SOURCES
To study in detail the Council of Ministers in ancient India we have to take into account the remoteness of the age, the want of chronology and lack of material lying scattered in literature, epigraphs and foreign testimony. These difficulties need a thorough examination of the sources at our disposal to assess their relativity and authenticity.

**VEDIC LITERATURE**

In spite of the fact that the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmanas* and the *Upanisads* cannot exclusively be termed as political treatises, there are certain references in them to indicate the existence of tribal assemblies such as the *Sabhas*, *Samitis* and *Vidathas* leading us to form an idea of the early political institutions prevailing in that remote age. Though it is difficult to assign any definite date to the earlier literature, the authorities on them have time and again tried to draw certain conclusions. Here we will discuss the views of different authorities regarding the date of compilation of the Vedic literature.

The earliest source of our information is the *Rgveda*. It consists of 1,028 hymns in ten Books or *Mandalas*. There is a great controversy regarding its date of compilation. According to one of our
leading historians R.S. Sharma, the Rigveda was compiled orally around 1200 B.C. He adds that its recitation did not prevent inflation at the beginning and end. He considers Book X as the post Rigvedic one. A.K. Warder is of the opinion that the Rigveda was composed probably between 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C. Romila Thapar maintains that parts of the Rigveda were originally composed prior to 1000 B.C. G. Bongard Levin, the renowned Russian Scholar has given new dimensions to the problem by harnessing the archaeological evidence to determine its date of compilation. He concludes that it was compiled at the end of the second millennium B.C. and the beginning of the first. Max Müller placed the earliest and the more primitive Vedic Hymns between 1200 and 1000 B.C.

R.K. Mookerji has drawn conclusion on the basis of inscriptions of about 1400 B.C discovered at Boghaz Koi in Asia Minor recording contracts concluded between the king of the Hittites and the king of the Mittanni mentioning some gods as protector of these contracts. The names of these gods correspond to those of the Vedic gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the two Nasatyas. He maintained that the Rigveda and its culture must have established themselves in India much earlier than 1400 B.C to influence the culture of Asia Minor. He added that of the same time as the Boghaz Koi inscriptions are the famous letters from Tel - Al Amarna which refer to Mittanni princes with names of Sanskrit form such as Artatama, Tusratta and
Moreover some of the princes of the Kassites who ruled over Babylonia between 1746 B.C. and 1180 B.C. also bear Sanskritic names like Shurias (Śūrya) Marytas (Vedic Marutas) etc. In the end Mookerji concluded 2500 B.C. as the time of the Rgveda.

Beni Prasad⁷ states that the Rgveda was compiled probably in the third and second millennium B.C. Of all these opinions O. Bongard Levin's⁸ appears to be most tenable. He has based his theory on the archaeological findings made at Atranjikhera where the Painted Grey Ware did not extend beyond the twelfth or eleventh century B.C. Scholars associate this ware with the early Aryans. It appears to be quite appropriate to assume that there were several stages of the Painted Grey Ware Culture associated with Vedic tribes, who, in the beginning, settled in Eastern Punjab and the upper reaches of the Yamuna and the Ganges and then advanced in southerly direction.

The Later Vedic texts, according to R.S. Sharma⁹ were compiled in U.P. in the land of Kuru and Pándula. He places them between 1000 B.C. and 500 B.C. and adds that the date of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and Satapatha Brāhmaṇa cannot be pushed much beyond 700 B.C. or so.
R.K. Choudhary\textsuperscript{11} also places the Later Vedic texts between 1000 B.C. and 500 B.C. G.Bongard Levin\textsuperscript{12} dates the later Sāṁhitās, Āranyakas and Brāhmaṇas between 8th and 6th centuries B.C. The generally agreed number of Upaniṣads is 108, but only 13 are regarded as the most ancient texts; they were composed between the 7th and 4th centuries B.C. according to G.Bongard Levin.\textsuperscript{13}

As a source material of our study, the Ṛgveda refers to the Sabha, Samiti and Vādatha. These institutions wielded considerable influence on king's authority. The Vedas refer to the Purohita\textsuperscript{14} who exercised a great check on the king's absolutism in the early period. The Purohita has been described as the sole adviser to the king. The Atharvaveda\textsuperscript{15} implicitly attributes the judicial character to the Sabha.

The Yajurveda Sāṁhitā and Brāhmaṇa literature inform us about the Ratnahavīṇī ceremony which imparted constitutional significance to the institutions of the king and the Ratnīna who took part in the ceremony\textsuperscript{16}. The Brāhmaṇas\textsuperscript{17} provide us valuable information about the position of the king and the entourage that surrounded him. The Purohita has been called Rāstragopa (Protector of the people) in the Brāhmaṇa literature. Max Müller\textsuperscript{18} rightly observes that 'passages in the Brāhmaṇas full of genuine thought and feeling, are
most valuable as pictures of life and as records of early struggles which have left no trace in the literature of other nations.

Though Upaniṣads are regarded as philosophical works, the moral ideals of kingship are very elaborately described in the Chhandogya Upaniṣad.
The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad also informs us about the moral obligations of the king.

SŪTRAS

The next important source of our information after the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads is comprised of the Sūtras. Scholars have divergence of opinion regarding the date of their composition. Bühler placed them between the 6th and 3rd centuries B.C., and formulated as descending chronological order consisting of Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vāśiṣṭha and Āpastamba.

Beni Parsad states that the Sūtras can roughly be held to reflect the life of the period from 500 B.C. to 100 B.C. R.S. Sharma opined that the Dharmasūtras were written in prose between 500 B.C. and 200 B.C. He adds that the law books of Āpastamba (Dharmasūtra) and Baudhāyana (Dharmasūtra) seem to have been the oldest and not of Gautama. He considers Vāśiṣṭha (Dharmasūtra) also a later work.
No doubt, the Sūtras are not connected with political philosophy and statecraft, but the Gautama Dharmaśūtra informs us about the duties of the king and the main sources of law. It is for the first time in this Sūtra that we come to know about the rate of taxation as 1/6th of the land produce. The Apastamba Dharmaśūtra and Baudhāyana Dharmaśūtra are also informative regarding taxation.

EPICS

The Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata constitute the two well known Epics in ancient India. The Rāmāyana, known as the Ṛṣiṣkavya, is ascribed by tradition to Vālmīki. In the present form the Rāmāyana has 24,000 Ślokas. The date of its compilation is again a controversy. According to Ramashraya Sharma it has been assigned to the 6th century B.C. It is definitely anterior to the Mahābhārata, because it does not refer to the Mahābhārata or its characters, while the Mahābhārata, besides giving a summary of the Rāṣa Kathā and referring to Vālmīki and his characters, also contains a verse from the Rāmāvana. Moreover, he adds that the occurrence of non-Pāṇinian grammatical forms in the Rāmāvana also indicate that the composition of the epic took place prior to the age of Pāṇini.
Winternitz maintains that the original *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāma was a human being was composed during the fourth and the third centuries B.C. But there are certain passages which were composed later. He adds that it assumed its present form at the end of the 2nd century A.D. when Rāma was regarded as a divine incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Romila Thapar, an eminent Indian Historian, is of the opinion that the two epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, are concerned with the events which took place between 1000 B.C. and 700 B.C., but the version which survives dates from the first half of the first millennium A.D. Romila Thapar maintains that the events described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* probably occurred later, since the scene is set further east than that of the *Mahābhārata* in eastern U.P. This added that the description of Rāma's crossing the peninsula and conquering Ceylon is the representation of Aryan penetration into the peninsula. As the movement of the Aryans towards south is generally dated about 800 B.C., the *Rāmāyaṇa* must have been composed at least fifty or hundred years later. However in the end it is further added that an early date for the *Rāmāyaṇa* is possible if it is conceded that the conflicts between the agriculturists of the Ganges valley and the more primitive hunting and food gathering societies of the
Vindhyā region and the transference of these events to southerly direction may have been the work of later editors.

G. Bongard Levin²⁶ states that the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana were written down between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. He pertinently adds that the main subject matter of these poems and many of the stories stem from the first half of the first millennium B.C.

Suvira Jaiswal²⁷ says that the original work consisting of Books II to VI with certain interpolated passages was composed perhaps in the 3rd century B.C. when Rāma was regarded as human. Books I and VII are later additions wherein Rāma came to be deified.

We may agree with Suvira Jaiswal that the original Rāmāyana consisting of Books II to VI, except certain interpolated passages, was composed perhaps in the 3rd century B.C. when Rāma was simply a human being and not an incarnation of Viṣṇu and his deification and identification with Viṣṇu are later hypothesis. The other important epic as a source of our information is the Mahābhārata. Though it is generally claimed that it was composed by Vyāsā²⁸ within a period of three years,
A critical study of this work reveals that it is not the work of a one man or one period. We learn from the Mahābhārata that it was composed by Vyāsa after the great battle and was known as Jayakāvya. In the beginning it consisted of 24,000 ślokas and was known as Bhārata. Later it came to be known as Śatasāhasrī Samhitā consisting of one hundred thousand ślokas. But at present there are 84,136 ślokas (in the critical edition) divided into 1948 chapters and 18 parvans in all.

The scholars have, time and again tried to fix the date of the Mahābhārata. Weber30 opined that the Mahābhārata dates from the 3rd Century B.C. to 1st Century A.D., but he assumes that certain additions were made during the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. also.

A.S. Altekar31 and Ray Chaudhary, on the basis of the average durations of the ruling dynasties have tried to conclude the date of the Bhārata war as 950 B.C., 1151 B.C., 1260 B.C., 1370 B.C., 1400 B.C., and about 1412 B.C. According to K.P. Jayaswal32 on the basis of the genealogy, the date appears to be 1424 B.C. On the basis of a statement in the Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II the date of the Bhārata battle has been fixed about 3103 B.C.33
Therefore, according to the traditional view the date ranges between 3103 B.C. and 950 B.C. B.P. Roy does not agree with the traditional view and says that the lowest limit 950 B.C. cannot be regarded as the date of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* on the linguistic and historical grounds.

B.P. Roy asserts that the upper limit may be supposed to be the 6th century B.C. and the lowest to be the 3rd century A.D., but a few interpolations were made during the 4th century also. He adds that the Epic *Bhārata* was transformed into the *Mahābhārata* during a long span of time at least from the 6th century B.C. to the 3rd and 4th century A.D. and process of development was in full force during the Mauryan and Śunga periods. Its *Satasahasṛi* form was complete by the 5th century A.D.

Winternitz has fixed the date of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* between the 4th century B.C and 4th century A.D. Hopkins says that the mass of didactic matter was inserted in the *Mahābhārata* between 200 B.C and 200 A.D. He adds that the *Anuśāsana, Śānti* and other Parvans were recognised as separate books in the period between A.D. 200 and 400 A.D.
According to Romila Thapar, the *Mahābhārata* is not the work of one man and that the story of the war has acquired a number of episodes and a variety of interpolations. The archaeological excavations conducted at Hastinapur, the capital of one of the families involved in the *Mahābhārata* war, have corroborated the Purānic evidence that it was washed away in about 800 B.C. by flood of the river Ganges. This incident is referred to in the Purānas as having occurred in the reign of the 7th king ruling at Hastinapur immediately after the war which suggests approximate 900 B.C as the date of the war. Incidentally the evidence of the flood is also the level at which the Painted Grey Ware Culture ends at Hastinapur. Attempts have been made by the archaeologists to fix the date of the Bhārata battle on the basis of the archaeological excavations conducted at Hastinapur and other places of the Gangetic Valley. The excavations at Hastinapur represent two periods; the period of Red Ware having red slip and the Painted Grey Ware. The Painted Grey Ware having red slip and has been attributed to the early Aryans. The first phase ends with the Bhārata war about 950 B.C but the C-14 dates from Hastinapur are late and those from Atranjikhera are early and corroborate the dates arrived at by B.B. Lal. If the
Painted Grey Ware is attributed to the Aryans, this may suggest the representation of the culture of the Purus and the Bhāratas. R. S. Sharma states that 'it is difficult to use the material drawn from the Mahābhārata for one particular period, for its narrative portion looks back as far as the 10th century BC, and didactic and descriptive portions belong to as late as the 4th century AD. He adds that the date of the compilation of the Sabha Parvan cannot be pushed beyond the first century BC. Anusasana and the Sānti Parvans were compiled at the same time. He further adds that the Rājadrharma section seems to have been inserted in the first centuries of the Christian era.

Moti Chandra, on the basis of certain events such as the siege of Madhyākāś by Yavanas, despatch of an embassy to the Greek king Antiochos and his detailed analysis of the geographical and economic data contained in the Sabha Parvan, has concluded that it must have been composed during the reign of Puṣyaṃitra Śuṅga in the second century BC.

This view of Moti Chandra has been accepted by Suvira Jaiswal. To quote her 'This is the most probable date of the first appearance of the Mahābhārata as the harbinger of Brāhmanical
She adds that the entire Epic as we have at present was not produced in the Sunga period and additions were made to it in the subsequent centuries. She further asserts that the Sānti Parvan and the Anusāsan Parvan are of a later date and the final redaction appear to have been completed some time in the early Gupta period. Narāyanika section of the Mahābhārata has been ascribed to the third or the first half of the fourth century A.D., according to Suvira Jaiswal.

The Ramayana is not only a sacred book, but also an important source of information for our study. It narrates the moral ideals of the king and tells us about the main functions of the ministers. It refers to the importance of the ministers to the king. It informs us about the three types of deliberations. The force of public opinion on the Kingly power is very elaborately explained in the Ramayana.

The Purohitas continued to exercised a good deal of authority on the Kingly power during the Ramayana age, we learn that Vasishtha, the priest of king Dasaratha, looked after the latter's demise till the arrival of Bharata.

The Mahābhārata is a mine of information for the present study. The Santi Parvan is most
informative for our topic of study. It discusses the duties of the ministers and other officials. It propounds the idea that the king should adopt right path in governing the realm. It brings out the importance of ministers by saying that the king cannot run the administration even for three days without the assistance of the ministers. The Mahabharata describes the Mantri Parisad.

SMRITIS

The Smritis occupy an important place in the Hindu literature. The date of the Smritis is enveloped in obscurity. Their origin is mythical even to some of the ancient writers. In the words of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa 'owing to the scattering of Śākhās, human error or carelessness and the variety of topics, the beginnings of Smritis could not be traced'.

Of all the Smritis that of Manu is the most important. It is generally ascribed to the period 200 B.C.–200 A.D. K.P. Jayaswal thought it to be a work of the Śuṅga period on the basis that it exalts the position of the Brāhmaṇas and accords divine sanctions to kingship. In the opinion of R. S. Sharma its style and contents suggest its final compilation in the first or second century A.D. Hopkins places Manu to the commencement of
or even before the Christian Era.

The other important Smṛti is the Yajñavalkya Smṛti. P.V. Kane assigned this Smṛti to A.D. 100-300 A.D. Jolly places the Yajñavalkya Smṛti in the 4th century A.D. R.S. Sharma says that the Yajñavalkya Smṛti assigned to the period circa A.D. 200-400 A.D. arranges the material of Manu in a more concise and systematic manner.

The Vismu Smṛti has been assigned to the period 100 A.D. - 300 A.D. by P.V. Kane.

The Smṛtis of Nārada, Brhaspati and Katyāyana are completely legal Smṛtis. Nārada and Brhaspati have generally been assigned to the 5th century A.D. and Katyāyana probably to the 6th century A.D. According to G. Bongard Levin the laws of Yajñavalkya (3rd century A.D), the laws of Nārada (fourth and fifth centuries A.D) also date from the early centuries A.D.

The Manu Smṛti contains valuable information on the present study. The seventh part of this book informs us about the duties of the king, the ministers and other officials. The Manu Smṛti enjoins upon the king to appoint seven or eight ministers for his assistance in his day to day
administration. It discusses almost all the topics related to our study. Notable are the qualifications of the ministers, mode of deliberation with the ministers etc. It also refers to the test of ministers but does not elaborate the process by which they were conducted.

The *Yajñavalkya Sūtra* lays stress on the legal matters. It arranges the material of *Manu* in a better form. *Nārada* also borrows the ideas from *Manu*. *Brhaspati* informs us that the king was required to attend to other political and religious works and abide by the opinions of the judges and the rules laid down in the scriptures. The *Kātyāyana Sūtra* also informs us that the king was required to run the administration in accordance with law and not according to his wishes.

**ARTHASAŚTRA**

The *Arthaśāstra* is perhaps the most important work on ancient Indian Polity. Tradition has it that it was composed by Kaūpilya. The internal evidence of this work also says that it was composed by one who had freed the territory, the *Śāstra* and Śāstra from the Nandas. Later on the *Kāmandakesaśāra* and the *Deśakumāra Charita*
of Daṇḍin also justify that the work was composed by Kaūṭilya. The Jayamaṅgala Tīkā of Saṅkara tells us that Kaūṭilya, Chaṅkya and Viṣṇugupta were the three names of one and the same person.

Scholars like Fleet who believe that it was the work of the Mauryan period draw our attention to the common data provided to us by Megasthenes and the Asokan inscriptions. It is further added that in terms of words and style adopted in this work it appears to be posterior to Āpastamba and Baudhāyana and anterior to the Sūtris of Mānu and Yājñavalkya.

But there are scholars who do not think that it is the work of Kaūṭilya. For instance, Hillebrandt draws attention to the fact that the Arthaśāstra of Kaūṭilya contains the two phrases "Iti Kaūṭilyaḥ" and "Neti Kaūṭilyaḥ" as many as seventy two times. The use of the name of Kaūṭilya in the third person may suggest, according to this author, that it was not the work of Kaūṭilya. Another argument advanced against the supposed Kaūṭilya's authorship of this work is that the name of Chandragupta Maurya, whose Chief Minister he is said to have been does not occur even for once in the Arthaśāstra.

Agreeing with Jolly, Winternitz doubts the
Kauṭilya’s authorship of this work largely on the question of the seven fold classification of the sovereignty of the state which he regards as too pedantic for a practising politician to formulate.

Ray Chaudhary also does not accept the Mauryan period as the date of the *Arthasastra* and maintains that it is a later work. He says that the language of the *Arthasastra* is Sanskrit, but the Mauryans used Pāṇḍīt as is evident from Asokan inscriptions.

Otto Stein is of the view that for providing the contemporaneity or otherwise of the account of Megasthenes and the *Arthasastra* of Kauṭilya a comparison of the administrative system revealed in them is of very great importance for he argues that Megasthenes could not have invented the administrative system described by him. His comparison of the two works has also led him to the conclusion that the *Arthasastra* contains indications of a highly cultural level than may be gathered from the statements of Megasthenes.

However, Kangle contrelerts the theory of Otto Stein assuming that the *Arthasastra* does not profess to be a document describing the actual conditions in any particular kingdom. It is a
theoretical treatise intended for the guidance of
rulers in general and based mainly on the earlier treatise
of the same kind.

After making a detailed study of the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, Kangla refers that there is no convincing reason why this work should not be regarded as the work of Kautilya who helped Chandragupta Maurya to come to power in Magadha in the 4th century B.C.

Kane has also made a detailed study of the date of the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya. He is of the opinion that this work cannot be regarded as indebted to the *Sārtis* of Manus and Yājñavalkya and hence posterior to them in date. He adds that, on the contrary, it appears extremely probable that these *Sārtis* knew and utilized this text of the *Arthasastra* and are, therefore, later in date than this work.

Though Romila Thapar believes that the *Arthasastra* was originally written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta who was also known as Chāṇakya, it was edited and commented upon by various later scholars until in about the 3rd or the 4th century A.D. Visnugupta worked over the entire text.

R.S. Sharma is also of the opinion that the *Arthasastra* is not the homogenous work written at one time and one place. Although most of the book is
written in prose following the Sūtra style prevalent till the first century B.C. or so, its portions in verse were inserted later. He is of the view that the Arthasāstra was finally compiled in the first century A.D.

Most sober and balanced is the viewpoint of G. Songard Levin who observes that the new research has revealed that in its present form the Arthasāstra was written down in the early centuries of the Christian Era, but many of its details unquestionably reflect features of the state structure pertaining to the preceding period and in particular to the Mauryas.

PURĀNAS

The Purāṇas were revised several times by several writers and handed over from generation to generation. There are eighteen Purāṇas divided into three Schools after Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu. A few Purāṇas are regarded as the oldest and they were compiled by the Gupta period. R.K. Chaudhary places the Vaiṣṇu, Viṣṇu, Mārkandeya and Matsya Purāṇa between 300 and 600 A.D. In the opinion of R.C. Hazra all Sāpti Chapters of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa were inserted sometime about the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.
R.C. Hazra\textsuperscript{71} maintains that the date of the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa} falls in the last quarter of the fourth century A.D. and adds that several chapters including Sārti Chapters in the \textit{Matsya Purāṇa} were composed in the Gupta period\textsuperscript{72}. The \textit{Agni Purāṇa} is also important for our study. P.V. Kane\textsuperscript{73} has concluded that the Poetic section of the \textit{Agni Purāṇa} was compiled about or little after A.D. 900 and probably after 1050 A.D. Bambahadur Mishra says that the \textit{Agni Purāṇa} is later than Rājaśekhara (A.D. 880–920). At another place he lays down that the chapters on dramaturgy and poetics of the \textit{Agni Purāṇa} are later than Rājaśekhara and Dhananjaya but earlier than Bhoja (A.D. 1018–1054).

As a source material of our study the \textit{Agni Purāṇa} informs us about the qualifications of the ministers in detail. It deals with the duties of king and discusses the importance of the ministers to the king in addition to the mode of deliberations with the ministers.

\textbf{NĪTISĀSTRAS}

The most important of the \textit{Nītisāstras} are of Kāmāndaka, Śukra and Somadevasurī. The \textit{Nītisāra} of
Kamandaka is a concise form of the Arthasastra of Kauṭilya. As against 160 chapters of the Arthasastra it contains only 36 chapters. A.S. Altekar says that Kamandakaśīya Nītisāra was probably composed in the Gupta period (C. 500 A.D.). K.P. Jayaswal attributed this work to Śīkharāsvamī, a minister of Chandragupta.

According to R.S. Sharma the Kamandakaśīya Nītisāra was compiled about 800 A.D.

The Kamandakaśīya Nītisāra discusses almost all the topics connected with our study. It tells us about the qualification of the ministers, mode of appointment, functions of the ministers etc. It categorically speaks of the Mantri-mandala which was no other than the Council of Ministers. The moral ideals for kingship are very elaborately discussed in the Kamandakaśīya Nītisāra.

The Sukraśīya is another source of our information. The date of its compilation is a controversy. Gutsav oppert places it in the pre-Christian period. A.S. Altekar is of the opinion that the work is a composite one and was being retouched down to the 14th century A.D., but its greater part has been ascribed to the 11th or the 12th century A.D. Of late Lallanji Gopal has attributed this work to the nineteenth century A.D.
The Sukranītiśāra adds much to the present study. It is for the first time in the Sukranītiśāra that we get the portfolios of the ministers. It provides us information about the duties and responsibilities of the king in addition to their qualifications. It enables us to have a clear picture of the day to day working of the Council of Ministers with the assistance of ministers under the control of the king. The Nītivākyāmaṛta of a Jain Scholar Somadevasuri has been ascribed to the 10th century as the date of compilation.

**Buddhist Sources**

The Buddhist Piṭakas also constitute an important source of our study. Specially speaking the Dīwaha Nikāya forming a part of the Sūtapiṭaka contains some important references to the ancient Indian polity. The Jātaka stories in Pali literature assumed their present form after successive redactions. They underwent modifications and this process continued till the days of Aśoka. The Jātakas provide us a picture of Indian society of a period earlier than third or fourth century BC. The Divyāvadāna another Buddhist source of our information is not the work of one period. Its major portion which deals with the later Mauryan
history was composed in the 2nd century A.D., while some of the portions were composed in the third or fourth century A.D. The Divyāvadāna provides us valuable information about the Council of Ministers during the time of Asoka. It narrates the story how Asoka was deprived by his Council of Ministers of giving more money in charity to the Buddhist Saṃgha.

In the opinion of Winternitz the Malindapañha was composed in the first century A.D. According to Rhys Davids this work belongs to a period between A.D. 100 and 200 A.D.

CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE

Among the classical Sanskrit works Pāṇini's Astādhyāyī is an auxiliary source of our information. It is generally ascribed to 5th century B.C. G. Bongard Levin places it in the 5th or 4th century B.C. H. Scharfe suggests 5th or 6th century B.C. as the date of Pāṇini but he adds that if Eggermont is right in fixing the date of Buddha's death at 348 B.C., instead of 484 B.C., then the date of Pāṇini could come down a hundred years. Pāṇini's Astādhyāyī tells us interalia about the types of Parisads prevailing during that period. According to R. S. Sharma the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali is a work of second century B.C. Patañjali has been considered a contemporary of Puṣyamitra Śunga. In the opinion of D. C. Sircar the Mahābhāṣya
contains several interpolated passages and adds that in the present form the work is not earlier than the second century A.D. Suvira Jayswal lays down that all the passages contained in the Mahābhāṣya may not reflect the condition prevalent in the Śuṅga period. Harmut Scharfe says that Patañjali must have composed his work some time around 150 B.C.

The Mālvikāśaṅkara, of Kālidāsa speaks of the Mantri Parishad. His other two works the Raghuvamśa and Abhijñāna Sākuntalam also speak of the existence of the ministers during the Gupta period.

The most important works of the times of the Vardhanas are the Harṣa Charita and Kādambari of Bāna Bhatā. Both these works were left in complete by Bāna and were later on completed by his son Bhūṣana Bhat. In the Kādambari the author describes the qualification of a minister named Śukanāsa. The Mudrārākṣasā gives us the added information that there was a Chief Minister called the Mantrīsmukhya among the ministers. This work is placed after 737 and 738 A.D. and before 754 A.D by Jagan Nath Aggarwal though Jayaswal would make us believe that it is a work of the Gupta period.

The Mṛchhakatika, the Kāthāsaritāśakar, the Tilakamañjari, the Prthvīrāja Rāṣṭra and Hemārāṣṭhākāvya are some of the other important works of our study.
FOREIGN ACCOUNTS

The earlier record is left by the Greek ambassador Megasthenes who visited India during the times of Chandragupta Maurya. Some of the scholars are of the opinion that Megasthenes visited India more than once. But on the authority of Strabo and Pliny it is believed that he visited India only once and did not stay for a long time. During his stay in India he noticed the contemporary condition and wrote about the duties of the king and various departments. He mentions accessors and the counsellors of the king in his writings, who were the same as the Mantrins and the members of the Mantri Parisad of Kautilya.

Fa-hien who was a Chinese Buddhist monk and visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramāditya and wandered throughout the country preserved his observations on the administration of this country in his work Fo-Kho-Hi (records of the Buddhist Kingdoms). This work also gives us some information on the present topic. Basing his argument Watters' s translation of the Hsi-Yü-Chi, U.N. Ghoshal has opined that there was a smaller and a larger Council at the beginning of the Harṣa's reign.
Hiuen Tsang visited India during the time of Harṣa Vardhana and tells us about the condition of the country at that time.

**EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCES**

Epigraphic evidences add much to our knowledge. The first and the foremost epigraphs are the inscriptions of Aśoka reflecting the political condition of India during that period. That the Mantri Pariṣad existed during the Mauryan period is attested by the Aśokan inscriptions as yet. It is true that the word Mantrī does not occur in them but the word Parīsa (Pariṣad) does occur in the Rock Edict VI of Aśoka.

The existence of the Council of Ministers is attested by the Junāgadhi Inscription of Rudradāman I. It speaks of the Matisachīvas (Councillors) along with the Karmasachīvas (Executive Officers). If K.P. Jayaswal is to be believed this inscription also highlights the constitutional dictum in ancient India that the king could not do anything substantial without the concurrence of his Council of Ministers. From the internal evidence of the Junāgadhi inscription he tells us how his Council of Minister has referred to sanction him the required amount of money for the
repairs of Sudarsana lake.

The Council of Ministers continued to exist during the days of the Guptas also, for instance the Bihad inscription of Kumārgupta I speaks of Pārśadas (the members of the Parisad) during the reign of Kumārgupta I. Similarly Kermadanga inscription of the same ruler speaks of the ministers under Guptas.

There are numerous inscriptions of the post Harsa period which clearly prove the continuance of the Council of Ministers during the period of our research.
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