# THE VAṂŚĀVALĪ
## FROM
# CHAMBA

### REFLECTIONS OF A HISTORICAL TRADITION

**Romila Thapar**

सोशल साइन्स बहाः
SOCIAL SCIENCE BAHA

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*Back cover shows Mahesh Chandra Regmi in the audience at the inaugural lecture on 24 April, 2003. Photograph by Bikas Rauniar.*

Indian civilisation, it has been said, was characterised by an absence of a sense of history. This view has been held since the eighteenth century when the early Orientalists first read Sanskrit texts and argued that there were no histories of India in Sanskrit. But few attempts were made to explain why this was so, if, in fact, it was so. The search was for histories that would conform to post-Enlightenment European histories. These emphasised a chronological frame and a sequential narrative of mainly political events with some attempt at evaluating sources and drawing out causes. Obviously, such histories, which were specific to European traditions about the past, were not to be found in India. The one exception that was always quoted was the *Rājataraṅginī*, the twelfth-century history of Kashmir by Kalhaṇa.

The insistence on Indian civilisation being ahistorical facilitated the claim that the Indian past was being rediscovered by colonial scholarship. This was not altogether incorrect. The decipherment of the *brāhmī* script in the early nineteenth century introduced the vast body of inscriptions as sources of history. Archaeological excavations revealed tangible evidence of historical activity. This was done partly out of curiosity about the Indian past. But the more significant aspect was that the texts used for writing Indian history were now supplemented by inscriptions and archaeology. However, the interpretations provided were coloured by colonial policy.

The absence of historical writing was attributed to Indian

society having been static and unchanging. The recognition of change and the explanation for it is essential to a sense of history. It was a common belief that only societies such as the Judaeo-Christian had a concept of history. This had a clearly marked eschatology of a beginning and an end, and of change determined by a sense of linear progress. India, it was said, knew only a cyclic concept of time that emphasised repetition, whereas a historical sense required linear time to emphasise the uniqueness of events.

Critical enquiry into historical texts has emerged from the extensive discussion on the past in recent times. What is of interest is not so much the question of how closely these texts approximate to our modern notions of history, but rather why they were written and what they were intending to say; and whether they referred back to records of the earlier past. Were the later texts which drew on the earlier intended to create a historical narrative?

The historical tradition in early India was expressed in various genres of texts—genealogies, biographies claiming to be historical, chronicles, and annals in the form of inscriptions. These tended to provide the official version of social links and events. The oral tradition was also present although it was largely confined to genealogies and to epic poems. These also claimed to be historical. The category I shall be speaking about, however, is the *vaṃśāvalī*, the chronicle written as historical narrative. They were written in various parts of the sub-continent but pertaining to the local region. Their format and content suggest attempts to retain elements from earlier genres of texts as representative of the past.

It has repeatedly been said that only one text in early India could be regarded as history, and this was the *Rājataraṅginī*.[1]

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1. M.A. Stein, *Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅginī or Chronicle of the Kings of*

Without doubt it was the foremost of the chronicles and impressive on all counts. Nevertheless, it is one among many. I would like to discuss a lesser one and comment on its relation to what is called the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition: *itihāsa* meaning 'thus it was', and *purāṇa* being 'that which is old'—the compound phrase suggesting a historical tradition. Chronicles of lesser importance maintained locally often provide a different glimpse of events from depictions in the major ones.

My example is the *Vaṃśāvalī* from Chamba, a small hill state in the western Himalaya on the banks of the upper and middle Ravi river.[2] Its style is by no means as sophisticated or elegant as that of the *Rājataraṅginī*. It is a fraction of the length of the Kashmir chronicle, but the text illustrates the points I wish to make about early Indian chronicles. It relates the history of a small kingdom, hemmed in by larger ones.

Let me first sketch in the background. Spatially, the territory is well defined. The Ravi rises in the Pir Panjal range, is proximate to the Mani Mahesh area, and flows through the broad Chamba valley. In the upper and narrower valley there were meadows close to the settlement at Brahmor. Livelihood came from agro-pastoralism, with transhumance when animal herds were taken to the higher mountain pastures in the summer.[3] There are many more tributaries in the middle reaches at lower elevations around Chamba. These provided the required fertility to establish a kingdom.

*Kashmir*, Delhi, 1960 (reprint).

2. J.Ph. Vogel, *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Vol I, ASI New Imperial Series, Vol 36, Calcutta, 1911, has the text of the *vaṃśāvalī*. B.Ch. Chhabra, *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Vol II, Delhi, 1957, is substantially a collection of the later inscriptions from the area starting in the fourteenth century CE. See also, *Chamba District Gazetteer*, 1963.

3. Brahmor is referred to as Gaderan or the habitat of the Gaddi shepherds.

Three aspects are significant and characteristic of *vaṃśā-valīs*. These texts suggest the point when the state emerges as a kingdom, they provide legitimation for rulers through genealogies and marriage alliances, and they set out the process of acculturation to Sanskritic culture that became a significant historical change. The establishing of a state in the form of a kingdom was necessary not only to asserting power and organising an administration but also to welding the many diverse groups living in a region. From separate communities they had to be converted into the subjects of the king. The record of this change was the chronicle. It was written in a form constructed around a linear chronology with a sequential narrative relating events that involved the elite of the region.

Most of these events revolved around establishing kingdoms and dynasties. Consequently, the legitimation of each new dynasty became a requirement. This drew on a connection with the past. Links were fabricated between local rulers and the ancient gods and heroes listed in the *Purāṇas*. The kingdom came to be established only when the links were accepted. The *Purāṇas* were texts focussing on a particular deity and its sect. However, some, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, had a lengthy section of ancient genealogies and dynasties. Later writers sought links with these genealogies.

As part of the transition to a kingdom, the region underwent a process of acculturation. The mainstream Sanskritic culture, dominant in the powerful kingdoms of the plains, was introduced into the local culture in regions where kingdoms were being newly established. This enabled those who were inducted into this culture to obtain positions of dominance. This acculturation took the form of introducing caste as a form of validating social hierarchy. It also changed the economies of the area from agro-pastoralism to peasant farming and trade. Further, it brought in a new religion or changed an existing one

to suit the needs of the state. Patronising a particular religion was a historical choice. Literate, ritual-knowing *brāhmaṇas*, catering to the needs of those now claiming to be royalty, had an edge over others in this process of acculturation.

Chronicles have a recognisable format. There is generally an initial section that is concerned with cosmology and mythology. This provides links to the descent lists of early heroes. These are then connected to the origins of local clans and lineages. This is followed by a rather garbled history of early rulers in the area and sometimes of the dominant neighbour to whom local history is linked—in this case, Kashmir. Chamba lay in the shadow of Kashmir. It was also accessible to the plains of the Punjab, the routes being along the rivers. There was therefore some vacillation in the politics and alliances of Chamba— between closeness to the kingdom of Kashmir or to those of the northern Indian plains. Finally, in the third section, often coinciding with the firm establishment of a kingdom, the history of dynastic succession is narrated at greater length. This often coincides with evidence from local inscriptions on which it may have been partially based.

Access to the plains meant that communication from the plains to the mountains went through these major river valleys. This resulted in trade routes with goods travelling from one elevation to another—what has been referred to as a 'vertical economy'. The routes also came to be used for the initial coming of Puranic Hinduism through the arrival of the Śākta, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects. These were to become the established religions supported by royal patronage. Their distribution was largely in the fertile plains and the lower Himalaya. Nevertheless, despite the overlay of Puranic Hinduism, local religious beliefs and practices continued. Buddhism was the more commonly established religion beyond the mountain passes and into the higher Himalaya. Given the flexibility of frontiers there

was much interface between various religious groups and communities.

One may well ask what led to the writing of chronicles? The historical scene in northern India underwent a mutation during this period.[4] A rise in the number of small kingdoms increased competition for political power among tributary rulers. This inevitably meant even more attention than before to campaigns, marriage alliances and the establishing of status; in short, the basic data for chronicles.

In the late first millennium CE, individuals sought opportunities for upward mobility that frequently took the form of establishing principalities and claiming *kṣatriya* status. Such persons often claimed to be Rajputs. The commonly held explanation for this is that the Rajputs were threatened by the Turkish invasions and fled to safer places. But these movements began prior to the Turkish invasions, and the *Vaṃśāvalī* from Chamba, for instance, makes no reference to the Turuṣka/Turk, or the Yavana/West Asian, at the start of the narrative. It is more likely that the fertile, uncultivated valleys of the lower Himalaya attracted adventurers from the plains in the earlier period.

Control over an area was often established through conquering it. Conquest and heroism therefore became significant idioms, reinforced by evoking past heroes. Alternatively, forested areas and waste lands, of which there were plenty, could be colonised, by making extensive grants of land or even villages. These were made to *brāhmaṇa*s or to religious institutions as gifts and to a lesser extent to administrators, who could claim the revenue in lieu of salaries. Eventually, the claim was extended to the land itself. Such grants assisted in the transition to states and to the gradual acculturation to the

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4. R. Thapar, *Early India*, p. 405ff.

*mārga*, the established mainstream norms.

Grants to religious beneficiaries had multiple purposes. They accumulated religious merit for the king. They assured him legitimacy by providing a genealogy that covered up obscure origins and allowed claims to *kṣatriya* status. They established a network of support for the king and for Sanskritic culture. Above all, the grant became the starting point for opening up waste land to cultivation and tapping resources from a rich environment with a scanty population. *Brāhmaṇa*s, for example, as recipients of such grants, were often pioneers in agriculture even if they were not meant to be agriculturalists. Kingdoms required a developed agrarian economy and/or substantial commerce to support the administration of the state. Conversion of forest dwellers into tax-paying peasants was a source of revenue.

The spread of Puranic Hinduism from the plains facilitated the conversion of local clan-based societies to *jāti*s/castes. New caste names occur in inscriptions and there are references to *varṇas*. Conversion from clan to caste was not one-sided. Some local rituals, beliefs and customs became part of Puranic Hinduism. Migration of professionals from elsewhere at the upper social levels were frequent, as among learned *brāhmaṇa*s and *kāyastha*s who sought employment in the new kingdoms. But others also migrated, such as stone masons and craftsmen employed in the construction of temples in the style of conventional architecture. The local shrines often built of wood in the hills were superseded by the royal stone temples. Conventional iconographic representations of deities decorated the temples, replacing the earlier forms. Religious icons encrusted with symbols are among the more obvious reflections of acculturation. Chamba stone temples are said to bear the imprint of the

Gurjara-Pratihāra style from the plains.[5]

The court poet and the royal priest emerge as authors of the chronicles, taking over from the bards. The *vaṃśāvalī* is then written in the form common to sub-continental culture. The bards continued to record genealogies, marriage alliances and minimal property relations. The tradition was reformulated and those that now became its authors controlled this source of royal validation. The attempt was to authenticate it by reference to what was believed to be past tradition.

Recipients of grants of land were potential founders of dynasties. The requirement of founding a state was therefore not confined to conquest. Internal confrontations and competition could also result in a reshuffling of social groups. Some emerged as more powerful than before. But the rhetoric of conquest remained a necessary part of the heroic and courtly image.

For the king, legitimacy could be further endorsed by claiming to be an incarnation of a deity. This also served to attract the loyalty of his subjects. Even where incarnation was not claimed, the king in the court and the deity in the temple became counterpoints of power, extending political strategies. The royal temple receiving patronage from the king, was additionally symbolic of the political authority of the patron, and incorporated some of the local religious idiom.

Chronicles use multiple sources. Among the more important were inscriptions of the same period, issued as the official record of royal activities. And where chronicles are absent, inscriptions often read as annals. Many inscriptions focussed on the king and the court, but in their function and intention they reached out to a wider audience than the chronicle. They were

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5.   M. Postel, A. Neven, and K. Mankodi, *Antiquities of Himachal*, Bombay, 1985, p. 111.

located at places frequented by the public such as temples where they are inscribed on temple walls and on the pedestals of images. The precise dating of inscriptions provided a skeletal chronology for the chronicles as well. Their location was useful in setting out the geography of events. Inscriptions that were legal documents recording a grant, for instance, tended to be inscribed on copper-plates. These were kept safely by the family of the recipient.

The names of the grantees reflect interesting changes in the *brāhmaṇa varṇa*. Early grants, perhaps pointing to migrant *brāhmaṇa*s from well-established *agrahāra*s in the northern plains, refer, for example, to Manika Śarman of the Kāśyapa *gotra*, whereas later grants refer to *badu* Legha and to Cipu, son of Rāsi, son of Jin and said to be of the Bhāradvāja *gotra*. *Badu* was the local term for *brāhmaṇa* in Chambayali, the language of the region. The names could suggest a recruitment of local priests into the *brāhmaṇa varṇa*.

The *Vaṃśāvalī* of Chamba is in many ways typical of regional chronicles.[6] It was updated to about the seventeenth century in the version that survives, authored, it is said, by Chamba *brāhmaṇa*s attached to the royal court. It is written in Sanskrit, but of a poor quality. There might have been a version in Chambayali as well.[7] Elements of Chambayali are recorded in the later inscriptions, suggesting the gradual forging of a local identity—a fusion of local culture with the cultural and linguistic idioms used by the elite and in accordance with more distant fashions. Nineteenth-century scholars report the existence of a rendering into Urdu as well and which was consulted for corroboration. This doubtless coincided with the use of Persian in Mughal times. Some Persian technical terms related to admini-

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6. Vogel, op cit, p. 78ff.
7. Vogel, op cit, p. 78ff.

stration are used in the inscriptions of the late period.

As with most such texts, it is not a completely reliable history in the earlier part but it becomes more dependable—in terms of cross reference to other sources—from the founding of the first dynasty. The Chamba kings sought connections with the heroes of the Solar line, the Sūryavaṃśa. The first part of the *Vaṃśāvalī* provides a list of ancestors in successive order from whom the Chamba rulers claimed descent but with some emendations. Mention is made of the late *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a source. Descent is traced from deities to human ancestors, from Nārāyaṇa to Brahmā, Mārica, Kaśyapa, Vivasvant, Manu, and then to Ikṣvāku, the ancestor of the Sūryavaṃśa lineage. The list goes down to the *kṣatriya* hero, Rāma, and further, in accordance with the pattern of descent in the *Purāṇa*. Names are bunched together either with common suffixes such as -*aśva*, or taken as a group from Puranic sources. There is also an attempt to link ancestors to believed events from the past. One ancestor is said to have been killed by Abhimanyu in the war at Kurukṣetra.[8] The last of the ancestors died childless, thus bringing the succession to an end.[9] Despite its being in a line of patrilineal succession, these ancestors did not establish a dynasty and are, therefore, listed as individuals. The narration of origins with Puranic links ends the first part of the chronicle.[10]

There is an apparent break at this point. What follows is a narrative of local rulers, with some background material on those seen as the more important ones. The precise status of the earlier among these is somewhat ambiguous and the ambiguity gives way subsequently to a history that is more firm.

The narrative continues with the statement that after many

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8. Chamba Vaṃśāvalī, henceforth *CV*, v. 27.
9. *CV*, v. 34.
10. *CV*, vs. 1-34.

years the rājā Maru established a succession.[11] Maru was both a yogi and a king, and is said to have re-established the Sūrya-vaṃśa that had faded out in the early Kaliyuga, the current cycle of decline. This re-establishment of status enabled Maru to marry the daughter of a king and presumably claim to be a *kṣatriya*. Yet his territorial base was the Kalapa *grāma*, technically a village. Such rājās were more likely chiefs of clans, where the root meaning of the word rājā is 'the one who shines'. The transition to rājā meaning king would assume the existence of a state system to support the title. This would have come later. His having to go to Kashmir with his eldest son, Jayastambha, suggests that he was actually a subordinate intermediary. The family established itself at Varmapura—possibly what is later referred to as Brahmapura, the present-day Brahmor. This was the first town of importance in the valley, located in the upper reaches of the Ravi valley. Jayastambha was brought up in Kashmir, therefore Chamba may have been part of the territory of Kashmir at this time. The reference to Maru being a yogi is suggestive of possible shaman connections common to the early religious articulation in the region. Maru anointed his son as king and departed to practice his yoga. This can be read as a cover-up for Maru having been superseded. The departure of rulers given to *tapas* and yoga in favour of successors occurs at various points in the narrative. Although it may have been a legitimate preoccupation of some, it could also have signified an enforced dynastic or generational change. There is a shift now from ancestors to dynasties.

After a few successors we are told that because a particular heir-apparent was devoted to yogic practice, the reigning king appointed Meruvarman as his successor. This is explained as

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11. *CV*, vs. 35-43.

being for the good of the state/*rājya siddhaye*.[12] With Meru-varman the history of the kingdom comes to the forefront. The suffix *-varman* perhaps suggests a claim to *kṣatriya* caste. He is said to be the tenth in succession after Jayastambha but his relationship to the previous king remains ambiguous. He may not have been the son or even a kinsman. Meruvarman, in his inscriptions, claims to belong to the Ādityavaṁśa, an alternate name for the Sūryavaṁśa, and to the *moṣūṇa gotra*. One wonders why this *gotra*, not mentioned up to this point, is now introduced and why it should carry a seemingly uncomplimentary name.

Meruvarman's act of what might be called 'sanskritisation', or upward social mobility, was to do what was required of *kṣatriya* rulers. He installed images of deities such as Narasiṁha, Durgā, Ganeśa and Nandi—both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava deities—at Brahmor, the political centre at that time. The image of Nandi had a *rājaśāsana* written on the pedestal, in somewhat faulty Sanskrit, palaeographically dating to about the late ninth century CE. These images are still in worship.

Meruvarman's grandson, Lakṣmīvarman, was killed in an attack by the Kīras, the neighbouring people of the mountains.[13] The story about the birth of Lakṣmīvarman's son, Mūṣaṇa-varman, was a stereotype, narrated curiously in chronicles from various parts of the sub-continent. The widowed queen being pregnant was rescued by the ministers and went into hiding in the mountains, taken care of by the *brāhmaṇa* guru of the family. The appurtenances of a kingdom in the form of ministers and *rājagurū*s are by now established. In the mountains she gave birth to a son, who, when he came of age, faced both alliances and hostilities. Eventually, he regained the lost throne,

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12. *CV*, vs. 43-48.
13. *CV*, vs. 49-60.

and ruled independently as Mūṣanavarman.

This story seems to emphasise a link with Meruvarman through taking his *gotra* name as a personal name. But it could also be suggesting a break. It acts as the origin myth of this second section of the chronicle and serves to introduce the third section. The third echoes the pattern of dynastic descent in the Puranic tradition where the legitimacy of the dynasty came through caste status and political power. Genealogical connections were now less important.

From the inscriptions of Mūṣanavarman's successors it is clear that the name had a special significance. They refer to themselves as belonging to the Ādityavaṃśa and the *moṣūna/mūṣuna gotra*, or the *mauṣana kula* or the *mūṣaṇa vaṃśa*.[14] Vogel suggested that, in a couple of instances, *mauṣana* could be read as *pauṣana*, linking it to Pūṣan, the solar deity. But he recognised the grammatical problem in doing so.[15] Most inscriptions do not support this reading. *Pauṣana* is an unlikely *gotra* name, nor is it likely that Pūṣan and Āditya would be used as *gotra* and *vaṃśa* names in the same title.

The alternative explanation is more credible. The root for the name is *mūṣa*, meaning a mouse. Vogel mentions that the popular explanation for the name Mūṣanavarman is associated with the child in exile being guarded by a mouse.[16] The mouse could have been a totem animal of the clan and the word was later linked to other meanings. It could also be associated with Ganeśa, who is sometimes referred to as *mūṣavāhana* in mythology, since his vehicle is a mouse.

As a dynastic name, *mūṣaka/mūṣika*, is known from other

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14. Vogel, op cit, pp. 141ff; 164; 197.
15. Vogel, op cit, pp. 97-98.
16. Vogel, op cit, pp. 97-98.

more illustrious dynasties.[17] The stories are similar and may reflect a stereotype in origin myths, or some borrowing between migrant authors. The young prince and heir is said to have grown up among the *mleccha*s, and these were people outside caste society, and often people of the forest. Obscure origins can be disguised as exile. The gaining or regaining of a kingdom would have involved raids, looting, and violent confrontations. The spatial scale seems smaller actually than the impression given in the Chamba version since Mūṣanavarman is said to have used the village of Pangi, granted to him by his father-in-law, as the base of his operations.

The words *mūṣaka* and *mūṣaṇa* also mean a thief or a plunderer. Was this then a memory of how local people viewed the intrusion of a new family where intervention is seen as plunder? Or, does it indicate a local family claiming greater rights in a system that had previously supported a relatively egalitarian distribution of resources? The establishment of the state sharpens the divide between those who produce and those who appropriate. The existing order could have been disrupted and control over land obtained through violent means. The mouse in the ancestral myth may have been invented to provide a possibly more acceptable explanation of the word *mūṣaṇa* when its meaning of plunder or theft had to be avoided. This anecdote may also illustrate the rise of obscure families to *kṣatriya* status which is referred to in the *Purāṇas* as the creation of new and other *kṣatriyas*.[18]

A few generations later, the king Sāhilavarman was granted

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17. For example, the Guhilas of Marwar and the *Mūṣaka-vaṃśa-kāvya* of the Ay kingdom of north Malabar. *Epigraphia Indica* XXXIX, p. 191ff; Ganapati Rao, 'Extracts from the Mūṣaka-vaṃśam', Travancore Archaeological Series, II.1.10, pp. 87-113.

18. F.E. Pargiter, *The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, Delhi, 1975 (reprint), 53, … *kṣatram anyat kariṣyati.*

a boon of ten sons by the eighty-four *siddhā*s, who appeared and blessed the king.[19] Their presence points to the continuing importance of earlier religious idioms and to sources of religious power alternate to the Puranic religions. The Nātha yogi, Carpaṭa, is said to have blessed the king to ensure his victory against other *kṣatriya*s, presumably the feudatories. The Yoga Siddhās remained a source of power. The association of Carpaṭa underlines the arrival of the Nātha religion as well as the increasing contact between this region and the northern plains. Possibly, it was also a concession to non-Sanskritic culture since yogis and *siddhā*s related more closely to the popular religion.

Judging by the *Vaṃśāvalī*, Sāhilavarman was active in the evolving of the state of Chamba. He founded the city of Champa on the Iravati/Ravi, which is said to have been protected by the goddess Champāvatī who slew the demon Māhiṣa. Temples were built to house the *lingam*s that had appeared miraculously prior to the reign of Meruvarman, doubtless viewed as a benediction from Śiva. Further temples were required to house Vaiṣṇava deities. A royal capital would be the seat of the court and of the administration supporting the kingdom, both of which presuppose prosperity. The location of Chamba meant a shift from the higher, narrower valley of Brahmor, to a fertile plateau at a lower altitude. This provided more land for cultivation and access to other valleys where agriculture could be introduced through grants of land. Agriculture brought revenue through taxes. The location was also more accessible to the trading networks that were emerging in the lower Himalaya. The state of Chamba was taking shape.

But validation was also required from the ideology of Puranic Hinduism to support the king and his kingdom. The king

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19.  *CV*, vs. 63-72.

was anxious to install an image of Viṣṇu to be carved from a special stone only available in the Vindhya mountains in central India.[20] He sent his nine sons to fetch the stone but they were unsuccessful. The one they brought had a frog in it—and they, in any case, died in the process. The tenth son brought back the stone and the image was installed in the royal temple.[21]

This story marks another phase. The image from central India would confer another kind of status on the Chamba ruling family. The Bhāgavata religion, focusing on the worship of Viṣṇu, was a religion of assimilation. It incorporated local social groups and their varied practices and beliefs. This facilitated the trend towards political centralisation. Not surprisingly, his successors take the exalted title of *paramabhaṭṭāraka mahārājādhirāja parameśvara*. Substantial grants of land date from this period. They refer to a range of officials, indicating a more complex administration than before. The *Vaṃśāvalī* mentions kings granting land to *brāhmaṇa*s together with seed, rent and so on.[22] The coming of Vaiṣṇava Bhagvatism helped integrate social groups and linked Chamba with wider geographical networks, as the story of the stone suggests.

An interesting episode is narrated regarding the restoration of the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple in Chamba, built as the symbol of royal sovereignty.[23] A later king, Ānandavarman, required finances to renovate the temple, but did not wish to overly tax his subjects. Most rulers had little hesitation in extracting taxes

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20. *CV,* vs. 73-81.
21. The travels of an image in the reverse direction is narrated in a tenth-century Candella inscription from Khajuraho. *Epigrahia Indica,* I, p. 122ff, p. 129 v. 43. An image originating in Tibet, passes through many hands—as a token of diplomacy or sometimes as booty in a campaign—and is installed in a temple at Khajuraho.
22. *CV*, v. 90.
23. *CV*, vs. 98-102.

from the populace, so much so that the tax itself was referred to as *pīḍa*, pain. One night, the deity appeared to him with an assurance that wealth for the purpose would be provided. The next day, villagers arrived bearing copper and announced that a copper mine had been discovered in their village. This was a profitable commodity and the wealth produced by its sale was used on the temple.

The subsequent period was one of campaigns against Kangra in the neighbouring plains and other hill-states with varying degrees of success.[24] Hostilities against Kashmir were not always to the advantage of Chamba, as the version from the *Rājataraṅginī* states.[25] The *Vaṃśāvalī* continues the history but pares it down to a list of local rulers, who were by now, in effect, feudatories rather than independent rulers. The chronicle narrates their campaigns, marriage alliances and religious benefactions. These were indicators of status rather than records of actual power. Among the later kings, Janārdana, despite being a considerable hero comparable to Arjuna in archery, lost his kingdom to the Yavanas now ruling in Kashmir. The reference would have been to the Sultans. His son avenged his father's defeat and retrieved the kingdom after many bloody battles, and eventually made an alliance with the lord of the Yavanas. The campaign against the state of Nurpur was a major event in the closing section of the *Vaṃśāvalī*. The later rulers of Chamba gradually replaced the suffix *–varman* in their names by *–singh*, perhaps because the Rajputs were using this suffix and they had political clout with the Mughal court.

Other sources inform us that subsequently Chamba was attacked by Kashmir and the reigning king replaced.[26] This event

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24. *CV*, vs. 104-120.
25. *Rājataraṅginī*, VII.218; VIII.323, 538, 1443.
26. *Rājataraṅginī*, VII.218.

inaugurated intermittent periods of the subordination of Chamba to Kashmir. Not surprisingly, there is little mention of this in the chronicle. Perhaps this was due to embarrassment at being subjected to attacks, or else it could have been unimportant to the history of Chamba. Independence was reasserted when Kashmir itself failed to withstand the power of Delhi.

This *Vaṃśāvalī* of Chamba is the chronicle of a relatively unimportant state. It illustrates the kind of record maintained in such states. The focus is on the kingdom itself, with little interest in the wider world except when it impinges on the kingdom. This may have been in part because the succession of authors was closely associated with the royal court. The imprint of what might be called a historical tradition, encapsulated initially in the *Purāṇa*s and subsequently based on other sources, is evident. There is a consciousness of incorporating the past using sources believed to record the past. The narrative registers historical change through varying patterns of succession. It is not a continuous, unbroken descent. A change from lineage to dynastic form is recorded, as also the changes of dynasties. Founders of dynasties could have been adventurers from elsewhere or a local chief asserting himself more forcefully than others. The structure of kingship is supported by territorial expansion, by the hierarchy of landed intermediaries, and by administrative functionaries. A noticeable change is that of social hierarchy following the rules of caste.

There is a shift from local cultural forms to those represented in the more powerful kingdoms of Kashmir and of the northern plains. These latter forms are adopted locally by those of higher social status. This is apparent in visual artefacts such as temple architecture and iconography. Still later, however, images of a local style[27] tend to reappear when the status of the

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27. M. Postel et al, op cit, p. 113 ff.

kingdom declines in the later period. Puranic Hinduism is accepted in the initial change to a kingdom, but loyalty to the earlier sects, perhaps more localised and with a sufficiently impressive following, is not discarded. There are three religious strands that weave their way through the narrative, the Nātha Yogis, the Śaivas and the Vaiṣṇavas, each suggesting a different form of acculturation. The yogis represent both the continuation of local religion and an initial movement towards mainstream religion. The establishment and validation of the state seems to be more closely linked to Vaiṣṇava benediction. The proximity of the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple to the king's palace at Chamba, would also emphasise this.

Status is asserted through presumed genealogies, matrimonial alliances, the granting of land to *brāhmaṇa*s, and the building of temples to Puranic deities. That the chronicle was maintained in a small kingdom may be because marginal states require greater validation. The more powerful states articulated their history in other forms as well, such as in the *carita*s, or historical biographies, and frequent lengthy official inscriptions.

There is a purposeful selection from the past of what was thought to be relevant and worth reformulating, and there is a concern for there to be a sequential narrative in chronological order. The attempt is to bind groups together and to provide identities that may be new but are relevant to the times.

The time frame of cosmic, cyclic time as set out in some *Purāṇas* with the grandiose measurement of time in theory of the *yuga*s—the four immensely long cycles of time—is used as a background. However, the central chronology of the *Vaṃśāvalī* focusses on the more limited span of generations of earlier heroes followed by dynasties. The use of regnal years in the *Vaṃśāvalī* and calculations based on eras in the inscriptions indicates an alternative linear sense of time, additional to

the cyclic *yugas*. Linear time was closely tied to the historical tradition.

In conclusion, let me say that in choosing to speak on the *Vaṃśāvalī* from Chamba, I also had in mind the thought that there is a relative abundance of *vaṃśāvalīs* in Nepal. Not least of these is the much-studied *Gopālarāja-vaṃśāvalī*.[28] A genea-logical succession is narrated and claims made to Sūryavaṃśi descent. Some borrowing from Puranic sources seems evident. This is followed by a succession of events and dynasties with an approximate chronology. With this change, events at court as-sume importance as do the institutions linked to the major reli-gious centres and the capital city. Subsequent to this activity, the narrative moves between political and religious interests. The focus on the origin and arrival of the ruler after whom the *vaṃśāvalī* is named introduces yet another dimension.

On reading this, I was struck by the parallels in form and the similarity of concerns to other *vaṃśāvalīs*. It seems to me that there is scope here for comparative studies of the *vaṃśāvalī* as a historical tradition which had currency in many parts of the sub-continent. Juxtaposing and cross-referencing the informa-tion from these texts are likely to throw more light on them as historical writing and the society they represent. What these texts suggest is that far from there being an absence of history, there was a deep involvement with the past and its historically recognisable forms.

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28. D. Vajracarya and K.P. Malla (eds), *The Gopalarajavamshavali*, Wiesbaden, 1985.

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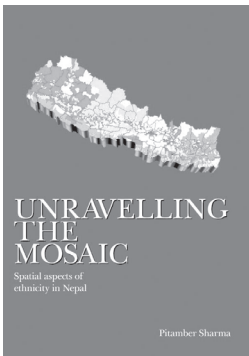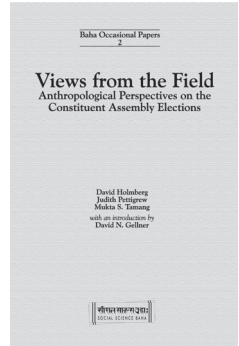
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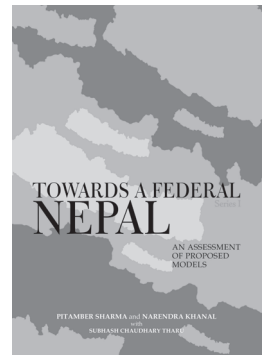
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