CHAPTER II

KINGSHIP
Monarchy was the general system of government in the Vedic period. The region occupied by the Aryans was divided into a number of small kingdoms. This becomes clear from the references in the Rgveda to kings occupying small territories here and there.¹ The Rgveda ² and later Vedic literature ³ mention an expression — Rājan which was applied to a man of superior lineage and of a unique position in the tribe.

Social Contract Theory of the origin of Kingship

There are two theories of the origin of kingship — the divine origin theory and the elective origin theory. There was also a third view according to which the idea of kingship sprang from a democratic platform is clear from the references found in our early literature, according to which the institution of kingship was based on a social contract — i.e. the kingship originated in a social need, namely that of providing protection to the people’s life and property.

¹Rv. I. 126, 1; VIII. 21, 18.
²Rv. III. 43, 5; V. 54, 7.
³Av. IV. 22, 3, 5; VIII. 7, 16.
The following incidents are recorded in Indian literature on the basis of which modern scholars have based the social contract theory of the origin of kingship in ancient India.

The first hint of the contract theory is found in the Taittirīya Samhitā.¹ The tradition also occurs in Satapatha Brāhmaṇa² and the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.³ The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa refers to the origin of kingship through election among the gods as a compelling necessity to fight a successful war against the Asuras. The former were being constantly defeated by the latter who were led by a king. The gods assembled and decided to have a king who could lead them in the war. They elected Indra, who was the most vigorous among them, as their leader and installed him as be their king. They were victorious in the war. The election of Indra implies a sort of agreement without any terms; stress was laid on the physical qualities of Indra, the most vigorous one among them, because the ambition was to wage a successful war, not to set up governmental machinery. Further the text records that after defeating the Asuras they fell a

¹Taitt. Śām. II. 4, 2, 1.
²Sat. Br. III. 4, 2.
³Ait. Br. I. 14; VIII. 12-17.
victim to discord, and were split into four parties, each refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of the other. On realising their mistake they decided to part with their favourite forms and desirable powers and attributed them to Indra, making him supreme. They also decided that whoever violated the agreement would be "scattered to the winds". Thus they sought to make the covenant imperishable.

That this account of Hindu texts is similar to Hobbes' concept is obvious from the salient features of his theory. The contract is among the individuals (willing contribution of powers); the sovereign is not a party to it but a sequel. In Hobbes' theory an individual surrenders his rights to the sovereign on the condition that others too would do the same. Again, the Hindu theory resembles that of Hobbes in stating that the covenant was "imperishable"; anybody transgressing it will be "scattered to the winds". Another similarity lies in the constant defeat of Devas at the hands of Asuras for want of a king, which is equivalent to the endless strife in Hobbes' exposition. It may be supposed that this heavenly account was nothing but an echo of the happenings on earth. But the basic idea in the social contract, namely the guarantee of protection to life and property by the elected leader i.e. the king,
is missing in the account. Secondly, there is no obligation on the sovereign as he is not a party to the pact. If this account is accepted as the historical truth, the pact deprived the individuals of their powers (rights in the case of Hobbes), leaving them weak. Consequently, they could fall a prey to the arbitrary behaviour of the sovereign who was not responsible to them.

The Buddhist works i.e. Dīghanikāya and Mahāvastu, record the clear and developed exposition of the social contract theory. In the Dīghanikāya we are told that in course of time people found themselves threatened by anarchy and chaos. To protect themselves from this danger, they decided to elect a leader whom they gave such epithets as Mahājanasammatā, Khattiya and Rājā. They agreed to pay a part of their paddy to him in exchange for the protection he provided.¹ Mahāvastu's account is nothing but a practical reproduction of the one given in the Dīghanikāya.

Three points are noticeable in the Buddhist account: (i) The idea of respecting the family and property of each other for the establishment of an orderly society; this is not specifically stated but is implied;

¹Dīgh. III. 93.
(ii) contribution of a part of the paddy in exchange for protection indicates a term of the contract between the subjects and the sovereign; (iii) the terms of the contract are made clear by telling the sovereign to punish, revile and exile those who deserve to be punished, reviled and exiled, the people promising in return to give a portion of their paddy.

The Buddhist theory of the origin of monarchy greatly resembles that of Locke. It refers to the Golden Age, followed by a state of anarchy which led to a contract between the people and the powerful leader, resulting in the establishment of a government according to Locke's theory. Another point of similarity is that like Locke, the Buddhist theory advocates the idea of limited legislative powers of the sovereign. The sovereign in the Buddhist text is to legislate in accordance with the established law, not arbitrarily. The most valuable idea of Locke's theory — "government resting on the consent of the governed" is also implicit in the interpretation of the title — Mahājanasamātā.

Kauṭilya also refers in his Arthasastra to the origin of monarchy through social contract in two contexts.

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1 Though the fixed part of the paddy is not described in the Dhāranikāya, it may safely be taken to be 'one-sixth' of their produce, on the authority of Baudhāyana (I.10, 18-19) which is a contemporary work.
He first describes the state of anarchy, calling it 'Matsyanyāya* (the big fish swallowing the smaller), and advocates a solution through the appointment of a magistrate under whose protection the weak will survive.¹ Kauṭilya further narrates a discussion among two parties of spies, one of which discloses that to counteract the law of the jungle, the people elected Manu Vaivasvata to be their king² and allotted one-sixth of their field products and one-tenth of the merchandise as the sovereign's dues in lieu of the protection afforded to them by him. The Kauṭilyan account is not a thought-out exposition of the issue but an incidental reference. That is why his theory does not show any advance on the Buddhist one, except showing the developed state of the economy. Kauṭilya, like Hobbes, places no limitation on the royal power.

R.S. Sharma remarks that the obligations imposed on the people are burdensome and designed to strengthen the royal authority.³ Kane points out that Kauṭilya is silent on whether Manu made any promise to the people.⁴

¹Arth. I. IV. 9.
²Ibid., I. XIII. 23.
³Sharma - Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, p. 70.
⁴Kane - H.D.S. III. p. 31.
In the Mahābhārata (Śāntiparva) we come across two theories. Since Śāntiparva is not a systematic work on political thought but a collection of political and legal theories, it is possible to find two divergent theories on the same issue. The first, which is associated with the name of Prthu, occurs in the 59th chapter and the second, found in the 67th chapter, is associated with the name of Manu.

Yudhishṭhir asks Bhīṣma how a man who is like others in all respects governs the world. Referring to the origin and importance of kingship Bhīṣma described the existence of the golden age from which people degenerated into anarchy following the emergence of anti-social elements which made them slaves to their passions, psychologically and otherwise. As Dharma was disappearing from the earth, the gods sought the help of Brahmā who created the Daṇḍanītī treatise. Then the gods approached Viṣṇu for help; he created an asexual son named Virjas, but he and several of his descendants renounced the world and preferred to practise all-round austerity. Then Anaṅga agreed to rule according to Dharma; his son succumbed to passion and his grandson Veṇa was a thoroughly wicked man. The sages had no choice but to have him slain so as to put an end to his tyranny. From the thigh

Śāntiparvan - Ch. 59, 87-89.
of Vena they created Prthu who agreed to govern the world in accordance with Dharma. He was administered an oath by which he was required to protect the Brāhmaṇas and do whatever was proper in accordance with the science of polity.

This theory cannot be regarded as tantamount to framing a contract between the original ruler and his subjects. Secondly, a promise made to the Brāhmaṇas by Prthu cannot be taken to mean a social contract. R.S. Sharma has rightly remarked: "By no stretch of imagination can they be considered as representing the whole people. King Prthu does not repeat the whole oath, but he states it in unequivocal terms that he would always respect the Brāhmaṇa". Further he points out that this account is a theoretical recognition of the special position of the Brāhmaṇas.¹

Moreover, it was not the people who approached Brahmā and Viṣṇu but the gods who feared disappearance of Dharma from the earth. So the very idea of a contract taking place between the subjects and the sovereign is missing as the subjects did not approach any one for the appointment of a king and the king did not make any promise to the subjects. This theory is nearer the

¹Sharma - Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 73.
divine origin theory of kingship than that of a social contract.

The second story runs as follows: There was a state of anarchy which brought great suffering to the people in its wake. To get rid of this, some wise and virtuous people assembled and made certain pacts among themselves to the effect that if any one was harsh in speech, of angry disposition, adulterous and voluptuous, addicted to the habit of stealing, mis-appropriated others' property and seduced or abducted others' wives, he should be cast off by the rest. The object of the pact was the establishment of a society which would inspire confidence among all classes of the people so that they might live peacefully for some time, but it did not work. Then they approached Brahmā, "Without a king, O divine lord, we are facing destruction. Appoint some one as our king; all of us shall worship him and he shall protect us". Brahmā asked Manu to agree to be their king, but he refused the offer and said; "I fear all sinful acts; to govern a kingdom is exceedingly difficult, especially among men who are always false and deceitful in their behaviour". On hearing this the people gave an assurance that they would contribute to his treasury 1/10th of their crops, 1/50th of their cattle and gold and further promised to depute the foremost of the warriors and riders to form his retinue and also 1/4th of the spiritual merit.
Manu felt satisfied and agreed to be their king.

Bereft of the supernatural element, the people went to Brahma: this is the only Ancient Indian theory which harmonizes with the western concept of the origin of kingship through a social contract. The above account corresponds to Hobbes' view in all main respects, viz., the state of terrible anarchy prompting the recognition of the need of a king. The mythical Manu, however, is not directly a party to the compact like Hobbes' sovereign, but his acceptance of the offer confirms the idea of the ruler being a party to the covenant. The sovereign's obligation lies in protecting his subjects, while the subjects' obligations are manifold — showing full obedience to the sovereign, paying tributes to him in lieu of protection and acting according to the established laws. As in the case of Hobbes' sovereign, no limitations are placed on Manu's authority.

That the above account is certainly an improvement on the earlier accounts of social origin of kingship is clear from the following facts. It is the only systematic theory that records the social compact before achieving the political covenant. The people went to Brahma for the appointment of the king. They held direct negotiations with Manu, resulting in his consent to become their king. The contribution of military service and of a portion of
the spiritual merit go to show that the people undertook to help the king in every respect.

The social contract theory has been criticised by historians on the following grounds while comparing it with western theories. The texts which expound the social contract theory are vague and merely have an implicit bearing or a pale resemblance to western theories. Saletore holds that the similarity between the two is superficial, while contrast is remarked. He points out that both the theories are of a great antiquity and the concept of anarchy may be said to have had within it the germs of contract; in both theories the coming into existence of a leader is preceded by chaos in society.¹

According to Saletore, the first point of dissimilarity between the western and Indian theories is that the state of nature described in Indian theories is nearer to Hobbes’ account but does not resemble those of Locke and Rousseau at all. But in our view, holding such an idea will not be doing justice to the Indian version of the social contract, as the Śāntiparvan account clearly discusses the Golden Age which resembles Locke’s state of equity and freedom. Dharma in Indian theories corresponds to Locke’s dictates of right reason.

¹Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions, pp. 144-46.
Again, Salestore contends that it is not clear in Indian theories who abandoned the state of nature? Did the people willingly abandon the anarchical state of nature, or were they made to do so? According to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, the people willingly surrendered their rights to have a sovereign. The learned historian ignores the very first account of our literature, i.e. in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, according to which the gods decided among themselves to choose a king. In Dīghanikāya also, the people willingly chose a king and in the Śāntiparvan account the people not only wanted a king, but on Manu’s refusal they tempted him to accept the post by offering a part of their grains, metals and maidens, etc.

The social contract theory is criticised by many historians on the point that the state in India is a result of divine action. Though this is really a weak point in the Indian theory of social contract regarding the origin of kingship, we can advance some arguments to prove that the State was not the result of divine action only but human actions were combined with it. According to Hobbes, the sovereign is not a party to the contract but a result of it; in Locke the ruler is a party to it. Both these ideas were conveyed in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Dīghanikāya and the Śāntiparvan accounts. Though we do not have any theory which can correspond to Rousseau’s
idea that the government is an agent to carry on the contract among the subjects, we find that the central idea of Hobbes and Locke exists in Indian theories.

Secondly, ancient Indian thinkers were not born in the age of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, i.e., the age of rationalism. They attached religious importance to every important problem. Theirs was a socio-religious-political society. In the Sāntiparvan account (Ch. 67), Manu does not make any promise to the subjects: This again is considered to be a weak point of the Indian theory. But we must realize that the people offered to pay taxes and be obedient to Manu if he agreed to become their king. When Manu accepted the offer, he automatically made a promise to protect them.

The following are the shortcomings in our ancient theories: the Indian counterparts of the social contract theory do not provide any political and legal rights to the subjects without which no political contract can exist. They were, however, provided a right to dethrone or kill the king who does not fulfill his duties. How this authority was to be exercised is nowhere described. Spelman observes: "Divine appointment is the prevailing idea of the origin of kingship and despite some elements of social contract in the notion of an exchange of taxation for protection, royal power was not derived from an agreement with the..."
Altekar calls the contract theory a bad history and worse logic and refutes the very idea of social contract in the following statement: "It can no doubt explain the origin of a particular form of state among people who have already developed governmental institutions, but it cannot explain how the agreement took place among the members of a community, which was still in the state of society where mutual rights and obligations are respected and this is obviously in a society where the law of the jungle prevails."  

In spite of the above-mentioned shortcomings, an historical survey of the social contract in ancient India reveals that the root idea of contract, payment of taxes and showing obedience to the sovereign as an obligation in return for protection existed there.

Kino's Position

Though references occurring in the Rgveda and the later Vedic literature mention the grandiloquent imperial titles like Samrāṭa, Ekarāja, Adhirāja, Mahendra, Mahārāja and Sārvabhauma, the use of these expressions cannot be

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1 Spellman, J.W. - political Theory of Ancient India, pp. 1-25.
2 Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India, p. 31.
3 Rv. III, 55, 7; VIII. 37, 3; X. 128, 9; VIII, 16, 1; V. 68, 2; Av. III. 4, 1; VII. 98, 1; IX, 10, 24; Sat. Br. V. 11, 13; I. 6, 4, 21.
taken to mean the rise of imperialism in the Vedic period. In fact, it was not until the rise of the Magadhan empire that India saw big consolidated empires. The following examples from the later Vedic literature will confirm the belief that the Vedic king was a petty chief: Gautama Dharma Sūtra¹ records that Madhparka should be offered to certain relations if they come after one year but to king who is proficient in Vedas as often as he comes. The frequent visits of the king in person to a commoner’s house cannot denote the grand position of the king but they are hints to a senior and proficient member among the tribe. Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra² expressly says that the king should personally strike the thief. The same idea is implied in the Gautama Dharma Sūtra also.³

How was the Vedic king appointed? Was this institution elective? If so, who elected him? Was the choice restricted to the royal family or was it open to any one desiring to be a king? Or was it hereditary in accordance with the law of primogeniture, brushing aside all the possibilities of elective kingship?

The elective character of monarchy can be traced

¹Gaut. Dh. S. V. 30-31.
²Āpas. Dh. S., I, 9, 25, 4.
³Gaut. Dh. S., XII. 43.
in Vedic literature, and the hereditary aspect also can be discerned as the kingship is known to have passed from father to son in quite many cases.

On the basis of the passages reproduced below, Zimmer,¹ Weber,² Bloomfield,³ Jayaswal and Majumdar advocate the theory of elective kingship in Vedic India. At the same time they hold that the institution was sometimes hereditary too.

Jayaswal advances a hymn from Atharvaveda⁴ which he calls the song of election.

"Gladly you come among us; remain firmly without flattering; all the people want you; may you not fall off the state.

"Here be you firm like the mountain and may you not come down. Be you firm here like Indra; remain you here and hold the state.

"Indra has held it (the State) firm on account of the firm Havi offering; for it Soma as well as the Brahmaṃsapatī has said the same.

¹Zimmer - Altindicisches Leben. p. 162.
²Weber - Comments on Av. III. 3-4.
⁴Av. VI. 87-88; Quoted in Jayaswal's Hindu Polity, pp. 186-87. This hymn occurs in Rgveda, X. 173. Also with slight modification.
"Firm (as) the heaven, firm (as) the earth, firm (as) the universe, firm (as) the mountains let this rājā of the people be firm.

"Let the state be held by you, be made firm by the rājā Varuṇa, the God Brihaspati, Indra and also Agni.

"Vanquish you firmly, without falling, the enemies, and those behaving like enemies crush you under your feet. All the quarters unanimously honour you, and for firmness the assembly here creates (appoints) you."

Majumdar also quotes some passages from Vedic literature to prove that kingship was elective:

"Like the subjects choosing a king, they, smitten with fear, fled from Vṛita."

He argues that two passages from Atharvaveda used in Kauśitaki, referring to restoration of a king to his former throne, certainly point to the system of election.

The advocates of the theory of elective kingship argue that it was the most important function of the people to elect their king. Though it is not clear who were the people who elected the king, but there is no

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1 Majumdar, R.C. - Corporate life in Ancient India, p. 93. Rv. X. 124, 8.
2 Av. III. 3.4.
3 Kauś. 16, 30.
doubt that the monarchs were sometimes elected, as is pointed out in the Vedic passages collected by Majumdar.¹
Jayaswal² points out that the institution of kingship was created in the Samiti on the basis of the hymn quoted above. But it appears that the king was not elected by the whole populace but by the Vīśpatis and Kulāpatis. Their choice was perhaps restricted to members of the royal family or, at the most, to the nobles of the clan.

The evidence to prove the existence of the system of elective monarchy in Vedic India is however not very strong. Geldner³ argues that all the passages referring to the king's appointment by the people do not prove the hypothesis of election but merely mention the approval of the king by the people. Macdonell and Keith⁴ state that cases of election were very few; the general mode of succession in Vedic India was the hereditary system. But the fact remains that formal approval by the people at the time of the king's coronation indicates the election of the king previously. The Learned historians contend

¹Majumdar - Corporate Life in Ancient India, pp. 92-105; Av. I-9, Kauś. 16, 27; Whitney's Av. pp. 9-10; Av. IV. 22; Kauś. 14, 24; 17, 28; W. Av. pp. 188-89; Sat. Br., III. 4, 1, 7; S.B.E. Vol. XXVI. p. 87; Sat. Br., XIII. 22, 18; S.B.E. Vol. XLIV. p. 303; Av. III, 5-7; W. Av. p. 92; Kauś. 19, 22, Ait. Br. VIII. 27; Sat. Br. V. 1; S.B.E. Vol. XII. p. 109; Av. IV. 22; Rv. VII. 6-5; Sat. Br. XII. 9, 3; S.B.E. Vol. XLIV. p. 269; Av. IV. 23. 1; W. Av. p. 190. Av. VI. 88. 1.10; W. Av. p. 346.
³Geldner - Vedic Studien. 2, 303.
⁴Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 211.
that "this seems the more probable sense" and further state that "this is no proof that the monarchy was not sometimes elective."

Altekar\(^1\) opines that it was no doubt elective sometimes, as is pointed out in the Rgveda, but the passage describes the subjects as being afraid on the occasion. He further argues that if the king owed his crown to the people, why should the latter be afraid of him? Altekar also holds that the passages which refer to the restoration of a kingdom to the former ruler do not refer to general support but to that of the aristocracy.

Kingdhip in Vedic India is known to have passed from father to son for at least some generations, as is the case of Tristus and Purus. The Satapatha Brāhmaṇa\(^2\) refers to Aṣṭṛtu Paumāśyaṇa of Śrīṋyас inheriting the kingdom through ten generations (Daśapurusāṁrajyaṃ). Mention of the expression Rājaputra,\(^3\) meaning son of the king, also confirms the view that kingship was hereditary.

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\(^1\)Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 80.


\(^3\)Rv. X. 40, 3; Ait. Br. VII. 17, 6; Pañc. Br. XIX. 1, 4; Kāth. Saṃ. XIV. 8; Taitt. Br. III. 8, 5, 1; Sat. Br. XIII. 4, 2, 5; 5, 2, 5 etc.
The monarchy was normally hereditary in India is evident from literary and epigraphic sources. In descriptions of the coronation ceremony too, the king is mentioned as the son of a king. Generally, the law of primogeniture was followed; all the authorities on politics in ancient India approve of the eldest son's right to the throne. There are, however, a few contrary references in history, and these will be discussed below.

Advocates of the prevalence of the elective system of monarchy contend that the system was prevalent till the 8th century A.D. But this view is futile, as it does not hold good even in the case of Rāma's appointment as the heir-apparent. All their arguments lose weight when it comes to the question: if the people had the right to choose their king, why could they not prevent Rāma's exile and consecrate him as their king. Moreover, the table of the Ikṣavāku family shows that the kings before and after Rāma ascended the throne through inheritance. The same argument applies to the stores of king Pratīpa and Yāyāti offering the crown to their younger sons Śantanu and Puru, ignoring the right of their elder brothers. The people assembled in front of the palaces to know the reason behind the change but went back after the satisfactory explanations given by
their respective kings. Altekar\textsuperscript{1} points out that these incidents do not show that the people chose their king; rather, they reveal the fact that they had already acknowledged the law of primogeniture.

Later, during the Mauryan and Gupta periods too, the accession to the throne was regulated by the hereditary factor. Majumdar\textsuperscript{2} argue that Rudradamana (130 A.D.), Harsha (C. 606 A.D.) and Gopala (C. 750 A.D.) owed their thrones to public support. But this view is found in the Punegynic documents of their court poets. Rudradamana is styled as a king through his powers in the Junagadh inscription.\textsuperscript{3}

Harşavardhana was elected king not of his kingdom of Thanesvara but to the throne of the Maukhari kingdom of Kannauja after the death of his brother-in-law, Grahavarman, by the ministers of the kingdom and not by the whole populace.

Gopala put an end to anarchy in Bengal and became a king; after him the kings of the Pala dynasty ascended the throne through inheritance.

\textsuperscript{1}Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 82.

\textsuperscript{2}Majumdar - Corporate Life in Ancient India. p. 105.

\textsuperscript{3}E.I. Vol. IV. p. 2.
This discussion shows that the general mode of succession to the throne was the hereditary system based on the law of primogeniture, and that after the Vedic period, the divine character too was attached to this institution, making it altogether impossible for people to choose their king.

Ratnahavimsī

After ascending the throne, the kings were to undergo a ritual called Rājasūya\(^1\) which formed an integral part of ancient Indian polity. Details of this ritual are found in the Brāhmaṇa and Smṛti literature.\(^2\) The verses used in the ceremony are preserved in the Samhitās of Yajurveda.\(^3\) There are traces of popular elements in the ceremony though it was royal in nature.

The main features of the consecration ceremony were the following: The king offered oblations at each Ratnin’s house which was called Ratnahavimsī. This was a preliminary ritual, followed by Abhishechniya, anointment of the king with various kinds of soil and

\(^1\)Av. IV. 8, 1; XI. 7.7.


\(^3\)Taitt. Sām. I. 8; Kāṭh. Sām. XV; Mait. Sām. II.6; Vāj. Sām. X.
water. After this some symbolic ceremonies like Digvijayasthāpana, treading upon a tiger's skin, a mimic cow raid or sham fight were performed. Before the actual enthronement of the king he was to take a vow which in modern terminology may be called the 'coronation oath'. After sitting on the throne a game of dice was played in which the king was made the victor. Then presents were given to the priests and received from the subjects who were suitably rewarded in return. Lastly, a royal procession was taken out.

In the whole ceremony of consecration, two rituals are important from our point of view, viz., Ratnahavimsī and the coronation oath, since both of them seem to involve some democratic elements.

Pointing out the importance of the Ratnahavimsī ceremony, R.S. Sharma remarks: "Perhaps no other single ritual throws so much light on the political organisation of the Aryans in the later Vedic period as the Ratnahavimsī ceremony, which forms a part of the Rājasūya coronation sacrifice."

The Ratnins were those at whose house the new king offered oblations to the appropriate deity. They

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1Sharma - Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 132.
were also known as king-makers i.e. Rājakartṛ,¹ or Rājakṛt.² Different texts offer lists of Ratnins with slight variations.³ Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa’s list is more in conformity with the Sāmhitās of Yaju than that of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

The following are the 15 Ratnins which are mentioned as forming the college of jewel holders.

Purohita, he was the domestic priest of the king and represented God Brhaspati. He is mentioned as Brāhmaṇa and tops the list of Ratnins in the texts other than Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa’s where he is mentioned after the Senāṇī and is designated as Purohita. He was the alter ego of the king and the sole, confidential adviser who continued to dominate the social, religious and political scene till the last days of Hindu monarchy.

The second name in our Brāhmaṇas is that of a Rājnya or Rājā who appears to be the king himself, as the oblation at his house is paid to Indra, the warrier par excellence.

¹Ait. Br. VIII. 17.5.
²Av. III. 5-7. Śat. Br. III. 4.1.7; XIII. 2, 2, 18.
With the exception of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, the third name in the texts is that of Mahiṣī, the chief queen. The sacrificing king offers oblations to Aditi, representing the earth goddess at her palace. Jayaswal argues that Mahiṣī’s importance lies in her completing the spiritual self of the king, but none of the texts warrants this assumption. Moreover, if she completed the spiritual self of the king, how is it that the text does not show her making oblations along with the king? As is evident from the later evidence, the chief queen was consecrated along with the king.

After Mahiṣī follows Vāvātā, the favourite wife, whose position rested on the favour and love shown to her. She is mentioned as a Ratnin in Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa only and is followed by a Parivrkti who stands fourth in the list of Ratnins in the majority of texts as the discarded wife on account of her barrenness. She is not considered to be a regular Ratnin in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in which she is mentioned in the end, as No. 12. The references show that she was not considered to be a source of positive help to the king but her importance was that of a negative nature as the king offered oblation to God Nirṛti at her palace to ward off any evil which might overcome him. The king is advised not to stay at her place. This indicates that the king’s coronation was to be expressly
approved by all the Ratnins; even the hostile elements were not neglected at the time.

Next is Senāni who tops the list in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa but is numbered fifth or sixth in other texts. He is described as the commander-in-chief in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which attributes this to the growing military influence in society.

Sūta has been interpreted as the court-minstrel or chronicler by the historians but at his house oblation was offered to Varuṇa for which a horse was donated as a sacrificial fee. This shows that he was the holder of the reigns of the chariot of the king, which was considered to be an important job due to the constant warfare for prominence during the latter Vedic period. Even later in the Epic period, this post had not lost its importance. Śri Kṛṣṇa acted as Sūta to Arjuna.

Grāmanī too figured in the list of the Ratnins. It is difficult to say how only one Grāmanī was represented on the list. Whether he was a representative of the Grāmanīs is not clear from the available data. Jayaswal⁠¹ argues that he was in charge of a town. But this contention seems incorrect because the later Vedic

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society was essentially rural in nature. We may accept the view of Eggling who suggests that the Ratnigrāmanī was the chief of the village nearest to the place of consecration.

Kṣattrīya's association with God Śāvita does not throw much light on his position. He is interpreted as the chamberlain, the umbrella holder over the king.

Samgrahitṛ's position is a disputable point among the historians. Jayaswal interprets him as a treasurer on the testimony of Arthasastra where he is called Sannidhātā, while R.S. Sharma criticises the above contention by stating that "there is no point in projecting later ideas into the meanings of the term". He interprets Samgrahitṛ as a driver (holder of reins) on the plea that at his house oblation was offered to Aśvins who are represented as swift-moving gods in the sky having horses as their means of conveyance (Vāhana). But we do not think that there is any harm in projecting the latter idea, which is a development of the earlier ones, and accept the interpretation that Samgrahitṛ was

1Eggling - S.B.E. Vol. XII. p. 60.
3Sharma - Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 137.
most probably the treasurer.

Bhāgadugha, the literal meaning of which is 'milcher of share', was possibly the tax-collector, Bhāga (compulsory tax) replacing "Bali" (voluntary tributes). Offering at his house was made to Pūṣana, the god of cattle. From this R.S. Sharma¹ infers that in all likelihood this tax was collected in cattle rather than in grain.

Aksāvāpa is common to all the lists and this expression is interpreted to denote the dice thrower. Though it seems a bit strange for the king to approach the dice thrower before his consecration and seek his approval but the gesture does not seem to be altogether futile because considerable importance is attached to the game of dice in the coronation ceremony in which the king is deliberately made to win the game.

Govikartana's name occurs with variations in the texts. Maitarāyanī Saṃhitā describes him as Govikarta. He is styled as Gavayaccha in the Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā, while Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa refers to him as Govikartana, meaning butcher or killer of cows. Ghoshal² interprets the

¹Ibid., p. 138.
expression as chief huntsman. The importance of Govikartana (occurring in the Ratnin list) shows that hunting was still the chief occupation of the people and a favourite pastime of the royal house.

The next two Ratnins seem to be allied to each other as they are mentioned as Takṣa-rathakārau, i.e. carpenter making the chariot wheels. R.S. Sharma,\(^1\) wrongly describes Śūta as a wheel-wright; he was a charioteer. The sacrificial fee of all kinds of metals\(^2\) at their place suggests their association with metals and the importance of experts in crafts without which regular life could have been paralysed.

Pālāgala, the last Ratnin, is mentioned only in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa as a messenger\(^3\) carrying errands from place to place. His inclusion in the Ratnin list is a striking feature as he is considered to be a Śūdra. The sacrificial fee of skin covered bow, leather quivers and red turban strengthens the fact that he was a messenger and the above-mentioned articles were offered to him to enable him to defend himself on the highways.

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\(^1\) Sharma, R.S. - Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 136.

\(^2\) Mātt. Saṃ. II. 6, 5; Āp. SŚ. XVIII. 10,17.

\(^3\) Sat. Br. V. 3,1, 11.
Historians are not, however, certain about the exact significance of the Ratnins. Whether they formed the king's council or were royal servants who had nothing to do with politics, or just had a ceremonial importance is not clear from the references in the Brāhmaṇical texts.

W. Rau\(^1\) suggests that some of them were domestic servants of the royal household; according to his interpretation, Bhāgadugha cuts the meat, the Kṣattrī carves and perhaps serves. He may also be a cook.

Spellman\(^2\) holds that the list of the Ratnins makes more sense at the religious than at the political level. His discussion suggests that some, like Aksāvāpa, did not actually carry the role suggested for them by these titles but merely symbolise them at rituals to represent good fortune. According to him, the Ratnins as a class had a ceremonial rather than a political task.

Mabette\(^3\) states that "we cannot discover anything that can meaningfully be called a state apparatus in the course of an examination of the titles and functions of

\(^1\) W. Rau - Staat and Gesellschaft in alten Indien, p. 102.


\(^3\) Mabette - Truth, Myth and Politics in Ancient India, p. 22.
Heesterman\(^1\) goes to the extent of stating that the Ratnahavimśī ceremony was based on the idea of marriage and rebirth which he thinks is clearly represented by the groups of royal consorts who acts as wombs. He further states that the representatives of four Varnas can also be compared with the idea of embryonic covers.

R. S. Sharma\(^2\) criticises Heesterman's assumption by pointing out that this interpretation does not coincide with the explanations of the rituals given in Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇas. Moreover, according to the learned historian, the institutions of mother and wife were "so well established that the very idea of entering the wombs of his wives and thus treating them as his so many mothers must be regarded as extremely reprehensible and repulsive, not only to the sacrificer but also to the Brāhmaṇa priests."

Jayaswal\(^3\) designs the Ratnins as high functionaries.

We cannot agree with the contention that Ratnins were not state functionaries or king's counsellors. The

\(^1\)Heesterman - The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration. pp. 55-56.

\(^2\)Sharma - Political Idea and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 142.

\(^3\)Jayaswal - Hindu Polity. p. 196.
Ṛgveda does refer to Ratnins. It bears testimony to the existence of the king's entourage constituted of the Purohita, the Senāṇī and Grāmāṇī, etc. In the later period, Pañcavimśa Brāhmaṇa² refers to eight Viras—brother, son, Purohita, Mahiśī, Sūta, Grāmāṇī, Kṣatrī and Saṃgrahitr—forming a sort of king's council and we can safely presume that the institution of Ratnins was an outcome of a developed society in which even the Śūdras were considered as a recognised part.

The Brāhmaṇa literature further bears testimony to the fact that the Ratnins were high dignitaries because they are described as givers of the kingdom.³ Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā describes them as limbs of the ruling power by stating that if the Ratnins become vigorous and energetic, the State also becomes vigorous and energetic.⁴ The formula recited at the Ratnin's place states that the king is consecrated for the sake of the Ratnin and that he makes the Ratnin his faithful follower.⁵ All this goes

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¹Ṛv. I. 1, 1; VII. 18, 13; VII. 62, 11; 107, 5. etc.
²Pañc. Br. XIX. 1, 4.
⁴Mait. Śām. IV. 9, 8.
⁵Sat. Br. V. 3, 1, 12.
to prove that the Ratnins formed a sort of bureaucratic organisation, which took an active part in the politics of the State.

Jayaswal\(^1\) is of the opinion that the selection of the Ratnins was made on the basis of class and caste representation. While the method of selecting the Ratnins is not definitely known, the fact cannot be refuted that they represented different communities, i.e. the Purohita represented the Brâhmaṇas; the Rāja symbolised the Kṣatriya class; the Graṇāṇi represented the third order i.e. the Vaiśyas while Rathaṅra and Takṣaṇa were the representatives of those who lived on craftsmanship, some like Kṣattr, Saṁgrahitṛ and Akṣāvāpa cannot be determined with certainty; Pālāgala surely was from Sūdra extraction which is the most striking feature of the Ratnins list. Mahiṣī, Vāvatā and Parivṛkti represented the fair sex.

The king’s succession was expressly approved by the Ratnins, which clearly establishes the democratization of the monarchy during that period, which was gradually tending to be military in character.

R.S. Sharma\(^2\) argues: "At the early stage when

\(^1\)Jayaswal - Hindu Polity. p. 197.

\(^2\)Sharma - Political Ideas and Institution in Ancient India. p. 142.
life had not been so much compartmentalized and purely governmental functions not completely differentiated from other functions there is nothing incongruous about the banding together of several functionaries. Several passages convey in no uncertain terms the political importance of the personages whom the king visited in connection with the Ratnakavims ceremony.

Coronation Oath

The other important ritual of the coronation ceremony from the democratic point of view is the oath-taking ceremony. The king is called Dhrtavrata\(^1\) in the later Vedic texts. He is administered an oath after enthronement. The vow which the newly consecrated king took is recorded in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, according to which it was common to all the regimes. The oath, which the king repeated to his priest, ran as follows: ["Let the Kshatriya be sworn through his great coronation of the Indra-ritual. He is to repeat with faith:] 'Between the night I am born and the night I die, whatever good I might have done, my heaven, my life and my progeny may I be deprived of, if I oppress you.'\(^2\)

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1 निखसाकृतस्य

\(^1\) वि. सम. x. 27; तात. सम. i. 8, 16; तात. ब्र. l. 7, 10, 2; अय. ब्र. viii. 18.

\(^2\) अय. ब्र. viii. 15. [स्लो-स्त्रय भक्तिमयहि लोकं सन्मिष्ठा 

बन्धुयां पिन्हदुहुः क्रमापि] याः प्रेमार्थिः तदः सम्माक्स्यादांतुक ते नाहि 

सुभक्तिः प्रक्ताः धार्मिकं यदि ते धार्मिकिः।
Jayaswal\(^1\) states that the oath is business-like and of a contractual nature. There is no reference to any divine agency and the promise was made to the officiating priest as representative of the whole society. If there was no reference to any divine element in the coronation oath there is even no hint of any sort of contract or representative capacity of the priest. Jayaswal did not refer to the first part of the text — the words uttered by the priest — which was as follows: "If you do me harm, in that case all the merit acquired by you from the night of your birth to the night of your demise, your pious deeds, longevity and issue will be stolen by me."\(^2\) This suggests that the promise was made by the king to the priest and not to society. Still we cannot assume that the king was left free to behave arbitrarily; he was bound to some extent through his coronation oath.

By the period of the Epics the oath administered to the king had become more democratic in nature and was called Pratijñā. It ran as follows:

"Mount on the Pratijñā (take the oath) from your heart (without any mental reservation), in fact and by

word of mouth;

'I will see to the growth of the country regarding it as God himself and (this) ever and always;

'Whatever law is here and whatever is dictated by Ethics and whatever is not opposed to politics I will act according to, unhesitatingly. And I will never be arbitrary'.

Checks on King's Autocracy

Despite the divinity of character attached to the personality of the monarch, he was not left to behave arbitrarily. Were there any checks to curb the functioning of a monarch if he tried to behave in an unjust, oppressive and autocratic way? Actually, a number of checks were devised by the ancient Indian law-givers which cannot be called constitutional in the modern sense of the term, but they were practicable enough to prevent a tyrannical king from behaving in an arbitrary manner.

During the Vedic period one of the greatest checks on the king's authority was the power and prestige of the

\[1\text{Mbh. Śāntiparvan. LVIII. 115.116.}\]

\[\text{प्रत्येकम् सर्वोहस्तत मनं कर्मणां सिद्धिः।।}
\text{पातसिद्धान्तं धार्मिका शर्मेच हत्येव बालिकू।।}
\text{रक्षावर्त्धो नौत्तजो कण्ठनीतिविधाय।।}
\text{कषु ईष्क हरियामस्मि सवः संत्वन।।}\]
Purohita. Vedic instances show that he accompanied the king to battlefields and prayed for his success. The following verses emphasize the importance of the Purohita for a king:

"That king indeed overpowers all opposing forces with his valour and might who maintains Brhaspati (the Brähmana priest) well attended and praises and honours him as (a deity) deserving the first share (of the homage due);

"He (that king) verily abides, well established in his own place; to him the holy food flows for ever; to him the holy food flows for Viśāḥ bow down of their own accord, the king with whom the Brähmānas take precedence;

"Irresistible, he wins the riches of his enemies and his kinsmen; the king who affords protection to the Brähmana desiring help — him the gods help."

All these passages show that the king who attended his priests well was always favoured with good luck. Vaśiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra are the most famous priests of the period.

Rapson remarks: "Far more important in the

1Rv. IV. 50, 7-9.

estimation, at least of the composers of the hymns, was the Purohita, or domestic priest, whose position represented the height of a priest's ambition. He further remarks that "the Vedic Purohita was the fore-runner of the Brāhmaṇa statesmen who from time to time in India has shown conspicuous ability in the management of affairs." This statement of Rapson carries weight as throughout Indian history the domestic priest was the conscience keeper of the king and the most confidential adviser.

The second check was exercised through the popular assemblies of the Vedic period, why it was considered most important for a king to have cordial relations with the Sabha and the Samiti for having firm footing is discussed in a chapter on the 'Vedic Popular Assemblies'. In the later period, when big empires came into existence instead of the small kingdoms, both these institutions died out but not without leaving better institutions to carry on the tasks of administration firmly — the Mantriparīṣad and the local assemblies.

The Mantriparīṣad exercised considerable control on the autocracy of a monarch. In Altekar's view, "The administration during the first millennium — the nature, capacity and ability of the two rival limbs of the body politic being the deciding factor,"¹ it is discussed in

¹Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 108.
The duties performed by the local bodies throughout Indian history reflect the concept of decentralisation of power. They carried on the local administration and shared the judicial powers of the king. The king could not impose taxes arbitrarily as they were collected by the local bodies for him. The posts of headman and other office-bearers were hereditary and not a creation of the crown. So a tyrannical king could not exercise his authority through them.

Proper training of a prince was also considered good for taming the arbitrary, tyrannical and whimsical manner of a king. Kautilya suggested a very tight schedule for a king which would keep him occupied the whole day.

If in spite of all these checks, some kings behaved arbitrarily, or were too weak to remain on the throne, were the subjects expected to show passive obedience to them? No, this was not the case in ancient India. The kings had to submit to public opinion. If the kings disregarded the laws of the land, India's ancient law-givers offered the right opportunity to the subjects to revolt against such a king. How this right was exercised is not specifically mentioned. There are a number of kings like Veṇa, Nahuṣa, Sudāsa, Samukha and Nimmi who
lost their lives following a mass revolution, while 
Duṣṭārtu Paumasāyana was expelled and then reinstalled 
on the throne by the people. The Jatakas also record 
many such instances where the kings were expelled by the 
subjects. The Mahābhārata explicitly recognises the 
people's right to revolt against a tyrannical king or 

to migrate from his country.¹

In the Rāmāyaṇa also the system is limited Monarchy, 
because the Purohita, the ministers and other officials 
played a vital role in the administration. Dr. Upendra 
Thakur throws some light on the point, while states,"from 
a study of the Rāmāyaṇa, it is clear that the impartial 
nature of the king and his simplicity in action, sound 
and systematic counselling, national solidarity, social 
harmony, prosperity of the people and of the nation, national 
defence and well defined inter-state relations were supposed 
to be the chief attributes of Monarchy. The significance 
of great administration, specially the idea of a Rāmarājya 
necessitates a benevolent, limited Monarchy given to preserve 
these high ideals."²

¹Mbh. XIII. 86. 35-6. ।
ते ने राजकृति हृदय: प्रजा: सं नायन निष्ठुः

²Thakur Upendra - Some Aspects of Ancient Indian 
History and Culture. p. 164.
The king's personal interests were considered to be inferior to those of the public. He is advised by ancient law-givers to give up even his beloved wife, if demanded by his subjects — a crude way of exposing the king's position. The Rāmāyāna bears the best testimony to this ideal; Rāma exiled Sītā instead of being himself convinced of her fidelity.

Kautilya, 1 who was a strong monarchist, also lays down that the king should feel happy in the happiness of his subjects.

The question may well be asked: Was it not a difficult remedy to revolt against a king who had a paid and standing army at his disposal? Altekar advances the following arguments in answer to this question. It was not difficult in ancient India to dethrone a king since no regular army existed during those days; secondly, all the villages and towns had their army for times of distress and the people could find a leader among feudatories or sub-feudatories, who were popular and known to them, to lead them in their revolt. Examples of this are found in history; during the reigns of the last kings of the Mauryan and Sunga dynasties. So the idea of a revolt

1 Arth. I. 19.
against such a king and installation of a new king was not a remote one.

Moreover, the restraints on kingly power were moral and spiritual sanctions and the dread of hell. The Arthasāstra holds that a king who oppresses his subjects and misappropriates public funds will be punished by Varuṇa, the chastiser of kings. These sanctions proved quite effective. As Apte points out: "The moral and spiritual sanctions behind this acred law were a sufficiently powerful motive, more than we can possibly imagine today, for restraining the wilful exercise of authority by the king."2

"If by autocracy is meant absolute government wherein the ruler is all in all and above whom there is no authority to control and influence his acts and deeds, then it does not admit of application in case of the Mauryan monarchs", remarks Dikshitar3 while discussing the nature of the Mauryan monarchy. This

1 Arth. IV. 13. – जम्मुक्तयथा राजा जम्मुक्तयथा माति ।


3 Dikshitar – Mauryan Polity. p. 90.
statement holds good not only for the Mauryan monarchy but for the institution of Hindu monarchy on the whole. The foregoing discussion reveals that the Hindu monarchs were no autocrats, for all their acts were restricted by the above-mentioned institutions and ideals.