

Historical Significance of Chandragupta—Kumar Devi Coin

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ABSTRACT

Numismatics is an important source for the construction of Ancient Indian History. The coins provide us valuable information about the political, social, economic and cultural history. The Chandragupta-Kumradevi coin, also known as the King –Queen Coins are one of the most controversial and important coins of ancient India. Chandragupta I by marrying the Lichhavi princess Kumaradevi enhanced the power prestige and influence of newly established Gupta kingdom. These coins show that the Guptas gave special importance to Kumaradevi that is why her name is written along with Chandragupta I. To show gratitude towards her family the legend Lichhavayah is also engraved in these coins. This research paper deals with the causes and the importance regarding the issue of these coins.

Key Words : Political matrimony, Amalgamation, Matrimonial Alliance, Imperial, Lichhavi Dauhitra.

After the disintegration of the Kushana Empire, for about a century confusion and chaos prevailed, as there was no paramount in north India. This imperial void was filled by the imperial Guptas, they brought about a transition from darkness to light, from an unsettled disorganized state of things to a systematic progress and civilization. The conventional genealogy of the Guptas in Prayag Prasasti and several other Epigraphs begin with Maharaja Srigupta(275-300 A.D) , succeeded by Maharaja Ghatotkacha (300-319 A.D). The son and successor of Maharaja Ghatotkacha was Maharaja SriChandragupta.

The Chandragupta Kumaradevi coins or the king queen type coins, discovered mainly from Mathura, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Sitapur, Tanda, Ghazipur, Banaras in U.P and Bayana in Bharatpur state show on their obverse a king standing to the left, usually nimbate, dressed in trousers, coat, head-dress, wearing usual ornaments as ear rings, necklace, armlet etc. holding in left hand a crescent topped

filleted standard. He is offering some object to the queen identified variously as a ring Sindurdani or a bangle. The queen usually nimbate, standing towards right is looking at the object in the hands of the king. She is dressed in Sari, blouse, head dress and wearing usual ornaments as earrings necklace and armlets, left hand hangs down and right hand is resting on waist. On some coins crescent is shown on the heads of royal pair. The legend is written vertically Chandra under king's arm, Guptah outside standard. On left side KumaradeviSri or Sri-Kumaradevi is written. On the reverse side inside a border of dots is shown a goddess, dressed in Sari, blouse, wearing usual ornaments as necklace, armlets and seated on a lion, Pasa in right hand, Cornucopiae in left hand, her feet rests on a decorated mat and behind her are traces of back of throne. Usually a symbol is shown towards left, sometimes another symbol to the right also, legend written on right side is Lichhavayah.

These coins are one of the most controversial issues of Imperial Guptas and scholars differ in their opinions in their opinions regarding the attribution and significance of these coins. John Allan has suggested that these coins were struck by Samudragupta to commemorate the marriage of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi and to show his gratitude and indebtedness towards the Lichhavis. V.S. Pathak, is of the view that these coins show Kumaradevi standing on the right of her husband, Chandragupta, which indicates that the royal couple is being shown in the Kalyana sundara or Vaivahika posture. These coins were issued by Samudragupta to publicize that he being a dvamushyayana had a better claim to rule over the amalgamated kingdom of Lichhavis and the Guptas. V.C Pandey had also suggested that Samudragupta was the daughter's son i.e, putrika-putra of the Lichhavi chief, and these coins were issued by him to bring about the dual character of his royalty. S.R. Goyal is of the view that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in his initial years to popularize that he being a Lichhavi Dauhitra had a better claim to the throne than his rival brothers. S.V. Sohoni is of the opinion that these coins were issued by Samudragupta to show his respect to his parents and towards the Lichhavi community, but the composition on the obverse is not a marriage scene but a farewell of a ruler proceeding to a military campaign.

Several scholars have suggested that these coins were issued in the reign of Chandragupta I. According to A.S.Altekar, these coins were issued after the marriage of Chandragupta I with Kumaradevi, by the joint authority of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi, respectively the rulers of Gupta and Lichhavi state. R.G.Basak has supported the view of V.A. Smith that Chandragupta I had circulated these coins out of a sense of pleasant gratitude that his power was much augmented by his matrimonial relation with the Lichhavis. R.C.Majumdar is of the view that these coins were issued by Chandragupta I to acknowledge the valuable assistance that he had received from the Lichhavi relation of his wife. S.K.Aiyangar has suggested that Chandragupta I and his wife Kumaradevi, respectively the rulers of Gupta

and Lichhavi states had jointly issued these coins. P.L.Gupta is of the view that after the death of Lichhavi chief i.e, Kumaradevi's father, for the smooth functioning of the Lichhavi kingdom, Chandragupta I was given the responsibility of administration on behalf of his minor son. But to avoid political confusion the name of Kumaradevi was attached with administration and the rule was done in the name of Lichhavis. Hence, these coins were issued bearing the names and figures of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi with the legend Lichhavayah. V.S.Agarwal has suggested that these coins were issued by the Lichhavis to commemorate the marriage of Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi.

Thus, different opinions have been given that whether these coins were issued by Chandragupta I or Samudragupta or by the Lichhavis. But the names and effigies of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi and the legend Lichhavayah clearly indicate that Chandragupta I was married to Kumaradevi, who belonged to the republican state of the Lichhavis. This is also confirmed by Prayag Prasasti in which Samudragupta is mentioned as the son of Maharajadhiraja Sri Chandragupta born from his Mahadevi Kumaradevi and as a Lichhavi Dauhitra. However, the proud with which the Lichhavis are mentioned on these coins indicate that this matrimonial alliance marked an epoch in the fortunes of Gupta family. These coins indicate that this marriage alliance was established as one of the terms of treaty of peace. Probably, as a crown prince Chandragupta I had helped his father Ghatotkacha by making a conquest of the northern state of Vaisali and to compel the Lichhavi chief or chiefs, to please him by entering into a Santana Sandhi and the decision of this marriage was taken in battle field. But the pride with which Kumaradevi is shown on coins indicate that Lichhavi were not their conquered subjects. Probably the Guptas were proud of the ancient lineage of the Lichhavis than any other material advantages gained by this alliance. Some are of the view that the coins indicate that this marriage was important from political rather than social point of view. The Manav Dharma Sutra mention Lichhavi as descendants of Vartya kshatriya, i.e, who for not fulfilling their sacred

duties are excluded from Savitri, and in ancient India purity in the orthodox sense counted far more than the antiquity of a family, so it appears doubtful that the Gupta's laid so much emphasis on their Lichhavi descent merely for the sake of social prestige. This marriage was politically important as it led to the amalgamation of the Gupta and Lichhavi states.

On the basis of these coins it has also been opined that the father of Kumaradevi, the Lichhavi chief had no son to succeed him, thus Kumaradevi was a queen by her own right. But the Lichhavis to whose tribe she belonged were too proud to allow their state to be merged in the Gupta empire after the marriage of their princess, Kumaradevi with Chandragupta I. They were quite anxious to retain their individuality in the new imperial state and so would have insisted that Kumaradevi will not merely be a queen consort but a queen regnant. So a compromise was arrived under which both the king and queen were regarded equal or joint rulers of state. Thus, Gupta and Lichhavi states were unified and these coins were issued on their names. Kumaradevi was the heiress of the Lichhavi territory and Chandragupta I received the kingdom of Magadha or Vaisali from his Lichhavi relatives.

The Chandragupta- Kumaradevi coins are made of gold which indicate that Kumaradevi evidently brought to her husband, as her dowry, valuable influence which in the course of a few year secured to him a paramount position in Magadha and neighbouring countries and Chandragupta I succeeded to the power previously held by his wife relatives. The legend Lichhavayah on the coins indicate that that a vestige of old republican constitution still persisted among the Lichhavis but Kumaradevi's position was like a hereditary monarch. The Guptas and Lichhavis ruled over two adjoining principalities and this marriage alliance led to the amalgamation of Gupta and Lichhavi states. In the joint Kingdom a considerable part of Bihar, northern and western Bengal was included. It has also been suggested that the Lichhavis, though a republican tribe, had developed some monarchical tendencies and hereditary leadership as they were quite jealous and critical of each other. Due to

pressure and stress of imperial revival the Lichhavis voluntarily accepted their merger with Guptas.

Kumaradevi is the only Gupta queen with her name struck on coins which indicate to the fact that it was a political matrimony and the Guptas fulfilled their political and economic objectives. The early Gupta kingdom was confined to eastern U.P. but the Guptas had covetous eye on Magadha. The republican State of Vaisali was traditional enemies of monarchical Magadha kingdom. The Guptas followed the principle of Mandala that an "enemy's enemy is a friend in politics" established friendly and matrimonial relations with the Lichhavis and with their support establish their control on Magadha.

Another view propounded by S.R.Goyal on the basis of these coins is that due to the marriage of Vakataka crown prince Gautamiputra, the son of Pravarasena with the daughter of Bhavnaga, the Naga ruler of Padmavati, the two great power of Deccan and Aryavarta had become close allies and posed a threat to neighbouring states. The Guptas and Lichhavis realized the necessity of having a strong state in middle Gangetic basin. Ghatotkacha tried to pay them back in their own coin which he did so quite effectively through this marriage to meet the Vakataka- Bharshiva entente.

The economic resources of the Guptas were greatly augmented due to their relation with the Lichhavis as due to this marriage the Guptas received control on the precious mines of southern Bihar, which gave them great impetus and confidence. The merchant class of the Guptas was also anxious to take benefit from the precious mines, so gold coins along with the name of Chandragupta- Kumaradevi and the legend Lichhavayah were issued and circulated to please the Lichhavi community.

Thus, study of the Chandragupta- Kumaradevi coins show that they were the most significant coin issued by the Guptas. These coins were issued to show their gratitude towards Lichhavis as the political greatness of the Guptas has been largely due to this marriage alliance. Chandragupta I was materially helped by

this Lichhavi alliance in achieving his conquests and establishing himself as an independent ruler. He raised the small Gupta principality to the status of an empire by extending boundaries in all directions. These coins also indicate the fact that Chandragupta I probably owed his imperial status to a considerable extent to the valuable assistance that he had received from the Lichhavis

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