CHAPTER - III

ROLE OF REGIONAL SUBORDINATE DYNASTIES
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Regional subordinate states were important elements in the body politic of Gupta empire. In the previous chapters it has been described that there were a large number of dynasties not only existing within the boundaries of the empire but ruling as subordinate kings.

This type of loosely knitted imperial fabric of the Guptas was the embodiment of their sovereignty which was obtained by them partly through the conquests and partly by diplomacy. As it has been already observed how Samudragupta conquered certain kings and incorporated their kingdoms in his dominions; conquered others and allowed them to rule their own kingdoms; and lastly the frontier kings and tribes submitted voluntarily and preferred services, presents and tributes. Besides these, there were certain foreign powers bounded with diplomatic alliance. There were thus several categories of dominions included within the empire of the Guptas yielding varying degrees of obedience. Such dominions could not be transformed into one uniform type, so that one uniform central government could be imposed upon all. A system of government therefore had to be devised which would respect the local variations and at the same time would be competent to
impose the paramountcy of one upon all. In this system the conquered
territory reduced to the subordinate status and as stated earlier defeated
kings were converted into tributary or feudatory rulers who were
allowed to remain in the possession of their own dominions and to
exercise their control over it. The Allahabad Pillar inscription suggests
that the Sankanikas had been subordinated\(^1\) but the Udayagiri cave
inscription of the G. year 82/A.D. 400-4001 records the grant of a cave
by a certain Sankanika Maharaja\(^2\), a feudatory of Chandragupta II. This
shows that subordinate states were allowed to exist. Besides, in Bagh
region Valkha dynasty, and in Malava region Aulikara dynasty were
ruling. Similarly in Bundelkhand region we find the dynasties of the
Parivrajakas and the Uchchakalpas ruling as subordinate kings. There
were other subordinate dynasties whose progenitors were administrative
officials like governors or commander in chief of the army to begin with
but became feudal vassals with the growth of their power in the later
years of the Gupta rule. The Maitraka land grants provide the most clear
picture of this process of transformation.

There are facts, however, which show that these subordinate or
feudatory rulers were not petty nobles but rulers of considerable
importance in their respective regions. At the same time they played

\(^1\) *CII, III, p. 213, L. 22*

\(^2\) *Ibid, pp. 243-244.*
prominent role in the polity and administration of the Gupta empire. The Gupta emperor did not interfere with the internal freedom of the subordinate state. Titles and terms indicating rulership were used in their records. The subordinate kings according to their importance were styled Raja, Maharaja, Samanta, Mahasamanta etc. They ruled in their kingdoms by hereditary rights. This is attested by the fact that the genealogical portions of their inscriptions contain the description of their predecessors who were also under subordination of the Gupta empire. Instances of grants of villages and revenues by subordinates which was a royal prerogative make it clear that they, when making such grants exercised their rights as rulers. Besides, such subordinate kings had their own administrative set up and officials. Inscriptions of two Maharajas viz., Hastin and Sarvanatha clearly indicate that there were bhogas and bhuktis in their kingdoms. Both of them and another subordinate king viz. Mahasamanta Maharaja Dhruvasena I had their administrative officials with very high sounding and grandiloquent titles. If a subordinate or feudatory ruler could enjoy many rights and maintain as full as establishment of government as the paramount power

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4 Fleet, CII, III, p. 100, f. no. 2, pp. 111-112.
than the obvious inference is that the position of the farmer obviously supersedes the latter.

But the power and autonomy enjoyed by a subordinate state appears to have varied with its size, geographical position and the financial resources. Subordinate kings who had been permitted to rule after a smashing defeat, or who were very near to the heart of the imperial kingdom, or whose resources and powers were insignificant, enjoyed little internal autonomy. They were not even the full masters of the revenues of their respective territories. In this connection we may refer to king Rudradatta, who was a subordinate of the Gupta emperor Vainyagupta and had to get the imperial sanction for making a grant or a portion of his revenue for some purpose.

There were also such feudatory dynasties as those of the Parivrajakas, the Uchchakalpas and the kings of Mandasor who, on account of their large and great resources enjoyed autonomy within their respective territories to such a large extent that they enjoyed the right of making land grants without any reference to the imperial government. While the Parivrajakas and the kings of Mandasor make passing reference to their overlords in their copper plate grants, the

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5 VGA, p. 258; GP, p. 240; IG, p. 50.
6 IHQ, VI. No. 1, 1930, pp. 53-60.
Uchchakalpas do not do even that. Some of the powerful and important subordinate chiefs had subfeudatories under them; thus king Surashmichandra who was a feudatory of Gupta emperor Budhagupta had a subordinate in person named king Mattrivishnu of Eran. Likewise the Parivrajakas and Maitrakas also had their own feudatories. The kings of Garulaka family were the subordinates of Maitrakas. They adopted the title Samanta Maharaja. The feudatories of Parivrajaka Maharaja Hastin have been mentioned in a very specific way in the latter’s copper plate grants. They are described as Mat-padapind opa-jivin- ‘subsisting on the cakes which are my (Maharaja Hastin’s) feet’, Fleet compares this expression with tat-padapadmopajivin- ‘subsisting (like a bee) on the waterlilie that are his feet’, which in later times in south India, became the customary technical expression to describe the relation of feudatory princes and nobles and other officers to their paramount sovereigns.

It is difficult to describe the exact relationship that existed between the imperial government and the subordinate dynasties in the Gupta period. However, the relation of Samudragupta with certain foreign states throw some light on the status of subordinate kings. These

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7 VGA, p. 259.
8 CII, III, pp. 340-341.
9 EI, XI, 1911-12, pp. 16-20.
10 Fleet, CII, III, p. 96, L. 13-14, p. 98, f.no. 4.
states are described as surrendering themselves, offers their daughters in marriage to the Gupta emperor and requests for the imperial charters confirming the possession of their territory\textsuperscript{11}. For defeating kings would appear to have been reinstated in their kingdoms by a royal charter. These charters did not create any new rulership. Whereas formerly a king ruled in his own right as a subordinate he required a charter issued in his favour. Besides, it is also indicated by the \textit{Allahabad pillar inscription} that as a general rule it was enjoined upon the subordinate rulers to pay all kinds of taxes (\textit{sarva-kara-dana})\textsuperscript{12}. But the reference in the inscription does not reveal the nature of these \textit{karas}. Was a fix sum paid annually or periodically, had the paramount sovereign enjoyed the right to extort as much money as possible, or was the feudatories merely expected to pay something in the nature of presents? These questions cannot be answered certainly. But as the literary sources of the later period indicate that in the areas administered by the feudatories the emperor realised annual taxes from them and not from the subjects\textsuperscript{13}. Thus, it can be safely concluded that the feudatories were held accountable for royal taxes in the areas held by them and they annually paid \textit{karas} to the paramount lord.

\textsuperscript{11} CII, III, p. 213, L. 24.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, L. 22.  
\textsuperscript{13} Harsacarita, p. 217.
The feudatories were required to obey the emperor's commands (ajna-karana). Their important duties were to report at the imperial court to pay homage and respect to the emperor (pranamagamana) and to win his favour by various personal services (parichariki-karna). Detailed description of these services are given in the literary sources of the post Gupta period, wherein five model of saluting the emperor by the defeated kings, who were certainly reduced to the subordinate position, have been mentioned and it is described that the subordinate kings had to render three kinds of services to the emperor. They held chowries in their sovereign's court. They served as door-keepers and as reciters of auspicious words uttering 'success' (Jaya). In the Gupta period loyal and faithful feudatory kings served as the door-keeper of the king's chamber or the royal palace is evident from the Gunaighar Copper plate grant wherein Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena is described as Mahapratihara (chief of the door-keepers). In addition to it, feudatories were required to make use of the Gupta era for dating their inscriptions. It also appears that no feudatory was allowed

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14 CII, III, pp. 213, L. 22.
15 Ibid
17 Kadambari, p.128
18 Harsacarita, p.60.
19 Ibid, p. 194.
20 Kadambari, pp. 127-128.
21 IHQ, VI, no. 1, p. 55, L. 15-16; IEG, p. 184.
evidently to issue any coins of their own as we do not find the coins of feudatories issued during the Gupta period. However, foreign states had the right to issue their own currency with the obligation that they had to inscribe the name of the Gupta emperor on their coins.

Epigraphical sources do not provide any information that whether the subordinate kings kept their representatives at the imperial court on a permanent basis to serve as a hostage for their loyalty or whether the imperial government stationed their officers at the courts of these kings to ensure their loyalty? However, *Kamandakiya Nitisara* informs us that when the emperor marched for a military expedition he at first held consultation with the ambassadors of the feudatory kings. This indicates that the ambassadors of the feudatories were not only given appropriate place in the court of their paramount lord but their counsel was considered valuable in the matters of grave importance such as war.

It appears that the subordinate kings used to accompany the emperor in his wars. It is evident from the *Allahabad Pillar inscription* that the kings of forest region were made the feudal vassals. The use of forest tribes in warfare is oftenly mentioned in the *Kamandakiya*

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22 Some coins with the name of Samudragupta inscribed upon them, were actually used by the Kushana rulers of western Punjab, *Coinage*, p. 52.
According to V.R.R. Dikshitar, in building up the mighty empire Samudragupta not only vanquished the foresters as a class but there is evidence to show that the great monarch had made use of these forest troops in several of his wars. In support of his view he refers Kamandakiya Nitisara which mentions he is alone a clever leader in war, who places the forest troops in the front and his own troops in the rear. That the feudatories used to present with their Gupta overlord at the time of war is further confirmed by the Gunaighar grant which was issued from ‘the victorious camp full of great ships, elephants and horses’- Maha-nau-hasty-asva-jayaskandhavara. It is evident from the inscription that Gupta emperor Vainyagupta’s two subordinate viz., Maharaja Rudradatta at whose request the grant was made and Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena were present with Vainyagupta at the victory camp situated at a place called Kripura.

On the basis of the information provided by similar grant, it can also be established that subordinate rulers were also associated with the administration of the paramount king. The record mentions Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena as the Dutaka or executor of the grant.

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25 Kamandakiya Nitisara, XVIII, pp. 240-249.
28 JHQ, VI, no. 1, p. 53, 57, L. 1.
29 Ibid, pp. 53-55.
made by Vainyagupta\textsuperscript{30}. Apart from this he is also endowed with various official designations such as *Mahapratihara* (chief of the door-keepers of the king’s chamber or the royal palace), *Mahapilupati* (master of elephants), *Pancadhikaranoparika* (head of five administrative offices or departments), *patyuparika* (probably, the head of the department of accounts) and *Purpaloparika* (chief amongst the governors of cities)\textsuperscript{31}. This indicates that Vijayasena, a feudatory ruler, occupied various administrative posts under his sovereign Vainyagupta. It is difficult to say whether the different posts were held by him at the same time or one after another. It seems that such offices were entrusted upon a feudatory to show the suzerain’s favour and appreciation of the loyalty of the former.

Subordinate kings contributed in the integrity of the empire when loyal and faithful to the paramount lord i.e., the Gupta emperor. But the relationship between the subordinate and sovereign states depended upon the comparative strength of the two states. A feudatory king remained loyal and paid his allegiance only as long as the suzerain was powerful. On the least sign of the weakness of the empire the feudatories tried to shake off the subordination. They were always on the lookout to declare their independence and the paramount power had

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 55, L. 15.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, IEG, p. 183, 184, 229, 247, 265.
to bring them to submission from time to time. We have these kinds of instances throughout the Gupta period. We know how subordinate rulers as the Sakas, the rulers of Bengal and South India raised the banner of revolt at the first sign of weakness and confusion after the death of Samudragupta. And the Mehrauli Pillar inscription refers to Chandra or Chandragupta II as having subduded these feudatories by his might.32 Besides, the copper plate grants issued by the feudatory rulers in the later period e.g., the grants of Maitraka dynasty of the after Mahasamanta Maharaja Dhruvasena33, the Uchchakalpas34 and that of Maharaja Lakshamana35 and Maharaja Subandhu36 do not contain even a veiled reference to their weak overlords. Thus, it was the fear of the might of the paramount lord that kept the subordinate dynasties loyal and under control.

32 CII, III, p. 259.
34 Fleet, CII, III, pp. 117-139.
36 Ibid, XIX, pp. 261-263.