

THE SUZERAIN AND SUBORDINATE KINGS

(400 AD to 1200 AD)

Unending Wars

A large number of kingdoms came into being in various parts of India between 400 and 1200 AD. They were constantly at war with each other. Every minor king wanted to subjugate other kingdoms and establish himself as a major king. Similarly, major kings also wanted to force other big kings into submission. Wars were thus waged across the country. Perhaps, never before in the history of India were there so many warring kingdoms. Countless soldiers died on the battlefield. Victorious armies looted and burned the towns and villages of the vanquished. The destruction caused by war was widespread and considerable. And it were the ordinary people especially women, living in the villages and towns who suffered the most.

The Victorious and the Vanquished

What gains did a victorious king make? What losses did a vanquished king have to bear? You may think that a victorious king

would take over the kingdom of the defeated and make it a part of his own empire; that he would send his officials to the new realm to collect taxes. This way he would have accumulated considerable wealth. But, you will be surprised to know that victorious kings did not always act in this manner. They did not take over the kingdom of the vanquished. In fact, they normally returned the conquered kingdom to the defeated king.

• *Do you remember which king had adopted this practice?*

Between 400 and 1000 AD, defeated kings normally got back their kingdoms. But, in return, they had to accept certain conditions. Firstly, the defeated king had to acknowledge his victor as his master, and look upon himself as a servant at the feet of the conqueror. The victorious king was called the **overlord** and the defeated king was called his '**samanta**'. To show his subordinate status, the defeated king had to record this before his name.

Fig. 1 The common people bore the brunt of the wars



Titles

How did the defeated king depict his subordinate status before his name? Let's see one such example. Suppose the defeated king's name was Kshitipala and he was the *samanta* of a king named Bhojadeva, Kshitipala would then include a title before his name designating his subordinate status.

The titles of Raja Bhojadeva and his feudatory Kshitipal would read in this manner:

"It was the reign of Mahasamanta Maharajadhiraja Shri Kshitipala who meditated on the feet of Paramabhataraka Parameshwara Maharajadhiraja Shri Bhojadeva."



Fig. 2 A king with his samantas

so demanded. Especially in times of war, the overlord could send a message to his *samantas* calling for their armies to join the war on his behalf. The *samanta* then had to fight the war for the overlord.

A COMPARISON WITH THE TIMES OF AJATASHATRU

The kings who reigned before 400 AD like Ajatashatru, Chandragupta Maurya, etc. did not make the kings they conquered their *samantas*. They would simply remove the defeated kings and annex their kingdoms. After about 400 AD, this practice changed. Kings now normally did not take over the defeated kingdoms, but returned them to the vanquished kings and made them their *samantas*.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

You read about some of the benefits a victorious king gained by the practice of making the defeated king his *samanata*. But were there any disadvantages in doing so? Let us read a story to understand this practice of making *samantas* in greater detail.

Imagine you are in the court of the Chalukya emperor, in his capital city of Kalyani. The king's court is in session. The Chalukyan emperor is sitting on his throne and his samantas, generals, ministers and

- *What were the titles of Bhojadeva? Underline them.*
- *What were the titles of Kshitipala? Underline them.*
- *How can you distinguish between the samanta and the overlord on the basis of their titles?*

Maintaining such differences in titles was an important feature of those days. The *samantas* always had a shorter title compared to that of their overlords. This is what distinguished the more powerful king among the two. Whenever the *samanta* proclaimed an order in his kingdom, he always stated that he was doing this in name of his overlord.

- *Underline four important sentences in the above section.*

Homage and Military Service

After being made a *samanta* the defeated king had to accept several other conditions also. To show his gratitude he had to send expensive presents to his overlord from time to time. On several occasions he had to present himself at the court of his overlord.

It was the *samanta's* duty to be at the service of his overlord whenever the overlord

officials sit around him.

The court was discussing the fate of the Kadamba king. A few days ago the Chalukyas had defeated him in battle.

Some people in the court were of the view that the defeated king should be killed and his kingdom should be taken over. Others advised the Chalukya king to return the kingdom to the defeated Kadamba king and make him a samanta.

The keeper of the treasury said, "O mighty king of kings!, I think we should take over the kingdom of the Kadambas. It has many wealthy villages and famous harbours to which traders from all over the world come. The Kadamba king collects considerable taxes from these villages and harbours. If we take over this kingdom, these taxes will come to us and we will become wealthy."

A general added, "Lord, we can buy many horses and new weapons with this wealth and strengthen our army. So I, too, feel we should take over the Kadamba kingdom."

Then a high official spoke, "Maharajadhiraja, I don't agree with what they say. If we take over the kingdom of the Kadambas, we will have to appoint new officials to administer it. We will have to appoint tax collectors. We will also have to station an army there. This will turn out to be very expensive. Whatever taxes are collected from the villages and harbours will all be spent in this manner."

A samanta added, "Mighty emperor, what he says is true. If you take over the Kadamba kingdom, your expenses will rise manifold. But if you make the Kadamba king your samanta, he will give you gifts regularly. You will get wealth without incurring any additional expenditure."

A minister said, "Lord, beware of one danger. If we return the kingdom and make the Kadamba king a samanta, he can once again become powerful and rebel against us or even attack our kingdom. So we should execute him and annex his kingdom."

The same samanta said again, "No, Maharajadhiraja, I think our difficulties will increase if we take over the Kadamba kingdom. Even if we execute the Kadamba king, we cannot destroy the Kadamba clan and many members of this royal family will still live to oppose us. If we take over their kingdom, there is every possibility that the Kadambas will soon rise in rebellion to get back their kingdom. It would then become difficult for us to remain there. It is to our benefit not to kill the Kadamba king but to return his kingdom to him and receive regular gifts from him. When the need arises he would also bring his army to help us fight our wars with others."

The keeper of the treasury spoke again, "Maharaja, I still think we should take over the Kadamba kingdom. How much tribute can the Kadamba king offer if we make him a samanta? How much military support can he give? Can we forfeit the entire wealth of the Kadamba kingdom for such paltry benefits? You cannot depend on a feudatory. Today he is with you, but tomorrow he may oppose you."

Another samanta spoke, "Most mighty emperor, your name is famous far and wide. Everyone says the Chalukya king is a great king. Many important dynasties acknowledge your greatness. If you make the Kadamba king your samanta, your fame will increase further. People will say that the ancient and well-known Kadamba dynasty, too, is a subordinate of the Chalukyas." In this manner the discussion of the pros and cons of the situation continued.

• ***If you were the Chalukya king, what would have been your decision? Outline the reasons for your decision in four sentences.***

Between 400 and 1200 AD most of the kings adopted the practice of making the defeated rulers their *samantas*. However, you should remember that this was not followed always. Many kings also annexed the defeated kingdoms when it suited them.

EXERCISE

1. a. How did titles indicate that a particular king was a *samanta* or an overlord?
b. Suppose Raja Jai Singh was the *samanta* of Raja Bharat Singh. Now put titles before their names and make a sentence on them.
2. a. In the time of king Ajatashatru, one of the rulers lost a battle with him. What would have been the relationship between the defeated king and king Ajatashatru?
b. In 800 AD Raja Gangeya lost a battle to Raja Bhoja. Explain the likely relationship between Raja Bhoja and Raja Gangeya .
3. The story in the chapter explained to you both the advantages and disadvantages of making somebody a *samanta*. On the basis of this story fill up this table.

Advantages of making somebody a <i>samanta</i>	The Disadvantages
1. 2. 3.	

Benefits of annexing a kingdom	The Disadvantages
1. 2. 3.	