Any comprehensive study of democratic elements in ancient Indian monarchy has to be based on different kinds of sources, viz., literary sources, foreign accounts and epigraphic evidence. All these do not treat the democratic elements directly but refer to the various institutions of monarchical administration and bear direct and indirect references to this study.

**Vedic Literature**

Speculations on the earliest religious and social life find a place in Vedic literature; the same is the case with our political institutions. Even though, the four Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads are basically religious literature, they throw considerable light on the political institutions of the early period through interspersed references. It is difficult to assign any definite date to the earliest literature of this country. Some Rgvedic gods are mentioned in the Mitanniain inscription of the 14th century B.C. Indologists link the Rgveda with the period from the third to the second millenium before Christ.

There is ample evidence in the Rgveda indicating the existence of the monarchical form of government during that period. The expression 'Ṛṣajan' meaning
king frequently occurs in the Rgveda and the Atharva Veda.¹ The Vedas also refer to the Purohita,² who wielded considerable control over the activities of the king and is depicted as his sole adviser. The early Vedic literature also bears testimony to the existence of popular assemblies like the Sabhā, the Samiti and the Vidatha.³ Both the Rgveda and the Atharvaveda speak of a remarkable feature — the harmony of thought among the people sitting in the assembly.⁴ Though there are no clear references to the institutions dispensing justice, the Rik and Atharva Samhitās implicitly attribute the judicial character to the Sabhā.⁵ Terms like 'Bali' and 'Balihrt'⁶ prompt the belief that the king received taxes from his subjects, though the custom might have been voluntary in the beginning.

¹Rv. III. 43, 5; V. 54, 7; Av. IV. 22, 3, 5; VIII.7,16.
²Rv. III. 53, 12; IV. 50, 7-9.
³Rv. VII. 28, 6; VIII 4, 9; X. 34, 6; Av. V. 31, 6; VII. 12, 1, 2; VIII. 10, 5; XII. 1, 56; 56, 6.
⁴Rv. X. 191; Av. VI. 13.
⁵Macdonell & Keith - Vedic Index II. p. 428.
⁶Rv. I. 70, 9; V. 1, 10; VIII. 100, 9; VII. 6, 5; X. 173, 6; Av. VI. 117, 1; XI. 4, 19; XI. 1, 20; III. 4, 3.
Later Śaṁhitās contain references to the coronation and the Ratnahanvimsī ceremony, which impart a constitutional significance to the institution of the king and the Ratnins who formed a sort of royal retinue.

The Brāhmaṇa literature indicates further advance on the already established administrative machinery. The earliest speculation about the social contract theory concerning the origin of kingship is found in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. The coronation oath is mentioned for the first time in Brāhmaṇa literature, according to which the text of the oath is applicable to all the constitutions. There are several references in the Brāhmaṇas to the existence of the Sabha and the Samiti and also to the fact that the king always wanted to have cordial relations with them. It is notable that the Purohita and not the king is called Rastragopa (protector of the nation) in Brāhmaṇa literature.

1 Taitt. Sam. I. 8, 9; Kāth. Sam. XV. 14; Mait. Sam. II. 5, 6; Vāj. Sam. X.

2 Ait. Br. I. 14; VIII. 12-17.

3 Ibid., VIII. 39, 1.

4 Taitt. Sam. I. 7, 6, 7; Mait. Sam. IV. 7, 4; Taitt. Br. I. 1, 10, 6; Sat. Br. II. 3, 3, 3; V. 3, 1, 10; Kaus. Br. VII. 9, etc.
The Upaniṣads come after Brāhmaṇa literature in the chronological order. In spite of their philosophical nature they bear some references to the present study.

Sūtras

The dates of the Dharma Sūtras cannot be determined with certainty, but generally they fall between the seventh and the second century B.C.¹ They are the earliest works on law and the beginning of the schools of political thought can be traced in these texts which are produced by the sages who were the preceptors and advisers of the kings and naturally discussed with them the problems of administration. These are not works on political philosophy and the statecraft, yet they contain more touches of politics than Vedic literature, of course with a blend of religion and ethics.

Gautama Dharma Sūtra discusses the duties of the

¹According to Bühler, the Dharma Sūtras were compiled between the sixth and the third century B.C. in the following chronological order - Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vaśiṣṭha and Āpastamba. Jolly assigns the fifth of the sixth century B.C. to Gautama and Baudhāyana and the fifth or the fourth century B.C. to Vaśiṣṭha and Āpastamba. According to Jayaswal, the Dharma Sūtras in the present form are to be placed in the fourth century B.C. Gautama in 350 B.C., Baudhāyana in 240 B.C. and Vaśiṣṭha in 100 B.C. Hopkins places them not before 300 B.C. (Beni Prasad - Theory of Government in Ancient India, p. 158). R.S. Sharma does not agree with these historians and without advancing any reason he asserts that Āpastamba and Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtras are older than those of Gautama and Vaśiṣṭha (Sharma - Aspects of Political ideas and institutions in Ancient India, p. 15).
king and the sources of law. He also discloses for the first time the rate of taxation as one-sixth of the income. Vedic literature is however silent on these points.

Baudhāyana is also very explicit on the taxation policy and declares that duties on all marketable goods should be fixed according to their value. He is against fiscal oppression. Āpastamba propounds a new concept by refusing to accept the finality in law. According to him, it all depends upon the age and circumstances. Vasistha merely repeats the already established ideas.

The Epics

The Rāmayāna, which is earlier in chronology, is a much smaller volume than the Mahābhārata. Though it is not a work on political thought it provides a valuable account of the duties of the king and position and importance of mantrins. Its account of the coronation ceremony of Yuvrāja Rāma is however incomplete. It contains a very valuable reference to the role and responsiveness of the king who caring for public opinion, denounced his wife, though he himself was convinced of her fidelity.

An important source of information about ancient times is the great epic Mahābhārata, the longest poem in existence. It narrates the story of a great war
between the Kurus and the Pândavas. During the narration it refers to several episodes, throwing light on the set-up and working of political institutions of the time and the principles which curbed the actions of the autocratic monarch. The nature of the Mahābhārata is depicted in the following statement of Beni Prasad: "It is the Mahābhārata which gives the first clear, comprehensive and on the whole consistent account of Hindu political thought."¹

The date of compilation of the Mahābhārata is also enveloped in obscurity. Describing this difficulty, R.S. Sharma states: "It is difficult to use the material drawn from the Mahābhārata for one particular period, for its narrative portion looks back to as early as the 10th century B.C. and didactic and descriptive portions belong to as late as the 4th century A.D."² Though the gap between the narrative portions and the descriptive portions seems to be challenging, it does not narrate the oral tradition which was in the air but adverts to some ancient schools of polity an exposition of which was available in book form at that period, i.e. the Dharma Śūtras.

¹Beni Prasad - Theory of Government in Ancient India, p. 20.

²Sharma - Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, p. 17.
The Mahābhārata shares the ideas on taxation, judiciary and local government with Manu. This fact helps us to establish the date of the compilation of the epic round about the date of Manu.

Though Ādi parva, Sabhāparva and Anuśāsanaparva are quite useful for our studies, the true Hindu genius establishing the political theory of the time is depicted in the twelfth book of the epic which is called the Śāntiparva. It discusses the duties of the king and also those of the ministers and other officials. It propounds the idea that a government is to be run according to policy and not by fancy. It emphatically declares the importance of ministers in the following sentence:

"A king without a minister cannot govern his kingdom even for three days." Another important idea regarding the importance of the council of ministers contained in the Mahābhārata is that in the constitution of the Mantri parisad almost all the sections of society are represented viz., four Brāhmaṇas, three Kṣatriyas, twenty-one vaiśyas, three Śūdras and one Sūta. The books of the Mahābhārata also emphasise the supremacy of law and

1Mahābhārata. CXX. 52; CXXXIII, 13-16.
2Ibid., CVI. 11.
3Ibid., LXXW, 6-10; Sabhāparva. V.
are very clear on impartial dispensation of justice.\textsuperscript{1} The justification for and principles of taxation\textsuperscript{2} are also discussed in detail. Local units of administration were considered necessary for consolidation of big kingdoms.\textsuperscript{3} The Sānti Parva advises the king to be affectionate towards his subjects.\textsuperscript{4} The Mahābhārata's best contribution lies in the establishment of the theories of the origin of government\textsuperscript{5} which bear the closest similarity to the European theory of social contract regarding the origin of kingship.

\textbf{Smṛtis}

The next set of texts in the chronological order is the Dharma Śāstras or the Smṛtis. Many of the Dharma Sūtra contents have come to us in the shape of Smṛtis as a good many of them have been lost. The Smṛtis discuss in detail the topics on administration which were merely touched upon by the Sūtras. They are considered to be digests of the implicit political ideas scattered in Vedic literature by indologists. In modern language,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Sānti Parva. LVI. 2-9.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid. XII. 69.25; 71.10; XII. 67.16-32 etc.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Sānti parva, LXXX. 24; CIII. 25-27. Sabhā-parva. V.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Sānti parva. LVI. 43-45.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid., LIX. LXVIII.
\end{itemize}
the Smṛtis can be called the legal literature representing
the different Brāhmaṇical schools.

As in the case of the previous texts, the dates
of the Smṛtis too cannot be ascertained with certainty.
Their origin is mythical even to some ancient writers.
In his *Tantravartika* Kumārila Bhaṭṭa remarks that,
"owing to the scattering of Śākhās, human error or
carelessness and the variety of topics, the beginning
of Smṛtis could not be traced." It is generally accepted
that the Smṛtis in the present form were compiled some
time in the first millennium of the Christian era.

Among the Smṛtis, the Manu Smṛti is the oldest
and most important from every point of view, obviously
due to its comprehensive nature. It is particularly

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1Beni Prasad - Theory of Government in Ancient
India, p. 169.

2At first modern scholars assigned very early
dates to the Smṛtis. Sir William Jones assigned Manu
Smṛti to 1200 B.C. but later some scholars placed the
same text in 1200 A.D. According to Bühler, Manu's
code was compiled some time between 200 B.C. to A.D.
200 while according to Jayaswal it is a product of the
Sunga period. The following index show the dates
assigned to the Smṛtis by various scholars:

Bhandarkar - Between 3rd and 4th century A.D. (J.B.B.R.A.S.

Hopkins - Manu, Start or before the Christian era.
Viṣṇu, 3rd century A.D.
useful for the present study as in the seventh part it discusses the duties of the king, the ministers, the officials, and the authority of the judiciary, the local administration. In the eighth part of the book several principles of taxation are laid down.

Viṣṇu Śrautī is closely connected with Mānava Dharma Śāstra. Yājñavalkya Śrautī is a clear condensation of Mānū's work and pays more attention to legal matters. Nārada's work too is not independent of Mānū's ideas; it is the first Śrautī in which law itself is the subject-matter. Other important Śrautīs are those of Brhaspati, Kātyāyana and Parāśara. All these stress the point that the government was to be conducted according to law and not according to the sweet will of the king.

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Jolly
- Manu, not later than 2nd century A.D.
- Viṣṇu, 3rd century A.D.
- Yājñavalkya, 4th century A.D.
- Nārada, 5th century A.D.
- Brhaspati and Kātyāyana, 6th or 7th century A.D.
(The Imperial Unity, p. 257).

Kane
- Yājñavalkya, 100–300 A.D.
- Nārada, 100–400 A.D.
- Brhaspati, 300–500 A.D.
- Kātyāyana, 400–600 A.D.
(H. D. S. Vol. II. p. x).
Local Commentaries

The Śrautas of authorities like Manu and Yājñavalkya were commented upon and elucidated later on by various commentators. Beni Prasad states that on points of civil law they often make fresh contributions, but on principles and methods of government they generally serve only to emphasise, and sometimes to obscure, the meaning of the texts.¹ The first commentator on Manu was Medhatithi, who flourished in the 10th century A.D. Kulluka and Govinda followed later. Vijñāneshvara, who explained the Yājñavalkya Śrātiṣ, was the most authoritative commentator of the period about the 14th century A.D.

Arthaśāstra

Politics is discussed incidentally in the general discussion in the Vedic and the later Vedic literature, the Śrātas and epics, but Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra, which is a practical manual on statecraft, is devoid of religious injunctions. Kautilya takes a bold step and for the first time there is a clear demarcation between politics and religion in Indian literature. "... nowhere in his book does Kautilya evaluate political action in terms of religious thought. His work indeed was a daring attempt at diverting politics of religion - an

¹Beni Prasad — Theory of Government in Ancient India. p. 182.
attempt which is unparalleled in the entire field of ancient Indian political thought.\textsuperscript{1} The Arthasastra of Kautilya was intended to be a comprehensive work on the science of government in its widest sense. "The Arthasastra is more a manual for the Administration than a theoretical work on polity discussing the philosophy and fundamental principles of administration or of political science. It is mainly concerned with the practical problems of government and describes its machinery and functions both in peace and war, with an extensiveness not seen in any later work, with the possible exception of Śukraṇīti."\textsuperscript{2}

This most important work on ancient Indian polity was discovered at Trivendrum by Shamasastry who also edited it. The first edition was published in 1909.

"Artha" in usual form means wealth; Arthasastra would thus mean a work on economics, not on politics. But Kautilya himself has defined the term "Artha" thus:

*The substance of mankind is termed 'Artha' (wealth); the Artha contains mankind is termed 'Artha' (wealth); that sign which treats of the means of acquiring and

\textsuperscript{1} Aiyangar - Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity. pp. 62-63.

\textsuperscript{2} Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. pp. 10-11.
maintaining the Artha is the Arthasastra, science of polity.\footnote{Arth. XV. 1.}

Considering its elaborate contents and the thorough treatment of the topics, it is safe to presume that the author of the Arthasastra had before him copious material on polity to draw inspiration from and to dilate upon. This presumption is supported by Kautilya himself who declares that his Arthasastra is a compendium of all Arthasastras composed by ancient teachers, in view of acquisition and maintenance of Artha. The ancient teachers mentioned by Kautilya are: Manu, Brhaspati, Usanas, Bharadvaja, Visalaksha, Parasara, Pisuna, Vatavyadhhi, Kaumpadanta, Gaurasisra, Bahudanta, Ghotamukha, Kastyayana and Charayana.

The Arthasastra has 15 Adhikaranas with 180 Prakaranas. Adhikarana I deals in general with the manifold problems connected with kingship—his education, discipline and duties, etc.; Adhikarana II describes the civil administration and the fortification of towns; Adhikaranas III and IV describe the civil and criminal law; Adhikarana V elaborately discusses the various functions and obligations of government servants as
well as the methods to weed out the disloyal and hostile elements; and Adhikaraṇa VI discusses the Saptāṅga theory of the State. In the last nine Adhikaraṇas are discussed the Mandala theory and problems connected with diplomacy, war and peace.

The language of the Arthaśāstra is pure Sanskrit, though we come across un-Pāṇinian terms also. The work has been written mostly in prose, but there are a number of verses here and there. The form of the work is an admixture of the Sūtra and Bhāṣya styles.

The work is not written in the first person, but in the third person: "Iti Kautilya" and "Neti Kautilya".

There are some scholars who believe that the authorship of the Arthaśāstra should not be attributed to Kautilya, the great chancellor of Candragupta Maurya. They also hold that it is not a work of a single person but was written by disciples of Kautilya long after his death. The other reason for doubting the authenticity of the work is the mode of citation which is in the third person.

But this view is untenable mainly because the last verse in the Arthaśāstra itself says that this work was composed by one who had overthrown the Nandas.¹ The

¹ तैन शास्त्रेऽ त शास्त्रेऽ च नद्यरक्षयताः केद: 
अष्टोझकोशतयाः तैन शास्त्रेऽविदं ज्ञानः ।
Visnu Purana also states that the Brahmana Kautilya will uproot the Nandas and the same tradition is repeated in the Bhagavata Purana. Later, Kāmandaka informs us that the mountain-like Nandas were felled by the diplomacy of Cāṇkya who bestowed the earth on Candragupta.¹ Dandin refers to the Arthasastra of Kautilya as the science of polity (Dapdanlti of Visnugupta).² It is referred to as the work of Kautilya in several other ancient works also.

The similarity of descriptions in the Indikā of Megasthenes and the edicts of Aśoka also strengthens the idea that the Arthasastra was compiled by the great Prime Minister of Candragupta Maurya who was known by three names viz. Kautilya, Visnugupta and Cāṇkya.³

Next it is to be noted that it is not Kautilya only whose mode of citation is in the third person but there are a number of cases where the writer spoke of

¹ Kām. I. 7.
² Daś. Book I.
³ Ganepati Sastri does not agree with those who find the name Kautilya funny. According to him, Kautilya was called so because of his birth in the Kutala gotra; Visnugupta was his name and he was known as Cāṇkya because his father's name was Cāṇaka.
themselves in the third person.  

According to Shamasastry, the style and vocabulary of the Arthasastra closely follow that of the Sutrakaras. The importance given to Vedic sacrifices and the scant respect shown to Buddhism also go to prove that the work was compiled in the period before this faith became well-rooted in society.  

We feel convinced that Arthasastra was indeed written by Kautilya, the Prime Minister of Candragupta Maurya, and that the kernel of the treatise belongs to the fourth century B.C.  

Another Arthasastra attributed to Brhaspati has been unearthed by F.W. Thomas. It is a small volume of six chapters written in the Sutra form by Brhaspati. It is certainly a work of a later date, written perhaps by a follower of the Brhaspatya school.  

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2. Scholars like Winternitz, Jolly, Keith, D.R. Bhandarkar, Hemacandra Joshi and Kalyanov do not accept Arthasastra as the work of 3rd century B.C. They assign the work to the early centuries of the Christian era.
Another class of literature was compiled simultaneously with the Samāyana and is called the Purāṇas, which are 18 in number. Like other earlier texts, they were constantly retouched, some of the additions even bear the influence of as late as the 10th century A.D. Due to the interpolations they may appear to be texts belonging to a later period, but their origin is to be traced to the Vedic period. Purāṇa is mentioned as Itihāsa Purāṇa in the Atharvaveda. The Purāṇas bear a close affinity in form and content to the Mahābhārata and the legal texts. The Purāṇas, along with the same number of Upapurāṇas, are not of much relevance for the purpose of this study, except the Agni Purāṇa. It furnishes a detailed account of the government's working but considers the science of polity as an inferior science.

Mānalīstras

The Kautilyan tradition is carried on in the Mānalīstras of Kāmandaka, Somadeva Sūri and Śukracārya. The Kāmandakiya Mānalīsāra is considered to be a mini replica of the Arthaśāstra. Like Kautilya, he declares that he is giving instructions to the king through his

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1Av. XV. 6, 11.
manual. As against 180 chapters of the Arthasastra, it contains only 36. It is difficult to specify the date and the author of this work. Modern scholars suggest dates between the first century and the sixth century A.D. We are inclined to share the view of scholars like Dikshitar and Jayaswal, who think that the work belonged to the Gupta period and was written by Śikhara who was the Prime Minister of Candragupta II (Vikrmāditya).

To support the idea, we advance the following arguments. First, Abu Salih calls the author of this book as Safar in Arabian which corresponds to Śikhara in Sanskrit; second, the author mentions his patron as Deva and in a Vakāṭaka inscription Prabhāvatigupta is referred to as the daughter of 'Devagupta'; third, Kamandaka is quoted many times in the Pañcatantra, which is considered to be the work of the sixth century A.D.; fourth, Kamandaka is referred to in the opening chapter of Daśakumārācarita of Daṇḍin, another work of the sixth century A.D. All this goes to prove that Kamandakīya Nītisāra is the product of the 4th century A.D. and was written by Śikhara, the Prime Minister of Candragupta II.

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1 Kām. I. 7 and 8.
Kāmandaka was most probably his family title.

Next comes Nītivākyamṛta of Somadeva Sūri, who was a Jain writer. This work pertains to the early political thought and is ascribed by scholars to the 10th century A.D.

The most important work of this nature is Śukrāntisāra, written by Śukrācārya. It is much more than a compendium of political thought mentioned in the earlier texts. Like Kauṭilya, Śukrācārya gives practical instructions to a monarch. He discusses the sovereign's position and qualifications, his time-table, council of ministers, royal court, popular courts and principles of taxation, etc. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it discusses the portfolios of ministers for the first time in the history of Indian political literature and presents a clear picture of the day-to-day working of the ministry during those times. It also furnishes the details of the seating arrangement in the royal court, etc. As regards the origin of kingship, the treatise presents the Mahābhārata version, with very little modifications.

The date of Śukrāntisāra is also obscure. Dr. Gustav Oppert, editor of the work, opines that it belonged to the same period to which belonged the Smṛtis and the early epic literature.¹ But other scholars hold

that the spirit and atmosphere of the work belong to a later period. Even if we make some allowance for the interpolations, the work does not belong to the period earlier than the 12th or the 13th century A.D. due to the following reasons: the Mlechchhas are referred to as residing in the north-west of India and there are references to Sāmantas also; \(^1\) the text refers to the price of gold as 16 times higher than that of silver; \(^2\) there is a reference to the doctrine of Śāṅkara; \(^3\) the monarch is advised to make peace even with an Anārya, otherwise he may uproot the kingdom; \(^4\) there is a reference to the reserves of the treasury; \(^5\) and lastly it refers to fire-arms and gunpowder. \(^6\)

After the Śukranītisāra, which is the last important work on Hindu politics, the following were composed:

Abilāṣītārthacintāmaṇi (first four chapters) by Someśvara, Yuktikalpataru by Bhoja, Rājaṇītikalpataru by Lakṣmīdhara, Rājaṇītikāṇḍa by Devabhaṭa, Rājaṇītiratnākara of Candēśvara,

\(^1\) Sukra. I. 189.
\(^2\) Ibid., IV, 2, 92.
\(^3\) Ibid., IV. 3, 50.
\(^4\) Ibid., IV. 7, 243.
\(^5\) Ibid., IV. 2. 223.
\(^6\) Ibid., IV. 7, 195, 213; I. 231; II. 95 & 195.
Amuktamālāyāda of king Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Vijayanagar dynasty, Nītimayukha of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rājañīprakāśikā of Mitramiśra till as late as the 17th century A.D. But all of them lack originality of ideas and freshness of style.

**Buddhist Literature**

As in the cases of the Dharmasūtras, Dharmasāstras, the epics and the Arthasāstra, the date of the Buddhist scriptures can also not be fixed with certainty. But the scholars' research shows that the texts belong to the period posterior to Aśoka at the earliest and to the first or the second century A.D. at the latest.

Though these texts are of a religious nature, they contain several incidental references to administrative data. Dīghanikāya,\(^1\) a work of the third century B.C., contains the teachings of the Buddha and furnishes us with the first systematic speculation on the social contract theory regarding the origin of kingship in ancient India. This theory was later revised in the Mahāvastu, another important Buddhist text of the 1st century B.C. There is a reference to a coronation ceremony in the Malinḍapāṇho.\(^2\) That the king was assisted

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\(^1\)Dīgha. III. 93, 3.

\(^2\)Malihd. p. 72.
by a council of ministers, a repeatedly mentioned fact in Hindu texts, is corroborated in the several works of Buddhists. The institution of headman is repeatedly mentioned in these works, and the Jātaka stories. Much light is also thrown on the judicial administration.

The Jātakas refer to the king's share in soil produce but they do not embody any principles regarding the rate and collection of taxes. That in Buddhist literature the king is advised not to become an autocrat is evident from the maxim that "the king could do as he liked with those who had violated the law but that he could not regard himself as a despotic sovereign in general."

The scriptures of Jainism were composed from the 5th century A.D. onwards. There is only one important work on polity — Mātivyākyāmrtta — written by a Jain

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1 Lalit. p. 119. also Div. 291. 17; Mālinda. p. 114. 27 ff; Div. 549. 9; Mahā. Vol. III. p. 42, 11.9.

2 Div. 445. 23; 451. 20; Mālinda. p. 265.

3 Jātaka Vol. I. p. 198; p. 34. Vol. II. p. 134 etc.

4 Div. 126. 33; 211. 9; 250. 13; 30.6; Kāvya of Āvaghoṣa XII. 13; Mālinda. p. 279. 158; Mahā. Pt. I. p. 167. 11.6. Lalit. p. 43.11.9; XV. 207; V. p. 43. XV. 207, etc.

5 Jātaka Vol. II. 379; IV. 169.

6 Ibid. I. 398.
scholar, Somadeva Sūri, to which a reference has already been made. Otherwise, the Jaina sūtras are not of much relevance as they deal exclusively with eternity and salvation.

Oriental Sanskrit Literature

Beni Prasad has stated: "The ideas which the legal and political writers expounded became part and parcel of Hindu cultural tradition. They are reflected in literature, in poetry, in fiction, in biography and history. Here is little that is original but the form and setting of the traditional wisdom are interesting".¹ It is quite true that references to political ideas and practices are found interspersed in classical Sanskrit literature also. It would obviously be difficult to discuss all the works of Sanskrit literature here. We shall discuss only a few of them which are important from our point of view.

First of all, there is Pāṇini's grammar called Aṣṭādhyāyī of about the 5th century B.C., and Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya of the 2nd century B.C., which is a commentary on the former. The latter is more important for our purpose because it throws considerable light on the mode of administration in the post-Mauryan period.

¹Beni Prasad - Theory of Government in Ancient India, p. 268.
The pioneer position in Indian literature is attributed to Asvaghosa, the celebrated author of Buddhacarita and Sūtra-lāṅkāra. Though the Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana seems to be older than Asvaghosa, but the latter's date is not certain. The next renowned name is that of Bhāsa, to whom Gaṇapatiśāstri attributed the authorship of thirteen plays which are based on plots from the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and other popular legends, but they hardly provide any useful information for our purpose.

The next name in chronological order is that of Kālidāsa, the celebrated author of Sakuntalām, Meghadūta, Kumārasambhava, Mālvikāgnimitram, Vikramorśvi and Raghuvamsa. Scholars are not unanimous on the point that all these works came through the pen of a single person. Nor do they hold the same opinion on the precise years of Kālidāsa. The generally accepted view is that there were three Kālidāsas. Rajasekhara also informs us that he knew at least three Kālidāsas before his time, who were renowned writers and masters of aesthetic language.

Raghuvamsa carried veiled references to the Gupta rulers and describes the duties of the king in

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1Beni Prasad - Theory of Government in Ancient India. p. 269 fn.

2Dikshitar - Gupta Polity. p. 18.
In the *Malvikagnimitram* we come across interesting glimpses of the proceedings of the Mantri-pariṣad. *Sākuntalam*, the best work of Kālidās, also includes a few political ideas: that the king takes one-sixth of the soil produce in return for his function of protecting his subjects and that it was his duty to work for his subjects as for his children; he should behave towards his subjects as their nearest kin.

Another drama, *Mṛchhakātika* of Śūdraka, is one of the remarkable works of Sanskrit literature and an important source of information to us. There is a full scene revealing the proceedings of the royal court. It also records an example of misrule and oppression resulting in the death of king Pālaka.

Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin, though left incomplete, is of considerable use to us as it records the political activities of the royal court and ranks among the masterpieces of indigenous literature. Another writer, Bhārtṛhari, makes occasional references to the king and the state.

Next comes Bāṇa, the court poet of Harṣavardhana, to whom two works, viz. Kādambari and Harṣacarita, are attributed. Both these works were left incomplete by the author and were later completed by his son Bhūsana Bhaṭṭa. Though Bāṇa is accused of fabrications, his
Harṣacarita contains interspersed references to several political practices of the contemporary period.

**Difficulties and Limitations of Our Study**

The available sources of information on the subject of this study in the shape of indigenous literature suffer from many drawbacks due to which the scope is limited and the work beset with several difficulties.

First, the literary sources have not come down to us in the chronological order, leaving us helpless in finding the exact dates of different texts which could make this study precise and accurate. The chronological difficulty wraps authorities like Gautama, Vasiṣṭha, Viṣṇu, Nārada, Kautilya, Manu and even Kāmandaka. Chronological vagueness also pervades classical Sanskrit literature. As stated already, we cannot with certainty fix the years of Kālidāsa. The constant interpolations in these works provide the main explanation for this shortcoming. Perhaps the worst example is the Mahābhārata the narrative portion of which goes back to the 10th century B.C. and the didactic and descriptive portions belong to the period as late as the 4th century A.D.

Possibly, there was a tendency to attribute one's literary work to a renowned author which posed the problem of finding identical names. For instance, ancient Indian history refers to many Manus. In Vedic
literature he is referred to as the father of the human race,¹ in later Vedic literature he is regarded as the first consecrated king,² and lastly he is mentioned as the earliest Śmītikāra to whom many Mānava codes are ascribed. The same is the case with Brhaspati, Parāśara and Yājñavalkya. Kālīdāsa’s name also suffers from this handicap.³

These difficulties get accentuated when we interpret the terms used by commentators on ancient authorities and fundamentally related to our study. Still more confusing is the divergence of opinion among modern scholars regarding the exact connotation of these terms.

**Epigraphic Evidence**

"Epigraphal evidence which when stripped of the conventional ornamental phrases proves a most trustworthy..."

¹Macdonell & Keith - Vedic Index II. p. 129.
²Taitt. Śām. II. 4.2.1; Śat. Br. III. 4.2; Ait. Br. I. 14; VIII. 12-17.
³Brhaspati is considered the founder of Daṇḍāṇīti and there is a small Arthasastra which is also attributed to Brhaspati. Parāśara is mentioned among the Pūrvacāryas of Kaṭṭiliya and according to Dr. Kane (H.D.S. Vol. I. pp. 190-96) he lived in the age ranging from A.D. 100 to A.D. 500. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad refers to Yājñavalkya as a pupil of the famous teacher Svetaketu (Vedic Index I. pp. 87-88). While one Śmīti is attributed to a Yājñavalkya who flourished in one of the early centuries of the Christian era (Cf. Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions. pp. 6-10). Kālīdāsa also suffers the same handicap (Dikshitar - Gupta Polity. pp. 17-31).
It is not difficult to separate the facts from the exaggerated ornamentation of the patrons, because these records are generally written by court poets. Moreover, there is no chronological difficulty regarding this branch of our sources of information. Even if some inscriptions are not dated, it is not difficult to assign them to an approximate period on the palaeographical basis.

The first deciphered inscriptions in India are those of Aśoka, the great Mauryan monarch. They throw light on the duties of the king towards his subjects, the working of the council of ministers (Pariṣā) and the judiciary. Aśoka's edicts are also valuable on account of the record of the administrative machinery which bears some traces of similarity to Kauṭilya's system.

Next in chronological order is Junāgadh inscription of Mahākṣatrapa Rudradāmana I. It bears testimony to the power enjoyed by the ministry which could prevent the king from spending a large sum of money even on a public project.

The land-grant copper plates of the Guptas, their

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2 The first land-grant plates were issued by Satavahana kings.
contemporaries and the post-Gupta land charters are a very valuable source of information, specially for the rural administration and the taxation system.

**Greek and Chinese Accounts**

Some welcome information is furnished by Greek and Chinese works written by an ambassador and some pilgrims respectively.

Indika of Megasthenes, who was an ambassador of the Greek king Seleukos to the court of Candragupta Maurya, needs to be examined first. Though it is not difficult to assign him to a certain period, we cannot fix with certainty any particular year of his visit to India. Dikshitar suggests that most probably Megasthenes was in India during the years 302 and 288 B.C.\(^1\) Some scholars are of the opinion that he visited India more than once. But on the authority of Starbo and Pliny,\(^2\) most of the scholars hold that Megasthenes visited India only once and that he stayed for a short period. The discrepancies and fabricated accounts recorded by Megasthenes are sufficient to prove that his stay in India was short. Had he stayed long, he would have fully observed the nature of Indian society and then written his

\(^1\)Dikshitar - Mauryan Polity. p. 34.

\(^2\)Ibid. p. 35. fn.
account. Actually, he wrote what he saw outwardly and superficially. His Indika suffers from the following inaccuracies: It does not say anything about the author of the work. The work as it comes to us is in a fragmentary condition. It is believed that Indika was written in four volumes, but we are in possession of only one volume and that too in fragments. Another drawback is that the Greek ambassador tends to draw too rosy a picture of India by stating that the Indians did not drink and that slavery did not exist in this country. He not only gives an idealised picture of Indian society but also makes many fabrications. For instance, he says that there were no written laws in ancient India, that seven castes existed, that the king's share of the land produce was one-fourth and that there were no money lending contracts, etc.

According to Dikshitar, a revered scholar, Indika does not provide first-hand information. In his opinion, a work containing first-hand information is invariably the outcome of vast travelling, long stay and full knowledge of the local dialect. Megasthenes' work does not stand scrutiny on this point.¹ In Dikshitar's opinion, "the evidence of Megasthenes could not be looked

¹Dikshitar - Mauryan Polity. p. 33.
upon as something positive and conclusive.*1 But adoption of such an opinion would be doing more than injustice to the Greek author, who provides the following information on the lines of Kautilya’s Arthasastra. He wrote on the king’s duties and his daily time-table, the heads of various departments, the duties of superintendents, the penal code, the construction of irrigation works, the system of espionage, the army, the care of foreigners, and the municipal system of Pātaliputra. Though Megasthenes’ account suffers from certain inaccuracies, still on the basis of the above-mentioned facts we cannot discard Indika’s authority.

In the Gupta period, during the reign of Candragupta II Vikramaditya, a Buddhist monk from China, visited India. He started from China in 399 A.D. and, after wandering for nearly 13 years in India and for two years in Ceylon, returned to his native place. He preserved his observations on the administration of Candragupta II in his book Fo-kno-hi (Record of Buddhist kingdoms). He records some references to the political system in India, but, as is evident from the title of his work, his observations are coloured with the religious fervour of Buddhism.

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*Dikshitar – Mauryan Polity, p. 36.
The next work worth mentioning is that of Hsuan-Tsang, who visited India in 630-44 A.D. during the reign of Harṣavardhana. During his stay of 13 years in this country, he travelled from monastery to monastery. His work is mainly about Buddhism, but as he came of a family of administrators his eye also picked up administrative data concerning the prevailing machinery. In spite of its shortcomings such as dependence on hearsay and the colour of his preconceived ideas on politics, it is a generally trustworthy account.