and prosperous rule. The growing strength of the Nalas was naturally felt by the Vākāṭakas who had acquired suzerainty over Baster-Koraput region probably since the time of Pravarasena I who flourished during the early part of the fourth century A.D. The Nalas seem to have consolidated their position when the Vākāṭaka empire was under the regency of queen Pravābatigupta (cir.390-410 A.D.) and Varāharāja proclaimed independence and rose to great prominence.

The clash of strength between the Nalas and the Vākāṭakas started during the rule of Narendrasena, son and successor of Pravarasena II. The Nala king who fought against the Vākāṭaka power is known to be Bhavadattavarman who was very likely the successor of Varāharāja.

37. ibid.
NALA VĀKĀṬAKA STRUGGLE:

No proper study has yet been made of the Nala-Vākāṭaka struggle regarding its nature, course, span of the struggle and above all the main outcome of it. It is therefore, necessary to look into it in the light of some probable facts. The course of history during this stage should not be neglected so far as it enshrines the rivalry of an imperial power like the Vākāṭaka on the one hand and the rising power of the Nalas in Kośala on the other. Not only is it necessary to bring out the Nala-Vākāṭakas struggle in the pages of historical studies but also its results (far-reaching and important as they must have been) which gave a new turn to the politics of South-Kosala in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.

The Vākāṭaka records\(^{38}\) show that from the very beginning of their ascendancy the Vākāṭakas embarked on a policy of expansionism. At the same time these also indicate their other policy in this respect: appeasement. The Vakāṭaka do not seem to have annexed and incorporated the conquered territories with their kingdoms; they only made the vanquished kingdoms submissive to them.

\(^{38}\) CII, vol.V, Vākāṭaka inscriptions.
Scholars hold the view that towards the end of the reign of Narendrasena the Vakataka territory was invaded by the Nala king Bhavadattavarman. But it is not clear if this was the first invasion of the Nalas. It is also supposed that the successor of Narendrasena i.e. Prithivisena II retrieved the fortunes of his family twice. The Bālāghat plates of Prithivisena and the Poḍāgadh stone inscription of Skandavarman, however, inform us that their respective kingdoms had been subjected to attacks of the enemies. Scholars identify these rivals with the Vākāṭakas and the Nalas. It is further known to us that the Vākāṭaka-Nala struggle came to an end with Prithivisena II or Hariṣena Vākāṭaka and Skandavarman.

Whatever may be the case, there existed an irritating relationship between the two houses, and attacks and counter-attacks continued for generations. Altekar has shown that the debacle which temporarily overwhelmed the

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39. CII, vol.V, notes plate XXVII.
Majumdar, R.C. A New History of the Indian People, vol.VI, pp.115-117.
41. ibid.
43. Majumdar, R.C. op.cit., p.115-116.
Vākātakas was the invasion of the Nala king Bhavadattavarman. This indicates that the attempt at invasion was initiated by the Nalas. One wonders if the Nalas, a comparatively small power, were strong enough to pose any serious threat to the empire of the Vākātakas, and if they not only defeated Narendrasena, but also effectively occupied a part of his kingdom with the capital at Nandivardhana. S.R. Goyal suggests that in this venture the Nalas were helped by the imperial Guptas and that these powers invaded the Vākātaka kingdom simultaneously, the Nalas from the east and the Guptas from the north. This suggestion can be taken to have been valid on the basis of the Rithapur plates of Bhavadattavarman representing the collision of the Guptas and the Nalas. Significantly enough the charter was issued from Nandivardhana the erstwhile Vākātaka capital. The


45. Nandivardhana has been identified with Nandapura near Nagardhan in the close proximity of Nagpur. (JASB-NS, vol.XIX, pp.160-61). Hiralal suggested that the city is most probably identical with the Nagardhan (or Nandardhan) four miles South of Ramtek and 28 miles north of Nagpur. (A copper plate inscription of C.P.E. Berar, Plate II, JBORS, vol.XIX, p.182). According to Sindurgirimahātmya Nandivardhana as a holy place (Mirashi, Proceedings of 10th Oriental Conference, p.458).

T.A. Wellsted mentions that there are stronger ground for supporting that at Nandpur, one mile south-east of Nagardhan we find the remains of ancient Nandivardhan and not at Nagardhan (JASB-NS, vol.XIX, pp.160-61). Further it has been identified with Nandur of the Ycotmal taluq in the district of the same name in Maharashtra. (EI, vol.XIX, p.102).
grant was made by Bhavadatta at Prayag the capital of the Guptas, where this Nala king had gone apparently on a thanks giving pilgrimage. It is suggested that this grant was made by Bhavadatta on the occasion of his marriage with a princess of the Allahabad region\(^{46}\).

It is further interesting to note that the Bhiṭā Seal discovered from Bhiṭa near Prayag refers to a king called Vṛṣhabhadhvja who like the Nalas uses the epithet "Māheśvaramahāsenātishreṣṭharāyavibavaha". It is further possible that Vṛṣhadhvaja was also a ruler of the Nala dynasty\(^{47}\). The evidences of the Rīṭāpur plates and Bhiṭa Seal taken together lead us to believe that the mighty Nalas after vanquishing the Vākāṭakas moved in the northern directions possibly against the Guptas. It is not far fetched to infer that Skandagupta, the Gupta monarch could not have been silent when the Nala king had defeated his allies, that he must have taken all possible steps to check the rising power of the Nalas. It was possibly with the help of Skandagupta that Narendraśena who was once subjugated by Bhavadattavarman avenged the defeat and retrieved the capital city of Nandivardhana from the Nalas.

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47. Please see page-5.
He is also known to have marched against South-Kosala and it seems that in view of the impending danger arising out of Nala invasion the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas who were united from the time of Rudrasena by a matrimonial alliance now took effective measures jointly to hurl back the mighty battalions of the Nalas from the Vākāṭakas' territories. Narendrasena seems to have been substantially helped by Skandagupta in inflicting a crushing defeat on the Nalas of South Kosala. This can be inferred from the Bāḷāḡhat Plates of Prithivisena II which reveal that Narendrasena's commands were obeyed and honoured by the lords of Kośala, Mekhala, and Mālava (Kośala-Mekhalamālavadhipatyaśāsana). We learn from the same plates that Prithivisena II twice retrieved the fallen fortunes of his family. It is almost clear that he fought against the Nala king Bhavadattavarman probably with the help of Skandagupta. It seems that there was a protracted war between the Nalas and the Vākāṭakas for a considerable period. It may be noted in this context that Skandagupta records in his inscriptions that he thrice retrieved the fallen fortunes of the family. It is probable that Skandagupta

played an important role in curbing the growing insolence of Bhavadattavarman who had not only occupied Nandivardhana but also proceeded as far as Prayāg, the heart of the Gupta empire. Bhavadattavarman's sacred bath at Prayāg cannot be discussed merely as a religious act. Having captured the capital of the Vākāṭakas who were matrimonially allied with the Guptas he could not have marched as far as Prayāg without military precaution and motivation. In the light of these circumstantial evidences it may be suggested that Narendrasena could not have repulsed the Nalas without substantial help from the Guptas. Since Bhavadattavarman himself had proceeded as far as Prayāg, it is also quite reasonable that Skandagupta must have risen upto the occasion and come to the rescue of Narendrasena to inflict a defeat on Bhavadattavarman. The united military force of the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas must have caused a consternation in the length and breadth of the Nala empire. As the Podagarh stone inscription of Skandavarman indicates, the people were horrified and in utter helplessness deserted the city of Puṣkari which was captured by the enemies for some time. Lines 3 and 4 of the inscription clearly indicate that in the course of the crisis the citizens deserted the town of Puṣkari which fell into the hands of the enemies. It seems that during this period the Guptas succeeded in occupying a considerable part of South Kosala before they

reached Puṣkari and occupied it. The Nalas, thus, received a setback and rude shock from which they must have taken some time to recover. It was Skandavarman, son of Bhavadatta-varman, who seems to have driven out the enemies from the capital when Skandagupta had passed away and the Vākaṭaka king Narendrasena had died. This opportunity was seized by Skandavarman who succeeded in repelling his enemies by valour and in reclaiming the lost prosperity which had fallen into the hands of the enemies. He is also credited to have repeopled the deserted town of Puṣkari. These references in the Poṇāgarh inscriptions indicate that Skandavarman succeeded in restoring the prestige of the Nalas in the Koraput and Baster region, but very probably he lost his stronghold over the territory conquered by Bhavadattavarman. It seems that the Guptas continued to exercise their suzerainty over the northern part of South Kosala during this period. The Gupta supremacy over South Kosala is indicated by the Kurud plates which reveal that a generation before, Mahārāja Narendra, Paramabhaṭṭāraka Pāda, while taking a sacred bath in the holy water of the Gaṅges, had donated the village Keśavaka (identified with modern Kesawa near Mahasamund in

54. ibid, line 4-6.
55. ibid.
56. ibid.
the Raipur district) located in South Kosala in favour of the brahmin Bhāṣṛuhasvāmin by means of a charter written on palm leaves. Subsequently, Mahārāja Narendra regranted the village to Śankhasvāmin, son of Bhāṣrutasvāmin, the original donee. Our presumption that Skandagupta supported the cause of the Vākātaka in driving out the Nalas and occupied a portion of South Kosala is well-supported by the evidence of the Karud plates which refer to the rule of Paramabhaṭṭāraka over South Kosala\(^{57}\). This Paramabhaṭṭārakas Pāda was no other than a Gupta monarch. Infact, the imperial title Paramabhaṭṭāraka was popularised by the imperial Guptas in the 4th century A.D. M.G.Dikshit\(^{58}\) holds the view that Paramabhaṭṭāraka Pāda of the Kurud plates was Šarabha, who is usually identified with Šarabharāja\(^{59}\) a tribal chief under the imperial Guptas, and that he can be associated with the imperial title Paramabhaṭṭāraka, used by the Gupta overlords. On the contrary, it seems quite reasonable to believe that Šarabharāja owed allegiance to the imperial Guptas as his daughter's son Goparāja was a feudatory Chief under them. In

\(^{57}\) Also in the Chapter III of this work.

\(^{58}\) EI, vol.XXXI, pp.263-68.

\(^{59}\) CII, vol.III, p.91.
the said charter king Narendra makes respectful references to Paramabhaṭṭārakapāda who was presumably accepted as the overlord by his predecessor. But he himself, undoubtly, threw off the Gupta yoke in the early part of the sixth century A.D. In his inscription he does not describe himself as a subordinate of Paramabhaṭṭārakapāda; and he uses regnal years of his own, and not Gupta Era, in his charters.

From the aforesaid account it is clear that South Kosala was a part of the Gupta empire at least in the second half of the fifth century A.D. The mighty Nalas who followed the policy of imperialism expanded their territory in the northern and north-western direction against the Guptas and Vākātakas who were confined to the Koraput-Baster region during the reign of Skandavarman.

The subsequent history of the Vākātaka of the main line after Prithivisena II is unknown. It seems that the Vākātaka leadership passed on to Harisena, the last ruler of the junior branch who overwhelmed and terrified the north-eastern territories of the Vākātaka empire. This was the final shake-up directed by Harisena whose Ajantā inscription speaks in eloquent words of his vigour and influence. It

records that his sphere of influence was accepted by Kuntala, Malwa, Kośala, Mekhala, Lāṭa, Āndhra and other countries whose names can not be deciphered.

It may be summarised that the prolonged struggle between the Nalas and the Vakātakas continued for generations: from the reign of Pravarasena II to that of Harisena of the Vakātaka line and from Varāharāja to Skandavarman of the Nala house. It fairly engulfed the two houses for about three quarters of the fifth century A.D.

The result of the long struggle was far-reaching. The Nalas were defeated and were restricted to a small principality to the South eastern region of Kośala. The most important outcome after the struggle was the ascendancy of the Śarabhapura house in the politics of South Kosala, i.e. on the ashes of the Nalas. The emergence of the Śarabhapuriyas or the Amarārya Kula can be traced to Harisena, about 510 A.D., the date of the Ajantā inscriptions and that of the battle of Eran61 where the Śarabharāja's grandson died while assisting Bhānugupta against the Huṇa. Again, after the struggle the north-eastern kingdoms gained independence. Mekhala came to be ruled independently by the Paṇḍuvamsis62 and Kośala by the Amarāryakula.

IMPORTANCE OF THE NALA RULE

The Nalas ruled over the Bastar Koraput region and the geographical location of their kingdoms made them a buffer power between the Māṭharas of Kaliṅga and the Vākātakas of central India. The Nalas were the inveterate enemies of the Vākātakas and, as such, proved an effective bulwark against the aggression of the latter over Kaliṅga. They were very likely an important ally of the Māṭharas but not much is known about political relations between these two powers. However, the alliance between the Nalas with the imperial Guptas of north India gave a dramatic turn to the politics of Deccan considerably.

The Nalas, unlike the Māṭharas, professed the theory of divine origin of kingship and believed that upon them was bestowed the glory of royalty by Mahēśwara (Śiva) and Mahāsenā (Kartikeya). Rulers like Arthapati frequently bore the epithet 'Bhaṭṭarāja' conveying the sense of divinity. The Nala kings were, without doubt, great warriors and they personally led the army to the battle field. Their banner was known as Tripaṭaka.

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63. Found in the preamble of the Rithāpur plate of Bhavadattavarman and the Kesaribeḷḷā plates of Arthapatirāja.

64. The name Arthapati Bhaṭṭaraka is found in the Colophon of the Rithāpur plate.
The Nalas succeeded in establishing a stable Government and contributed to the growth of commerce and prosperity of their kingdom. The routes from Kaliṅga to Kośala as well as to the Central and Northern India passed through their kingdom and rivers like Indravati and Godāvari connected it with Vengi and other territories in the South. The prosperity of the Nala kingdom is testified by the circulation of gold coins by the kings of the dynasty and also by their large-scale fight with the Vākātakas, who were then a great power in India.

The Nala kings were great patrons of learning and literature. The writer Chulla, who composed the Rithāpur plates of Bhavadattavarman as well as the Kesarībeṛga plates of Arthapātilāja in Sanskrit prose, was given the charge of Intelligence Department (Rakṣhyādhikrita). Jaunter Dāsa, the grandson of Chulla (son of Chauli) is known to have been a great poet: the Podāgada stone inscriptions of Skandavarman has been composed by him in Anustūp metre which is unique in its type in the epigraphic literature of India.

The Nala kings were patronised the Brahmins and granted land to groups of them for their religious merit. King Bhavadattavarman granted land to Matrādhyāryya eight sons belonging to Parāsaragotra, while king Anrthapātilāja donated the village Kesalika to a group of three Brahmins all belonging to Kautsavagotra. The idea of protecting the cows and the Brahmins along with the subjects was cherished by the
Nalas; and in fact, Bhavadattavarman in his Ritząpur grant expresses his desire for bliss and happiness of these three categories. A sacred dip in the Ganges, particularly at Prayāg, the confluence of Ganges and Yamunā, was considered to be of great religious merit; and it was believed that the confluence of these two rivers had been purified by the divine favour of Bhagavān Prajāpati.

The Nalas were not only staunch supporters of Brāhmanism but also were the upholders of Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism. The early kings like Bhavadattavarman and Arthapatirāja were worshippers of Śiva and Mahāsena, while Skandavarman was a devout worshipper of Viṣṇu. The Podāgada inscriptions reveal that Skandavarman enshrined the footprint of Viṣṇu in the town of Puskari, which was the royal capital. The free feeding house (satra) attached to this shrine was meant for supplying food not only to Brahmins and ascetics, but also to the poor and the destitute. The footprint symbolises the dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu and it appears that the idea of divine incarnation was popular in the Nala kingdom.