

# **Kings, *Prasasti*, and Perceptions: A Survey of Kalachuri Inscriptions**

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## **Abstract**

The ruling dynasties during the post-Gupta centuries played a very crucial role in the transformation of space and the extension of political frontiers. In this quest, they encountered a variety of agencies, and thus arose the need to establish an idealized notion of kingship generally acceptable to the subjects. This led to sincere efforts in the creation of self-images of Royalty through which the Kalachuri rulers reached out to other subjects in Central parts of the Indian subcontinent. The present paper is an overview of the many ways through which popular perceptions of kings were created through the *Prasasti* in the inscriptions.

**Keywords:** *Arajaka, Asvapati-narapati-gajapati-rajatrayadhipati, Epic-puranic traditions, Prasasti, Gosahasra, Hero ideal, Hiranyagarbha, Kingship, Tulaparusadana, Vividha-vidya-vicara-vacaspati,*

## Introduction

Issues related to 'Consent to Rule' and Legitimation during the Early Medieval centuries have attracted the attention of scholars for many decades and the names of Nilakanta Sastri, R.C. Majumdar, R.G. Bhandarkar, H.C. Ray, C.V. Vaidya and D.C. Sircar readily comes to mind. Similarly, one can talk of other works inspired by the research of the above scholars. Popular consent is very essential when we look at the state as an institution. In the period and regions under study, this consent to rule has been associated with various kinds of images like origin myths, divine connections, hero-ideal, etc., reflected beautifully in the *prasasti* sections of inscriptions. Admittedly, these images are at times created by the sources and are subject to numerous interpretations. These images need to be studied in their own right and in the following pages we would be trying to locate the patterns in Kalachuri epigraphic sources and seek some explanations.

Most of the early medieval dynasties invented their origin myths, which formed part of the *prasastis* and take the form of those drawing typically on the *itihasa-purana* tradition of north India based on Sanskrit or Brahmanical traditions. The accounts of the same dynasty, particularly in the case of the Kalachuris in the different records do not tally in the matter of the sequence of rulers, especially concerning the remote past. However, in the more recent past, there may be agreement in a general way. This may mean that these historical traditions record not so much what 'actually happened' but what the authors and their patrons believed or wanted themselves and others to believe to have happened. Such traditions are (were) a conscious attempt to link the historical reality of the ruling dynasty with the mythical lineage of the *itihasa-purana* milieu and thus claim origins that would validate the ruling dynasty within the existing system. This becomes interesting when we compare the same with those of the early historical period, where fewer efforts were made in this regard, and the Ashokan inscriptions are a good example of the same.

The dynastic name Kalachuri is often referred to in the inscriptions as Katachhuri, Kalatsuri, Kalachhuri, Kalachuri, and Kulachuri (Ray, 1931, p. 234). Later records refer to them as *Haihayas*. Most of the Rajput dynasties of the post-Gupta period, like the Candellas, and the Paramaras, among others traced their origin to the lunar or solar race of the *Puranic* times. The traditional theories of their descent are generally mentioned in the laudatory verses of bardic ballads or even in unwritten folk tales or songs. The Kalachuris, like the other contemporary Rajput dynasties, called themselves "*Chandravamsis*" and traced their descent from Haihaya Sahasrarjuna (the son of Kartavirya) who vanquished Ravana. The Banares Plates of Karna dated in the Kalachuri Era 793/ 1043 CE and the Khairha Plates of Yasahkarna speak about the origins of this family in greater detail.

The Early Kalachuris do not call themselves Haihayas and they have been, for the first time, referred to as Haihayas in the Bilahari Stone Inscriptions of Yuvarajadeva II (Mirashi, 1950, p. 216). Some inscriptions of the Chalukyas of Badami and Vengi, dated 7th-8th centuries CE refer to the Kalachuris of Mahismati as Haihayas. One reason for associating the Kalachuris with the Haihayas seems to be the fact that the Early Kalachuris ruled at Mahismati which, according to *Puranic* traditions, was founded by Haihaya ruler Mahismanta. This practice of associating the Early Kalachuris with Mahismati certainly indicates the efforts towards connecting to the remote historical past.

The inscriptions of the Kalachuri dynasty are mostly dated in Kalachuri-Era, also mentioned as *Chedi-samvat* or *Ched-isasya-samvat*. This era was founded in 249-50 CE probably by the Abhiras and commenced with the date of coronation of Abhira king Isvarasena. This era is used for several centuries and in the early records it has been designated simply as *samvat*. It is only by the last quarter of the eleventh century CE that the era has been designated as *Chedi-samvat*, *Ched-isasya-samvat*, and *Kalachuri-samvat* (Mirashi, 1950, pp. xxii-xxvi). This appropriation of the popular calendar coincides well with the political expansion of the Kalachuri state during the period. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, we find them ruling over the Chedi country with Tripuri as the capital and known as the Kalachuris of Dahala (Ray, 1931, p. 751). In the absence of positive evidence, the relations between the Kalachuris of Tripuri and those of Mahismati are difficult to establish. We can say that the Kalachuris had a very humble beginning and elaboration in their *prasastis* came only when their territory expanded as we see in the inscriptions from the tenth century onwards. The way other contemporary dynasties used their control over famous regions to legitimize their rule, the Kalachuri kings connected themselves with the Haihayas of Mahismati to legitimize their rule over the Dahala region. It can be said that the elaboration of inscriptions is missing from Kalachuri records till the process and structure of the state become strong enough.

Speaking of valor and chivalry, the Kalachuri records compare the kings to the thousand-armed *Kartavirya Arjuna* who was triumphant in hundreds of battles and ‘performed as if he had a thousand arms’. Based on the collateral branches of Kalachuris ruling at Sarayupara, Ratanpur, and Kalyana it is clear that the Kalachuri records attempted to pin the ruler down to a family of established political tradition and with the purity of lineage which goes a long way in the process of legitimation.

Mention of marriages in official and public records of early medieval centuries ensured that the ruler of the next generation was of respectable lineage on both sides. The Kalachuri records are full of such details and the case of Queen Nohala is worth mentioning (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 204-223). From the Banaras Plates of Karna dated KE 793/1043 CE, we know that he married Nattadevi who was the princess of the Chandella dynasty (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 236-249). The Cambay Plates tell us that Rastrakuta Krsna II married the daughter of Kokalla, who gave birth to the successor Jagattunga who married two Kalachuri princesses (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VII, p. 38). Yuvarajadeva married the daughter of Chandravarman, the king of Lata and Laksmanaraja II had a matrimonial alliance with the Chalukyas, the rivals of the Rastrakutas in the Deccan. He gave his daughter Bonthadevi in marriage to Vikramaditya IV whose son Tailapa II later overthrew the last Rastrakuta king Karka II in 973 CE. From the Bheraghat stone inscription of Narasimha dated KE 907/ 1157 CE (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 312-320), we come to know that Gayakarna was married to Alhanadevi. She was the daughter of Vijayasimha, the Guhila prince of Pragvata or Mewar and Syamaladevi. Thus, based on these details, one can also say that the upward social mobility of the Kalachuri ruling family depended more on their political achievements and matrimonial alliances.

In the Kalachuri records, we find details about younger brothers succeeding the throne and fathers abdicating thrones. Kalachuri king Sankaragana III was succeeded by his brother Yuvarajadeva II. Karna abdicated the throne in favor of his son Yasahkarna and retired in his old age from active politics. Kharod Inscription of Ratnadeva III of KE 933/1183 CE mentions that Jagaddeva of the Ratanpur branch made way for his younger brother Jajalladeva II and himself

went to fight with the Eastern Gangas (Mirashi, 1950, p. cxxx). Sarayupara king Ullabha abdicated the throne in favor of his younger brother Bhamana I. Thus, we find a tradition of abdicating the throne in favor of the younger brother being very popular with the Kalachuris. This practice may conform with epic ideas and helped the kings gain popular support, but certainly indicates the pre-state/tribal traditions of oligarchy.

In several inscriptions of the Ratanpur branch, it has been stated that Kokalla had eighteen sons of whom the eldest became the lord of Tripuri and made his younger brothers the lord of *mandalas* in the neighborhood. Kalingaraja, the founder of the Tummana branch of the Kalachuris was born in one of the families of these eighteen brothers. Thus, the different ruling lineages traced their origin to a common ancestor and vice-versa. It also brings out the tribal-oligarchical nature of polity in central India where sovereignty is happily shared by the claimants of the throne giving birth to different layers of the structure of the state. It can also be taken as a good example of a clan-based political structure very much in practice amongst the Rajputs of Rajasthan.

While the origin myths, dynastic traditions, and genealogies are connected to the dynasty as a whole, there were means such as the claim to the *ksatriya* status by which the individual ruler was elevated and accorded a status in society. Interestingly, most of the ruling dynasties somehow claim *ksatra* status despite their diverse origin theories. Qualities of *ksatriya* like protecting the realm, brahmanas, and cows (cattle), bestowal of titles or *birudas*, and performance of rituals were clearly meant for conferring the *ksatriya* caste status to the ruler. Ritual occasions like *sraddha*, *tulabhara* or *tulaparusadana*, *gosahasra*, *hiranyagarbha*, *abhisheka*, *asvamedha* and *rajasuya* are mentioned in both sets of records. The performance of *mahadanas* attracted attention insofar as they had the potential to confer the Ksatriya status.

From early historical times, the *Abhisheka* (coronation) of the king was considered to be an important royal ceremony. Apart from its mystical value, the rite of coronation conferred upon the king the legal status of his office. The inscriptions of the Kalachuris do not give a detailed account of the coronation ceremony of the kings. The Banares Plates of Karna of K E. 793/ 1043 CE (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 236-249) and the Jabalpur Plates of Jayasimha of K E. 918/ 1168 CE (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 314-320) simply state that on hearing the coronation of the kings, their enemies disappeared. Talking of *abhisheka* which consisted of pouring sacred water on the king's head, the Kahla Plates of Sodhadeva states that "Bhima had his beautiful person bathed (at the time of his coronation) with the auspicious waters (poured) from the jars" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 314-320). Such ceremonies guided by the family priest are indicated in the Khairha Plates of Yasakarna of K E 823/ 1073 CE (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 289-298). Events like coronation admittedly had a ritual significance but also had a strong political role to play. They helped in building popular support for the new king and openly declared the supernatural things associated with the ceremony to capture popular sentiments.

A significant aspect of the image of royalty was the ideal of the Universal Emperor (*Cakravartin*) which it always looked forward to approximating. This ideal, however, was not exactly that of a *vijigisu*, that aggressive conqueror idealized in the *Arthashastra*, but that of the *Sarvabhoma*, the universal ruler, who was suzerain over other rulers: the *rajadhiraja* or later, the one who bore the burden of the entire earth. Examples from the *prasasti* sections from almost all the inscriptions used here can be cited in this context. The popular epithets figuring among the imperial titles used by the Kalachuri kings were

“*Avapati-gajapati-narapati-rajatrayadhipati*” (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XI, pp. 141-144). The other two epithets, *Giripati* and *Trisankupati* rarely occur in inscriptions. There were several instances of emulation of popular titles prevalent in those days as a part of interactions.

Talking of the Hero ideal it appears that rather than keeping an actual record of the military achievements, some statements of the *prasasti* served to create the ideal of a military hero, always valiant and successful in battles. This conventional ideal went a long way in the creation of the image necessary for political validation and general acceptance by the masses. Models of Heroic images are also encountered in the Kalachuri records belonging to the mature phase of state formation. The titles adopted by kings relate to the story of the growth and expansion of the state. One of the Karitalai Stone Inscriptions of Laksmanaraja II states that Yuvarajadeva I's elephants subjugated the Gaudas, punished the Kosalas, subdued the kings of the south, and defeated the Gurjaras. The Bilahari stone inscription of Yuvarajadeva II states that Yuvarajadeva I fulfilled the ardent desires of the minds of the women of Gaudas, sported with the ladies of Karnata, applied the ornamental mark to the foreheads of the women of Lata, enjoyed the pleasures, of love with the women of Kashmir and was fond of the excellent songs of the women of Kalinga (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 204-223). It implies that Yuvarajadeva raided Bengal, Karnataka, Gujarat, Kashmir, and Odisha. Verse 27 of the same inscription says that “up to Kailasa Mountain, near the bridge (of the south) and then up to the western lord of waters, the valor of his armies caused unending oppression to his enemies.” According to the Karitalai Stone Inscription of Laksmanaraja II, Yuvarajadeva had defeated the Gurjaras. The Bilahari Stone Inscription of Yuvarajadeva II states that he defeated the lord of Kosala (i.e. South Kosala) and pressed as far as Odisha. By vanquishing the ruler of Odisha, he obtained from him an effigy of the Naga Kaliya decorated with jewels and gold. The same inscription states that in the course of his expedition, he proceeded to the western quarter (i.e. Gujarat), and having bathed in the ocean he worshipped the god Somesvara (i.e. Somnath) with golden lotuses and offered that effigy of Kaliya which he had brought from Odisha. The Goharwa Plates of Karna refer to his victory over Bengal, the Pandyan kingdom, Lata, Gurjara, and Kashmir. Reference to the conquests of Kashmir and Pandya countries seems to be an exaggeration. The Goharwa and the Rewa plates of Karna refer to the victory of Gangeyadeva over the king of Utkala (Mirashi, 1950), pp. 252-274).

Gangeyadeva was one of the most powerful rulers of the Kalachuri dynasty of Tripuri. At the time of his accession, the Kalachuris of Tripuri were a weak ruling dynasty. Through his diplomacy and conquests, he extended his kingdom far and wide. From the Khairha and Jabalpur plates of Yasahkarna, we come to know that he assumed the coveted title of *Vikramaditya*. Even in the inscriptions of the Candellas, who were political adversaries of the Kalachuris, Gangeyadeva has been called a *jita-visva* (world conqueror). Political achievements of Karna during the first eight years of his reign have been described in the Rewa stone inscription dated in KE 800/1050 CE (Mirashi, 1950), pp. 263-274). By this time Karna seems to have achieved the position of highest political force in North and Central India and crowned himself for the second time in the Kalachuri year 804/1054 CE. His regnal year mentioned in the Rewa Stone inscription of Vappulla is counted from this second coronation.

Most of the territories he conquered gradually slipped out of control one by one and finally, he had to abdicate his throne too. This political distress is captured beautifully in the Udaipur *prasasti* comparing it to the dense darkness which envelops the world when the Sun sets. Even

the political defeats are presented as something quite amusing and it seems that unsuccessful kings often chose to abdicate the throne, trying to legitimize their deeds by choosing the path of spirituality.

The three aspects- claim to *ksatriya* caste, the emulation of the *cakravartin* model, and the approximation of the hero ideal- have a military emphasis about them. These seek to validate the political position of the ruler, by lending legitimacy to his wielding coercive power for purposes of both aggrandizement and defense. And while discussing the efforts made towards building 'self-images' we find that kings are duly praised as the protector of the realm. Such images impacted popular memory and as Chatopadhyaya has highlighted the Turushkas being called "wicked" had more meanings than what it appeared. Kalachuris, we find similar efforts towards the creation of the 'self-images'. The Ratanpur Stone Inscription of Vahara of KE 852/1102 CE states that he (Vahara) was "a unique king in respect of the protection of the earth" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 554-556). The Raipur Plates of Prthvideva-I of KE 821/1071 CE, similarly states that "while he who is strong in political insight in protecting the earth, even wind does not take to the wrong path", resulting from which "there is indeed no out-break of even the slightest divine calamity" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 398-408). *Prasasti* sections claim that with strong administration under the Kalachuri kings "thieves disappeared, obstacles vanished, dangers departed, the enemies took shelter in the corners of mountain-caves and the people roaming in dense forests had no fear even from a tiger." King was a store of valour and the sole resource of happiness of his subjects. Kings have been described as "protector of earth," "supporter of the world" and "the sole source of the happiness of the world." The picture of the kingdom in absence of such a "protection" from the king has been described in the Sheorinarayan Stone Inscription of Jajalladva II of KE 919/1169 CE in which it is said that after the death of Jajalladeva "beauty vanished, life departed, charity left for distant regions, prowess knew no judicious habitation, playful actions stayed far away, merits became religious mendicants" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 519-527). Of course, the description is unrealistic but it helps us know that the 'king on the throne' was careful in letting his subjects know about his administrative capabilities and wanted to build upon their confidence. Kings also wanted the subjects to know that their absence would result in internal social crises. Needless to say, such a picture of strong administration and political peace would boost the confidence of traders and merchants frequenting the state boundaries and would also serve to contain the so-called ill effects of the Kali Age.

Strength and valor are the next important qualities essential for a king. Success in war and valor in battle was the ruler's highest ambition and this is reflected in various expressions found in the inscriptions. Some of these are "thunderbolt to the great mountains that were the powerful kings", "wild fire in burning the spreading creepers that were his enemies" "valor pervading the circle of the three earths," "abode of courage" and "impending universal destruction", "fire of prowess requiring fuel of princes", "comet to the families of enemies", "prowess like that of a tiger", etc. For such kings, the sole delight is said to have been the "festivity of battles" and "the sole object of affection the sword", and with these, they used to "adorn the forefront of the battle fields." To bring out these qualities predominantly, comparisons are often instituted between the Kings and the deities and heroes of mythology. Thus, the kings are said to be "Dharmaraja among a multitude of kings", "Yudhishthira being solely devoted to truth", "Yayati in good qualities", "a wise man of well-known greatness like Mandhata," abode of political wisdom, humility and fortune like Bhima", "surpassed Kartavirya by merits," "Harish Chandra or moon

descended on the surface of the earth, or Kartikeya, or the God of love, or Nakula or Sahadeva, the abode of truth, always liberal and brave, the incomparable Siva to the enemies' cities."

The Karanbel Stone Inscription of Jayasimha states that the king (Gayakarna) "performed no action through partiality" (Mirashi, 1950, p. 636). The Ratanpur Stone Inscription of Jajalladeva I of KE 866/ 1116 CE, states that Prthvideva I "was endowed with qualities of righteousness and valor." The Paikore Stone Inscription of Karna states that the king was "the ocean of liberality, power, and justice." An important aspect of this phase of protection relates to *Danda*. In the same vein, the Koni Stone Inscription of Prthvideva II of KE 900/1150 CE states that the king "by his administration of justice, made the whole world always seek refuge in righteous deeds" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 463-473). The same inscription proceeds to say that Jajalladeva I "being intent on the welfare of his subjects, was indeed an incarnation of righteousness." Expertise in administration is indicated through several inscriptions such as the Karanbel Stone Inscription of Jayasimha which states that "he (Yasahkarna) clever and adept in policy as he was, achieved the four desired objects of life with the four well-known measures used in their respective spheres." Such claims are not to be taken at their face value, but they certainly indicate the desperation of the ruling dynasty in increasing its control over the subjects.

The grant charters speak of kings as generous and munificent donors. The gifts (*dana*) are not donations of charity, since they are not stated to be given to the poor, or the unpropertied but this *dana* served the function of gift exchange; what was received in return being explicitly stated as *punya* or merit and implicitly understood as recognition and legitimacy, the donor and the recipient both conferring status and material benefit on each other. The recipients of *dana* and *daksina* had to qualify for the gifts, i.e., they had to be in a position to repay it. The contemporary records in Gangetic Valley, in particular, mention the donee with the minutest of details regarding their expertise in different branches of Vedic learning, thus confirming the eligibility of the donee who was expected to repay by legitimizing the donor (king) through several means. The ideal of the king as a donor indicates the king's positive role in accelerating social change and economic development through the transformation of unsettled land to agrarian settlements or organizing the peasantry more efficiently. However, here it seems that the kings ensured robust control over the people in the donated lands by causing a large number of Brahmana donees to settle there.

In a social formation that owed its existence primarily to this transformation, an image of the king highlighting his positive role in that transformation would convey a message more meaningful than just another aspect of royalty in conformity with an existing stereotype. What is stated in the records about the munificence and generosity need not be taken literally. They at best wanted to project the picture of an ideal patron. Rather than acts of charity, these gifts were investments of a discerning nature where the king is generally praised for his generosity. It is possible that he indulged in abundant gifts not only out of benevolence but also as a matter of policy to enlist the sympathies of the twice-born (Brahmanas). Kalachuri inscriptions also indicate that the kings had belief in the grand rituals of mahadanas like *Tulapurusa* (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 375-382). Besides these, land in villages and sometimes even whole villages were given in grants to individuals and institutions for the promotion of learning and religious teachings. All these efforts on the part of the kings increased the legs of *Dharma*" as the Karanbel Stone Inscriptions of Jayasimha points out. From the Karitalai Stone Inscription of Laksmanaraja II, we come to know that Yuvarajadeva had patronized a very learned and capable

Brahmana minister named Bhakamisra. These learned Brahmanas in return created a strong popular support from the king. Thus, we come across a similarity in our sources.

‘Divine qualities’ of the king complimented the cause of the state. It has rightly been asserted that ‘states do not exist just because of their coercive power or because of their ability to raise resources. To enjoy authority over the subordinate groups and politics, they need obedience and support from them. This is achieved with the help of religious ideas, symbols, and institutions.’ The terms *asvapati*, *gajapati*, and *narapati* were used by many contemporary rulers.

After the elaboration of titles, we move on to the efforts made toward the creation of divine attributes. The *abhiseka* or coronation of one of the kings is often mentioned in great detail. Some statements in the inscriptions of the Kalachuris indicate vaguely that kings regarded themselves as men born with divinity. Most of the inscriptions refer to the kings as *deva*, some as *Saksatapamesvara*, while others, as *naresvara*. The Banaras Plates of Karna refer to the divine personality of the king (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 236-249). The Pujaripali Stone Inscription of Gopaladeva refers to him as the son of Goddess Varahi. Such statements indicate that Kings regarded themselves as men born with divinity. Kingship was hereditary and generally the law of primogeniture prevailed. Kings are said to be “Rudra-incarnate”, (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 204-223) “a second Arjuna in Kali age”, “Karna descended on earth”, “vying Parasurama in killing Ksatriyas”, “prowess itself in visible form”, “resembling Aurva” in valor, “resembling Sibi”, “resembling Jayanta”, “Kumara in prowess,” valor like “steps of Trivikrama”, (Garuda) the son of Vinata “in valorous deeds”, “second Bali in strength”, “Sudraka in valor”, and “Sibi in protecting even a wicked foe.” With such deeds, the fame of the King “like the waves of the milk-ocean,” “had covered the whole expanse of the confines of the quarters.” Such similes certainly indicate that the image of royalty was created quite meticulously.

High-sounding titles are absent in the case of early Kalachuri kings. Sankaragana I who belonged to the Tripuri branch used the titles of *Paramabhataraka Maharajadhiraja* and *Paramesvara*; and Gangeyadeva, *Maharha-maha-mahattaka Maharaja*, and *Trikalingadhipati*. It was at the time of Karna, the greatest king of the Kalachuri dynasty that the tradition of using high-sounding titles was started which continued to be used by the later kings of the dynasty throughout its history. In his Banaras Plates of KE 793/1043 CE Karna uses the titles of *Paramabhataraka Maharajadhiraja Parmesvara Paramamahesvara* and *Trikalingadhipati* (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 236-249). We find that this title expanded in his Goharwa Plates and other later records which refer to him as *Paramabhataraka Maharajadhiraja Paramesvara, Paramamahesvara, Trikingadhipati, nijabhuj-oparjit-asvapati-gajapati-narapati-rajya-tray-adhipatya* (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 204-223).

The use of the term *paramamesvara* indicates that political might was clubbed with divine features. It appears that the full titles of the rulers occur mostly in the copper plates, except in three stone inscriptions (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 365-367). The inscriptions which do not use the titles of the kings style the ruler simply as ‘king’ expressed by such synonymous terms as *Nrpa*, *Nrpati*, *Raja*, *Naradhipa*, *Naresvara*, *Narendra*, *Mahisa*, *Bhupati*, *Bhupa*, *Mahipala*, *Mahipati*, *Narapati*, *Bhupala*, *Rajna*, *Ksitipati*, *Avanipati*, etc. King was addressed as *Deva*, and his queen *Devi* or *Mahadēvi*, and we find this in most of the inscriptions of the Kalachuris.

Every king, keeping in tradition with conventional court literature, was presented both as a scholar and a patron of scholarship as also of the other arts. Moreover, it is stated that they were



surrounded by a court of scholars and panegyrists. Kings often had titles like *vividha-vidya-vicara-vacaspati* and *asvapati-narapati-gajapati-rajatrayadhipati*. These became the usual title. Kings also patronized scholars and encouraged religious observance by building Saivite temples and monasteries. Saivism combined with the more indigenous cult of the goddess which was used to bring together the dispersed agrarian and hill and forest communities together. Even though the *lingam* remained the focal point of worship in Kalachuri temples, their distinctive circular *garbhagrihas* are thought to represent the *devi*, while the latter's frequent depiction in sculpture was a prominent feature of Kalachuri art. According to the Goharwa plates and the Rewa stone inscription, the world was deafened by the engravings of copper plates that Karna granted to the Brahmanas. Even now, stories about the munificence of Karna "Daharia" are popular in Varanasi.

Early medieval *prasasti* literature generally describes every king as an attractive mien. In beauty, he is invariably equated with Kamadeva, the god of love. The Kalachuri records such as the Pendrabandh Plates of Pratapamalla describe the King as one "who has surpassed the god of love in lovely form" (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 543-548). The Gurgi Stone Inscription of Kokalladeva II, similarly, describes the king as one "whose (beautiful) form was praised by the god of love." Gangeyadeva has been described in the Khairha Plates of Yasahkarna of KE 823/1073 CE as "the lord of the fortune of heroes, whose chest was broad like an emerald tablet, and who having smiling eyes, surpassed with both his arms." Prthvideva II has been described in the Amoda Plates of KE 900/ 1150 CE as "having the strong body of a lion." The Pendrabandh Plates of Pratapamalla similarly describe Jajalladeva II as one "who possessed of radiant complexion and modesty." There are several references to "fully developed arms," long arms," "matchless beauty," "arms stretched to knees," etc. for the Kings. Such descriptions would have certainly helped in creating a positive impact on the subject population about the extraordinary personality of the kings and their right to rule.

The ideal character of the king is described in the Kalachuri inscriptions by various expressions like "abode of devotion to truth and pleasing speech", "resort of proper conduct", "resting place of three *purusarthas*," "treasure of truth and compassion", "not influenced by partiality" and "not displaying evil conduct," "stainless character," "guiltless heart," "store of a multitude of excellences," "straightforward by nature," "treasure of superior intelligence", "foremost among the good, the edge of the path of righteousness, the abode of glory and the ocean of the waters of piety," possessing "truthfulness, charity, pride, political wisdom, and activity," possessed of "nobility, valor, and serenity," "incarnation of the law of truth and a royal road among the paths of morning remembrance," and being "piety incarnate, an object of veneration to the whole world", "an object of wonder even to gods." Comparisons with mythological heroes also bring out these qualities prominently. These comparisons easily elevated the status of kings in popular perception.

The desired ideal of the King's learning is best reflected in the Rewa Stone Inscription of Karna of KE 812 /1062 CE where Karna is said to be the one "whose nails are the knowledge of the Sacred Law, whose legs are the *Puranas*, who appears dreadful, whose open mouth is the *Vedas*, whose eyes are good policy, and whose shining hair is the sacrifice." "Horse-riding, acquaintance with numerous and various (branches) of knowledge, healing, and appreciation of a multitude of noble qualities," "full knowledge of thirty-six sciences of weapons," "reading of *Puranas* and other works," and reflection on *Sastra* and the *Vedas* are some of the branches of knowledge in

which kings in the Kalachuri inscriptions are referred to have obtained proficiency. In the Khalari Stone Inscription of Haribramhadeva, the king is said to have been “the master of eloquence-Brhaspati among learned men and a second Bharata among connoisseurs of singing”. The Pujaripali Stone Inscription of Gopaladeva says that there was “none like Gopala in Sanskrit and Prakrita literature” (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 588-593). The Kharod Stone Inscription of Ratnadeva III of Chedi year 933/ 1183 CE states that “on the stage of his tongue dances vigorously the Goddess of learning, exciting wonder by the marvelous use of Sanskrit and other words (Mirashi, 1950, pp. 533-542).” The Gurgi Stone Inscription of Kokalladeva II says that the King “was to the poets what a cloud is to the Kadamba trees”. Kings of such higher intellectual learning were naturally “fond of Sarasvati,” “lover of lady namely literature” and “supporter of clear poetic talents.” These descriptions bring out the sincere efforts put into creating a grand image of the Kalachuri Kings and adding popularity to it.

## Discussion

The emergent picture shows that royalty had several features of super-normal characteristics attributed to it. This can be connected to the entire process of creating a sound system of legitimation. This self-image seems to be the result of a conscious attempt on the part of these polities to project a picture that was best suited to their times and purpose. The king is presented not merely as a political figure, he had social and cultural roles to play as well. He was as much an organizer, a symbol of unity in society within the existing structure, as he was the pillar of the state. This image is of an ideal and not of an individual. Even the ideal type could be seen to have adopted a readily available framework. It is this 'royal mystique' as Thomas R. Trautmann has put it, that emerges when an image of royalty is projected in manifold ways. The question arises as to why such an image was presented. For there is a gap between the ideal and the actual. We need to ask questions like why the face of reality was so masked. It is only then that one can understand the nature of kingship and its position in the power structure of early medieval India. One will have to go beyond the courtly culture and see the amount of power exercised and authority enjoyed by the monarchy in the given power structures.

It seems that the claims of Kalachuri rulers to have defended *dharma* as against the *dosa* of Kaliyuga, washed its stains, or ushered in *Krta* indicates that their ideal was to patronize and promote Brahmanical institutions and ideology in the larger context of internal transformation and the evolution of political society. This can be noticed in almost all the inscriptions used in this study and traditional Indian political thought, there was an obsession with order and stability (which the state/king was identified with) and there was a corresponding fear of chaos, which was defined in terms of *arajaka* as well as the Kali Age (Sahu, 2013, pp. 46-60). Besides, the king representing *dharma* and associated ideas had to be distanced from Kali, representing its negation. Admittedly, the *prasasti* sections of our sources with their usually standardized messages of the images of kingship and the benedictory and imprecatory verses in the land grant charters, bearing the influence of *Dharmasastra* literature, in the process of their being read out on various occasions played an important role in the process of cultural communication.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the picture we get here based on our sources indicates that the kings made great efforts towards the creation of impressive 'self-images' and at times we find similarities in the style and execution. However, the inherent distinctions are also noteworthy. This is the result of the interplay of three significant forces: the social milieu in which the two sets of source-material were produced, the purpose these records were expected to serve, and the level and processes of state formation experienced in the region. The discussion here attempts to bring out that, as space transformation took place in Central India, the ruling class of Kalachuris brought complexities in their style of execution of land grants. It was the same region that had transformed from being *atavika* land in Asokan inscriptions to *atavika-rajyas* in Samudragupta's Allahabad *Prasasti*.

We can say that such a meticulous effort in the execution of land grant charters shows that royalty was extremely concerned with its self-image and popular perception of the state. It also indicates that as the state became more complex and its frontiers expanded so did the elaboration of *prasastis* start appearing clearly. It also strengthens the argument that these land grants did not erode the authority of the king. Rather, they helped in strengthening and improving the popular perception of kingship thus legitimizing it and paving the path for further integration in due course of time.

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