ASCENDANT *SADHUS* IN WOODLAND HABITATS IN CENTRAL INDIA (7TH-13TH CENTURY)

R.N. Misra

This paper attempts to offer a brief account of the genesis and the rise of the *Mattamayura* ('ecstatic peacock') ascetics of *Siddhanta Order*, in the deep woods amidst rocky terrains (*aṭavīs*) of Mid-Indian hinterland that were inhabited by the irrepressible 'forest-based' (āṭ*avika*) communities. The relevant evidence about this entire phenomenon tends to accentuate the profile of these woodlands and the communities therein, such that they are construed as those who marginalised the city, the state-society and while valorising the ascetics who—mixing piety with political power—practiced spirituality of sorts, which on occasions did not rule out even militancy in exercise of their hegemonic intents. The ascetics who populated these woodlands disseminated their faith through a network of monasteries that also contained temples to exclusively serve their purpose. This account of the renunciants' predominance is also remarkable in art history for their temples and monasteries. Their temples introduced unconventional motifs and a pantheon that is bereft of canonical sanction; and the monasteries, which, with their vast resources grew into huge strongholds of their power, fully fortified with ramparts, towers, gates, walks and crenulations.

The *Ranod Stone Inscription* of Vyomaśiva (10th century) written roughly three centuries after the beginning of Siddhanta ascetics' lineage at Kadambaguha (Kadwaha), retrospectively describes the sect's progressively expanding space, with its multiple branches *(vipula vardhita bhūriśākhaḥ)*[1] in the woodlands of Central India. This expansion was rapid and it appropriated both the imagined as well as the material spaces including *guhā*[2] (cave), *vasati* (halting station for nights), *tapasthāna*[3] (locations for penance), *tapovana*[4] (penance forest), *tīrtha* (pilgrimage centres), and *aśrama*[5] (hermitage) in these forests of Central India. Other Inscriptions describe this expansion to have gone on to include even vast territorial and spatial tracts, such as *padra* (or *pada*, a forest-tract settlement), *viṣaya*

(district), *pradeśa* (region), the different *diśaḥ* (directions) and the entire *urvī* (earth) within its ubiquitous span.[6] In this expanse, the Siddhanta *muni*s aspired and managed to locate themselves away from populated settlements, and establish habitats (*sthana*) in the woodlands that came to be marked in some inscriptions as 'penance forests' (*tapovana*).

Thus, the term 'forest' in these references is generally suggestive of a place of penance that is secluded and solitary, and thereby fit for a self-mortifying individual living in meditation. Such an imagery projects the expanse along with the inhabiting ascetics as an exclusive sphere that is bereft of social, economic and other activities that characterized life in a village or a town. The forest, in the Siddhanta ascetics' case, thus stood as an antithesis of the villages and cities, and their withdrawal into it signified a state of renunciation, which over time seems to have worked also as a ploy to amass political power and hegemony. The other practices in their renunciation consisted of performing specific rituals, following yogic regimen, worship by fire, self-discipline, celibacy, vegetarianism and, above all, ritual initiation (*diksa*) of novices into the faith by the ascetics who were already so invested. That is how the Mattamayura *muni*s, pursuing a counter-culture of asceticism and denial, began their journey to prominence.

The ascetic movement began in the woodlands of Guna-Shivpuri region of Madhya Pradesh, its cradle, in the seventh century. Gaining strength through 8th to 10th century, it eventually came to have a pan-Indian presence, but got dissipated in central India by 13th century. It survives today as a living religion, served by its *muni*s and monasteries in the Tamil region.

The rise of Siddhantin ascetics and their movement, though spectacular in many ways, was not merely accidental. It appears to have been realized through an organized lineage of devoted ascetics and their well-ordered pursuits of benevolence, especially, charity, temple building, fairs, festival and celebrations, among other things. These activities promoted the ascetics in the Vindhyan woodlands thereby gradually rendering other forces subservient to it. These subservients included local chieftains, the intractable woodlands along with its fierce *atavika* communities, and the traders and their caravans that traversed through the region. The disorganised milieu of the Gopacala region could offer little resistance to the politico-religious upsurge of ascetics whose territorial control continued to expand unabated all the while.[7] The Siddhanta *muni*s' territorial ambition seems to have been insatiable as is evident in terms of their expanse. As spheres of their influence grew, thanks to the growing

network of their monasteries, the sages, even in their renunciation, did not flinch from assuming or exercising power and practising an acquisitive monasticism of sorts that garnered immense resources in terms of *dhana, dhanya, hiranya, ratna*, neighing horses and rutting elephants. In the process, their monasteries became fortified arsenals with emplacement of weaponry. The acquisitions allowed the powerful and pious Mattamayura *sadhu*s to adroitly use them according to the requirements on different occasions. The stone-built, and sometimes fortified,[8] strong and expansive monastic establishments with their temples and sculptures representing Siddhantin imageries apparently underscore the *muni*s' overarching presence in the woodlands and their clout. This is in addition to their supremacy which the contemporary epigraphs have explicitly articulated time and again.

In details, therefore, this entire account ramifies into interrogating the advent and empowerment of the Mattamayura *muni*s', their *maṭha*s and the *maṭha*-related exclusive temples and sculptures which proliferated in quick succession, first in Gopācala woodlands (7th to 13th century) and then concurrently in the forest tracts of Cedi-Ḍāhala region amidst the Vindhyas in Madhya Pradesh (10th to 13th century). The process apparently was not without its challenges. Perhaps, the most arduous of the ascetics' tasks was to have a firm foothold in the intractable *aṭavī* with its insuperable *āṭavika* folks— the *aṭavīs* which they called their *tapovana*s. The travails of those venturing into the *āṭavikas*' hinterland are in evidence time and again and even armies were not spared if they risked moving through their territory. For instance, during the time of the Kacchapaghāta ruler Kirtirāja (1015-1035) of Gopadri region, the arms of a Malava army were seized as they passed through the hinterland.[9] It happened again during the time of Kirti Singh Tomar (1459-1480) of Gwalior, when the army of Sultan Hussain Shah Sharqui was plundered relentlessly in the hinterlands of the region. The menace of robbers too was real and the rulers tried hard to emasculate them, but with little success.[10] Much before that, we have a queer epitaph on a hero stone of 903 CE from Terahi, a site of a Siddhanta *matha* and a fort—an epitaph that perceived battle as a reward of sorts whether one emerged victorious out of it, or lost his life in it. The Terahi Stone Inscription admonished grieving over the death of a valiant, proclaiming that he would have 'Lakshmi if he won and heavenly Apsaras if he lost; so why worry about death in a battle field: *jitena labhate Laksmim, mriten'api suramgana/kshana vidhvanmsini kaya, ka chimta marane rane.*[11] As we shall see below, the ascetics did overcome the *āṭavikas* with their

benevolent support towards the community, their non-intrusive spiritual pursuits, and a wilful integration of *āṭavikas*' pantheon into their fold. Furthermore, over time, they came to protect the *atavika*s in the woodlands more substantially than the rulers in the mainland would protect Brahmanas, cows and *varnasrama dharma*. The contemporary inscriptions, as we shall see, bear this facet out. We will return to this point later, but before that let us first have a glimpse of *aṭavī* and *āṭavikas* in some details to appreciate why, and how, it mattered for ascetics to have them by their side.

Aṭavi and Aṭavikas

The terms *aṭavī* and *āṭavika* have cultural connotations in respect of the *Vindhyāṭavī*'s landscape and demography, and juxtaposing them with *muni*s should help us here in appreciating what it could have been like for them to operate there. The *Mahabharata, Puranas, Malatimadhava, Arthasastra, Brihat Samhita, Meghaduta* and *Harsacarita* among other texts, offer a fairly graphic account of them; the details from some of these texts follow.

The same woodlands that Siddhanta ascetics described as *tapovana*s (penance forest) containing their retreats, are known in ancient inscriptions[12] and texts as *aṭavī*, inhabited by the fearsome āṭav*ika* communities of violent disposition, who were dreaded for their inhospitable, raw ambience. Their description of these woodlands as *ghora aṭavī*, (Vanaparva 61.18), *dāruṇa aṭavī* (Vanaparva, 61.10), *mahāraṇya* (Vanaparva, 61.24), and *mahāghora vana* (Vanaparva, 61.25) and as being dotted by high, rocky hills (61.38) and inhabited by the āṭavikas underscores the starkly fierce and undomesticated character of the *Vindhyāṭavī*[13] region.[14] The term āṭavika,[15] denotes 'inhabitants of forest', and is derived from the term *aṭavī* (forest). As for *Vindhyāṭavī*, it defines the 'forest tract of mid-India',[16] the undomesticated, wooded hinterland amidst the Vindhyan rolling hills with its valleys watered by numerous perennial rivers.[17] Bounded by Yamuna in the north and Narmada in the south and extending down to the *mahakantara* of Daksina Kosala which included the legendary Dandaka forests within its limits. Together, *aṭavī* and āṭavika signify a state of culture and a way of life which, in conjunction with the Vindhyas[18] of Central India, tends to assume materiality in the *Harṣacarita* (Parab 2005: 227-29), a text of seventh century. Much before that, the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya extensively dwells upon *aṭavī*, its fortresses (*durgāṭavī*), its āṭavikas, and their chiefs, painting the latter generally as belligerent and rebellious masters of the woodland

people. Despite its apprehensions about āṭavikas, the *Arthaśāstra* nevertheless recognizes their value as combatant troopers and a militant force against enemies amongst others. In the *Harṣacarita*, *aṭavī* figures as a typical ecological zone with its starkly natural and predatory ambience, where life amidst savage surroundings was not secure. The 'great' Vindhyan forest (*mahāṭavī*) was supposed to be *vipadbāndhava* 'a companion of calamity' (Parab 2005: 247). These woodlands were conspicuous for their intractability and for hard life of its folks. A journey through its thorny paths in the wooded surroundings was full of hazards (*durupagama śyāmākprarūḍhibhiḥ alambuṣā bahulaiḥ*). There was always the fear of 'sudden attacks by wild animals' (śvāpadopadravam). Hunting and bird-catching was a common practice and fowlers (śākunikas) foraged out to catch birds, especially hawks and partridges (*grāhaka, krakara, kapiñjala*). Young men, assisted by dogs, hunted out small game. These were less dangerous of the hunting errands, for there were other fierce hunters too who traversed the woods with their nets (*mṛgatantutantrī jāla*) and snares (*bahir vyādhaiḥ vicaradbhiransāvasaktavītam savyāla lambamāna balāpāśikaiśca*) for a big catch, carrying the necessary contraptions for the purpose (*śvapada vyadhana vyavadhāna bahalī samāropita kuṭīkṛta kūṭapāśaiśca*).

Amidst the āṭav*ika* communities, the training to groom the young ones in preying on birds and going in for small game started early. We are told of children (*pāśaka śiśu*), holding their nets, frolicking around, and zestfully targeting creepers to prey on birds. Banabhatta refers to a 'huge banyan tree encircled with cowpens' in the forest settlement with 'granaries of wild grains'. These cowpens, made of dry sticks and built around banyan trees (*śuṣka-śākhā-sancaya-racita govaṭa-veṣṭhita vikaṭa-vaṭaiḥ*), were protected by tiger traps (*vyāghrayantraiḥ*) which, it is said, were 'constructed in fury at the slaughter of young calves' (*vyāpādita-vatsaruṣakaroṣa...*). Its settlers were so wary of intruders that they would violently seize the axes (*kāṣṭhika kuthāra*) of the trespassing woodcutters'. A section of the forest had an enclosure of goddess Cāmundā (*gahana-taru-khanda nirmita cāmundā-mandapaiḥ vanapradesaiḥ*). The āṭavikas practiced slash-and-burn cultivation (*jhum*), and used to burn the husk of the wild (*ṣaṣṭhī*) rice. Its cloud of smoke would fill the sky (*dahyamāna ṣaṣṭhika ...dhumena dhusarimānam ādadhānaiḥ*) and make the heat unbearable. The plough was unknown to them, the soil too was unfavourable and they used the hoe (*kuddala*) for their incipient agricultural pursuit instead.

The people of āṭavika communities, such as Sabara, Pulinda,

Seka, Nara, Aparaseka, Bhadakana, Kacchapas, were no less fierce.[19] The *Harṣacarita* description of Nirghata, a Sabara youth in the *vindhyaṭavī*, profiling his bearing and outfit may be worthy of note here to indicate what āṭavikas might have looked like or been perceived of typically.[20] It describes this strongly built Sabara, blooming in youth (*prathama yauvanollikhyaman...*), as one who was the very epitome of violence (*hrdayahimsayah*). Like a 'shining pillar made on a lathe' (*yantrollikhitam-asmasara-stambhamiva*), he moved as a 'black mountain' (*anjanasilacchedamiva calantam*), 'gushing out like molten iron out of a Vindhyan cauldron' (*ayahsaramiva girevindhasya galantam*). The awesome bearing of the Sabara youth, described as a 'moving *tamala* (date palm) tree', was not without substance for he appeared no less than a death trap to deer (*kalapasam kurangayuthanam*), fever to tuskers (*pakalam karikulanam*), fire to lions (*dhumaketu mrgarajacakranam*) and death to buffaloes (*mahanavamiham mahisamandalanam*). He looked every bit as if he was the 'retribution of sins' (*phalam iva papasya*) or, 'the very cause of the Kali age' (*karanam iva kalikalasya*) or, 'the consort of the Night of Destruction' (*kamukam iva kalaratreh*). His flat nose, big chin, strong jaws and high cheek bone (*avanata kina cibukam, nasikam, cipit adharam, utkata kapola...*) amply displayed his fierceness and strength. His lofty forehead was generously covered with black hair; his skin between the eyebrows folded like a trident (*trisakha*). His eyes with scant eye lashes were sticky and red. His neck was slightly bent on one side; arms were long and chest wide. In all that, his built and bearing were imposing and awe-inspiring. He wore a glass bead (*kacamani*) on the lobe and had a feather of parrot stuck on to his ear. His outfit included a dagger in a sheath of snake-skin, overlaid with a patch of tiger skin, even as its hilt stood out on a deer-skin. He also carried a poisoned arrow in one hand and a bear-skin sack covered with a tiger's dappled hide (*sabala sardula carmapata*), in which he carried his arrows. He wore tattoos on his strong solid arms, had a bow hung on his left shoulder and carried in style the dead birds and animals— parrot, partridge and rabbit.

The specificities of life in woodlands are bared forth further in the *Harsacarita* in the statement that woodland cultivators were constantly agitated about sustenance of their dependents. They untiringly contemplated the breaking of the earth with their hoes (*prakāśamānam ataviprāyaprāntatayā kutumbabharanākulaiḥ kuddālaprayakrṣibhiḥ krṣibalaiḥ abalavadbhiḥ uccabhāgabhāṣitena*). The soil in the territory was hard to break (*krṣnamrttikā kaṭhinaiḥ*). So, they would parcel out portions of land into small plots for working

on them. Once the plots were secured and seeded, surveillance platforms were built overlooking the growing crop on such plots. Notwithstanding such precautions the plots still remained exposed to dangers from wild animals. Likewise, their ponds in the Sal (*aṭavi sulabha sāla kusuma*) groves were fenced with thorny *nagaphani* growth.

The *Harsacarita* graphically describes life in the woods where habitation was sparse. *Vindhyatavi,* however, remained endowed with natural wealth that people could have for consumption or other use. The forest products included cotton, jute, honey, wax, peacock feathers, *khadira* tree bark, medicinal herbs like *kuṣṭha* and *rodhra*. The *Harsacarita* also indicates the presence of iron smiths of the Vindhyas who burnt wood and extracted coal to use it for smelting iron. (*kacit anyatra grahayantam iva angariya darusamgraha dahibhih vyokaraih*). This added to the already existing heat all around. The woodland householders (*atavikutumbin*) had their wattle and daub dwellings enclosed within wooden enclosures amidst the woods. Those dwellings were sparsely scattered (*ativiprakrsthantara*) and could be identified only by the crowing of their cocks. Large bones of wild buffaloes were stuck out in the fields to scare the less dangerous of animals. Almost every household had the extract or liquor of *madhuka* (*madhuka-asava-madya*).

The pervasive ambience of these forests is also stressed in terms of spiritual experience in the woodland hermitages of saints and sages. The Vindhyas evoked different kinds of response among Harsa's courtiers. So, when in contact with it, 'some assumed monks' robes, some studied the system of Kapila (i.e., Sankhya), some abandoned gratification of senses and lived on limited diet, others reached old age in the hermitages and yet others finally took vows and roamed as shaven monks'.

The descriptions of Vindhyatavi and its sylvan surroundings in the *Harsacarita* (Parab 2005: 234-35) have graphic details about its people, their life and also the flora and fauna in their naturalistic and raw ambience. The picture of *vindhyāṭavī* and the people in it integrates their perils as well as splendours.

In contrast, the *Arthaśāstra* which, being particularly apprehensive of the āṭavikas, is loaded with the fiats of controlling and deploying them to serve the State aggressive designs. The text explicitly regards forests as a coveted entity in an imperial ruler's hegemonic exercise (*dvividha vijigīśo samutthānam-āṭavyādikam eka grāmādikam ca*, 13.5.1). It was needed particularly to augment the state with resources that could be put to different use. The āṭavika highlanders in the woods

were particularly sought to serve a ruler's expansionistic adventures. In Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, a text of the Gupta times, the term implies 'army', and that usage must have resulted from *āṭavika*'s unceasing and violent involvement with battles, raids and skirmishes in and out of the woods.

As *Arthasastra* explicitly states, the *atavika*s with the sole intent of plunder, were a threat to the traders and their caravans passing through the woods. These traders ventured into the region looking for ivory which fetched a good price in the cities. The *atavika*s, however, were difficult to be contained. Even Yuan Chwang (7th century) hints at their fierceness in his account of the Pariyatra region. He says that 'the climate (of the region) is warm and fiery, the manners of its people are resolute and fierce...The chiefs of these people are of a brave and impetuous nature and very warlike.'[21]

Thus, it is not surprising that in the scheme of Kautiliyan polity, the forest tribes (āṭavikān) could be won over by offers of money and honour, and could then be used to destroy kingdoms (12.3.17, 12.4.1). Like mercenaries, they, if placated, could be used to storm the forts situated in forests: the operation served its ends of harassing the enemy before a final assault was made to capture it (13.4.50-51). The forest tribes constituted one of the six kinds of combatants during the Mauryan period (and later), to be employed 'when useful for showing the way; when suited for the terrain of the enemy; when countering the enemy's mode of fighting, when a small raid (was) to be repelled or when enemy was mostly forest troops ... These were the occasions for the use of forest troops'. Thus asserts the *Arthasastra* (9. 2. 8).

The *Arthasastra* recommends that the 'king should remunerate ... āṭavikas with forest produce and with booty' (9.2.10) since the āṭavikas have plunder as their primary objective. But for this very reason, it also states that the danger from āṭavikas were akin to the dangers of befriending a snake (*Arthasastra,* 9.2.18-19), and hence, it warns that it is necessary for the State to be wary of them. The *Arthasastra* regards āṭavikas more perilous than highway robbers, saying that the latter 'operate at night and lying in wait, attack men's bodies, are a constant danger, rob hundreds of thousands (in cash) ...' The āṭavikas in contrast were known to 'operate in the forests far away', they were 'openly known'; they 'moved before the eyes of all and harmed only a part of the country'. Kautilya further adds that 'the āṭavikas have 'the same characteristics as a king', 'are many in number and brave (and) might openly seize and ruin countries' and that they are found 'living in their own territory' (*Arthasastra,* 8.4.41).

Reference to āṭavikas having 'characteristics like kings' and having 'their own territory' accords them a significant authority in ancient polity *vis-à-vis* the imperial rulers. It also reminds us of the Parivrajaka Maharaja Samksobha (528-9 CE) who ruled over the 'kingdom of Dahala...together with the eighteen forest kingdoms (*aṣṭādasa* āṭavika *rajya*),'[22] which had apparently federated, notwithstanding the admonitions earlier by Asoka, the Mauryan emperor in the 3rd century BCE and still later in the 4th century CE after Samudragupta's attempt to make them 'servile' (*paricariki krita*).

These accounts help in offering a glimpse of *atavi* and *atavika*s and allow us to conclude that having the āṭavikas in alliance with them was immensely useful to the Siddhanta *muni*s in various ways. With āṭavikas on their side, the esteem for the *muni*s must have risen phenomenally among the rulers, traders and others at large. The proximity between the *muni*s and the *āṭavikas* privileged the former and their monasteries, materially and symbolically in various ways. The āṭavikas could be deployed for defensive or offensive operations, they could serve errands, help in negotiating intractable stretches in the forests, and in peace time they could even be engaged in agrarian or artisanal pursuits. The Siddhanta *muni*s seem to have succeeded in winning them over with acts of benevolence towards them. Epigraphs bear it out eminently excepting for the fact that they figure in the *muni*s' epigraphs not as *atavika*s but as *prani, praja, jana, loka, i.e.*, 'people'.

The ascetics' concern for these people, and the latter's allegiance in their favour, seems to consistently surface in epigraphs, in various ways. The Siddhanta *muni*s are found providing subsistence, support in adverse circumstances (*uddhvartum vipadi praja*), health care and ease of passage to them in the intractable areas of forests by building pathways through them. Thus, Purandara is described in the Kadwaha Fragmentary Inscription as one who 'alleviated peoples' suffering'.[23] Vyomaśiva of Aranipadra stood for liberating forest folks from calamities and 'received people's respect' (*sakala loka namasya mūrtiḥ*) for that.[24] Compassionate to the core, he was dedicated to the welfare of all others: *yasyodṛkta paropakāra karuṇā mātram pravṛtteḥ phalaḥ*.[25] No wonder, when he rebuilt the Aranipadra *aśrama* of the recluses (*yati*s) that had gone derelict in time (*andhatamase bhagnaṃ*), the participation of the woodland community of Aranipadra was not missing in its renovation.[26] Kavacaśiva of Aranipadra was *lokapriya*, 'loved by people', not being like those self-seeking beings prone to chase their *tṛṣṇā* (thirst) in 'filling their belly' (*svodarapūrtimātra*). One of the ascetics of Kadambaguha is mentioned as *bhuvanaśraya*

'the refuge to the (entire) world'.[27]

Likewise, Prabodhaśiva was an ascetic, who was revered by people: *nikhila jana vandyaḥ*.[28] The Chandrehe inscription describes his works in the woodlands, which included digging a 'sea-like lake' (*sindhuprakhyam tadāgam*, v. 16) and a 'well having copious water' (*pracura salilaṃ kūpa*). By the process of excavating, breaking and ramming large heaps of stones he constructed pathways through mountains and across the rivers and streams, and also through forests and thickets (v.13), grew medicinal plants around the monastery, with people wondering at the glowing phosphorescence of these plants (v. 14). An ascetic of Kadambaguha is described as succour to people (...*tāpaharaḥ prajānām*).[29] The Jabalpur Stone inscription of Jayasimha[30] describes Siddhanta ascetics' proclivities for public good. Thus, Vāstuśiva is described as one who 'caused great bliss' (śreyaḥ prakarṣaṃ paramādadhānaḥ, v. 10). Nādaśiva was known for his 'support to all creatures' (*sarvabhūta dayāparaḥ* and *jantūnām āśvāsabhūmiḥ*) even as he was 'intent upon showing kindness to all creatures' (*sarveṣāmvandijanānām ādhārabhūtaḥ*).[31]

The proximity of the woodland communities, who were dreaded as much as they were sought for alliance which helped the ascetics to gain prominence and they seem to have stolen a march over the potentates. This could be possible in a milieu where all else except the *muni*s were dis-organized and disarrayed. Such circumstances, afforded the ascetics to successfully acquire privileges and power that conventionally rested with potentates. As the roles reversed, they promptly assumed the role of offering protection to the potentates who figure imploring the ascetics to do that. We have the instance of Avantivarman who offered the essence of his kingdom to Purandara seeking his favour: *nivedya yasmai nija rajya saram svajanma sapalyam'avapa bhupah* (*E.I.* 1, p.355, v.13) which stands confirmed in other similar instances mentioned in the Malkapuram inscription (*yuvarajadeva nripatir bhiksham trilakshīn dadau*) and in Jayanaka's *Prithviraja Vijaya* which speaks of the ruler named Sahasika who offered his kingdom to his guru in *dakshina* (*nijarajyalakshmim gurudkshinayai dattva...*), before proceeding on a military expedition for further conquests.

Epigraphs consistently indicate rulers, one after the other, supplicating to the *muni*s, not *vice-versa*, which always seems to betray the ascetics' clout over them. This is borne out in no less than seven specific instances and then again in *muni*s' investiture as royal preceptors (*rajaguru*s) of Kalacuris for two centuries. Those seven instances besides those relating to the royal preceptors respectively

refer to:

1. Avantivarman Calukya and Purandara *guru* at Aranipadra (Ranod) and Mattamayurapura (Kadwaha) in *c.* 825 CE. Avantivarman gave away the 'essence of his kingdom' to the *guru*.
2. The local Caulukya prince, possibly the protégé of Dharmasiva at Mattamayurapura, in whose favour the *muni* in person engaged the invading prince Gobhata in a battle and died fighting (sometime in the last quarter of the ninth century).
3. The Later Pratihara chief (*nṛpa cakravarti*) Hariraja, disciple of an ascetic at Kadwaha in the last quarter of 10th century. Hariraja sought and received diksa from the acarya and gifted villages to him for that.
4. Yuvarājadeva I (915-945), the Kalacuri king and Prabhavasiva at Gurgi near Rewa. Yuvarājadeva invited and settled the muni at Golagnika monastery, which became famous in central India, the Deccan and the South as Golaki *matha*.
5. Nohalā, the queen of Yuvarajādeva I who established Īśvaraśiva at Bilhari near Katni (M. P.) in early 10th century,
6. The Kalacuri Laksmanarāja II (946-970) who invited Hrdayaśiva from Madhumati, fetched and installed him at Maihar (Vaidyanātha monastery),
7. The Kalacuri Laksmanarāja II and Aghoraśiva at Bilhari. Only after installing these *muni*s in his region did Laksmanarāja II mount his military expedition.

And, then again, the subservience of the rulers to the ascetics is indicated in the relationship between consecutive *rajaguru*s and their successive royal disciples of the Kalacuri dynasty, for about two centuries beginning during the time of Yuvarajadeva I to that of Jayasimha.[32]

The Ascetics too do not seem to be discreet about subservience of contemporary rulers towards them and the epigraphs issued by them or by their protégés exultingly dwell upon it time and again. They tell us of Dharmaśiva whose 'feet were revered by the lustre of the crest jewels of many princes', (*bhūpālamaulimaṇikāntibhirar citāñghṛha*); of Sadāśiva whose 'venerable feet were worshipped by princes with rays of their crowns' (*nṛpaiḥ/yatpādadvayaṃvandama rcitaṃsekharāṃśubhiḥ*); of Hṛdayaśiva, whose 'uniquely venerable feet were rendered beautiful by the multitudes of rubies set in the crown of princes'; or of Īśānaśiva, whose 'lotus-like feet were reddened by the rays of jewels on the rows of heads of all kings'. The

Chandrehe inscription has Purandara described as the 'preceptor of kings' (*gururbhūbhujām),* and Prabhāvaśiva as the one who was 'revered by many kings' (*anekanṛpavanditaḥ*).[33] Trailokyamalla is said to have been similarly 'devoted to the feet' (*pādārcanarata*) of Śāntaśiva.[34] The substantive reason for the potentates' act of bending their jewelled heads to the feet of the *muni*s comes out clearly in the instances of Dharmaśiva, Kirttiśiva and others, described here, later. But we do find *muni*s claiming to be *mahibhrt*, 'protector of the earth' like kings. Vyomaśiva is described as one 'that in glory, vied with the rulers' *kṣitibhṛt urubhara-spardhi*. The ascetics' ambitious predispositions, apart from their spiritual attainments, are discerned in their militarism, administrative function and their well-knit monastic organization. Their active role in such matters helped in perpetuating their supremacy over the potentates roughly for four centuries from *c.* 825 CE.

The Saiddhantika ascetics are found strengthening their hold in the hinterland of the Vindhyas with their network of *matha*s, which ensured their control over the remote stretches of woodlands, and helped the rulers who had their support. Epigraphic accounts often bring out the ascetics' belligerent and militaristic role which helped their royal disciples. The Gurgi inscription of Kokalladeva II refers to Īsānaśambhu's 'conquest' (*nirjitya*) and compares him with Paraśurāma, the legendary warrior.[35] Prabodhaśiva too is described as 'Paraśurāma' in the Chandrehe inscription. He is said to have 'conquered all his enemies' (*vijitaśatruvargaśca yaḥ*) and 'showed the effect of his power on mighty kings' (*samunnata mahībhṛti prakatitātmaśaktikramo*). He is compared to Kārttikeya, the divine commander, who was the destroyer of the demon Tāraka.[36] Vimalaśiva[37] is eulogized for his 'political wisdom' and might i.e., for his 'power against enemies'. Nādaśiva[38] is mentioned as 'adept in the knowledge of religious texts and weaponry' (*śastra-śāstra viśāradaḥ*). Śaktiśiva 'augmented' the royal power of Gayākarna.[39] Kīrtiśiva is said to have 'reduced to ashes, the city of enemies' and 'wrested' the enemies' 'glory'. He was seen as Tripurāntaka-Śiva in his exploits without having the kind of divine support that Śiva had. It is said of him that though he '... had not the earth for his chariot, nor the sun and moon for its wheels, nor Brahma for his charioteer, nor Visnu for his arrow, yet he reduced to ashes the cities of the enemies (as Siva did those of demons). Hence, he (was)... Kirtiśiva, Śiva in glory'. He is further said to have '... filled all regions with his glory which he wrested from the enemy...'[40]

The Kadwaha Fragmentary Inscription explicitly refers to

Dharmasiva, who like Tripurantaka-Siva, worsted the raid of prince Gobhata, but died fighting in the process. The details about the episode in the Kadwaha Fragmentary Inscription make an interesting reading. The record speaks of prince Gobhata raiding a monastery with his army of elephants (*tatrajagamonmada sindhuranam balena bhupah kila Gobhatakhyah*). We are told that when the protégé of Dharmasiva, the *acarya* of the Kadwaha monastery 'suddenly fell' (*sahasa papata*: died in action), the *acarya* was much 'enraged' (*tad anu kopavipatalakshah*). In retaliation, he 'miraculously produced bow and arrows from the monastery', fought fiercely like 'Tripurantaka on earth', but lost his life in action. His militant action and his demise are firmly and categorically established in the epigraphic descriptions of 'heavenly damsels showering flowers' (*surapatiramaninam puspavrishtyavakirnah*) on him. That is the way texts, such as the *Mahabharata* for instance, typically described the demise of heroes in a battle of honour. The evidence leaves little doubt about the *acarya* Dharmasiva falling like a hero in his armed encounter with the forces of the *bhupa* Gobhata. It also brings out the active role of Dharmasiva in a military action and also the plausibility of such action by other *muni*s, whose similar 'exploits' are described in the inscription quoted above. No wonder, that the ascetics of the Mattamayūra lineage became indispensable to the State in exercising power which included combative action too, if the occasion so demanded.

Such oblique, as well as explicit references to their war-like disposition suggest that the Siddhanta ascetics were in demand because of their overall strength, and resourcefulness. They lent their active support to the State's political and economic well being, including its preparedness for wars. They probably augmented the State's security by offering training, garrisoning the royal forces—elephants and horses included—maintaining arsenals, manufacturing weapons and taking care of the States' affairs. They also offered support to rulers when the latter left their seat to mount a military expedition.

Such well organized dispensations managed by ascetics stand in utter contrast to the overall scenario in the region where other institutions had a dismal presence. What comes out through it is a picture of a disorganized milieu, marked by incipient levels of state and social formations, and a lack of effective control either by the distant imperial dynasties or by local chieftains.

In defining the Saiva Siddhanta as the product of the material milieu of the *Vindhyāṭavī* (Vindhyan forests) region, one encounters

many unconventional features of socio-economic and political developments that are amenable to alternative premises of historical interpretation, and are not necessarily based on conventional mechanism of state-society. It also allows for the possibility of interpreting art and patronage in the region differently. But that is a different story to be recounted elsewhere.

Notes

1. *Epigraphia Indica* (hereafter *EI.*), 1, p. 7355, v. 7; v. 3. Patangasambhu's Gwalior Museum Inscription, in Mirashi, V. V. (1974) *Prachya Nibandhavali* (in Hindi), Bhopal, pp. 179-89.
2. For *guha* as in 'Kadamba-*guha*-dhivasi,' cf. *EI.* vol. 1, p. 355, v. 8.
3. Cf., Mirashi (1955) *Inscriptions of Kalachuri-Chedi Era,* (Ootuckmund), Vol 1, p. 228; 200, v.7.
4. *EI.* 31, p. 36, line 14; or *EI.* 1, p. 355, v. 15. For delimiting the boundary of *tapovana,* cf. R.A. Kangle (1986), *The Kautilya Arthasastra,* p. 109.
5. *EI.* p. 357, v. 29.
6. For *guha,* as in 'Kadambaguhadhivasi,' *EI.*, 1, p. 355, v. 8; for *tirtha, El.*1, v. 9; for *padra, ibid. p.* 357, v. 29. It is mentioned as *pada* in a Kadwaha inscr., cf. *EI.* 37, p. 122, v. 7. For *visaya, pradesa* and *disah,* cf. *EI.,* 1, p. 357, v. 31. For *urvi* as in *urvipati, ibid., v. 11;* for *asrama, ibid., v.* 29.
7. Cf. Misra, R.N. (1999) "Religion in a Disorganized Milieu", in Joseph T. O' Connell, (ed.), *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements,* Simla: IIAS. The paper was presented at an IIAS seminar in 1993.
8. This is especially true of the monasteries at Ranod, Surwaya and Kadwaha. They are popularly known as *garhis* (fortresses), even today.
9. *Indian Antiquary,* Vol. XV, p. 36, v. 10; also. Trivedi, H.V (1989): 542, v. 20.
10. Trivedi, H.V. (1989): 'Inscriptions of Paramaras, Chandellas and Kacchapaghatas...', CII, vol, VII/iii, p.543, v. 20.
11. Keilhorn, F, (1988 rep.) 'Two Inscriptions from Terahi; [Vikrama-] Samvat 960', *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XVII, p. 202.
12. Inscriptions refer to the forest communities and their kingdoms. See, for instance, Asoka's Rock Edict XIII; Samudragupta's Prayag *prasasti* (Fleet, J.F. 1963 rep. p. 13) and Samkshobha's Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of the year 209 (ibid, p. 116).
13. The term is used in the *Harṣacarita,* (Parab ed. 2005): *ucchvāsa* 8, p. 231.
14. Cf., Agrawala, Vasudeva Sharan (1964) *Harshacharita: Ek Sanskritik Adhyayan* (In Hindi), Patna, p. 181, where these references are quoted.
15. The term figures time and again in Buddhist texts, the epics, Puranas, Dharmasastric text like *Manava Dharmasutra* (IX. 257) and in the *Kamandakiya Nitisara*; in Kamandaka it is consorted with army. Cf., Monier Williams, M. (rep. 2006): 133. Kamandaka apparently followed *āṭavika*s' descriptions from the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya.
16. Raychaudhuri, H.C. (1953): *Political History of Ancient India,* Calcutta, p. 307.
17. These rivers included Chambal and its tributaries (Sindh, Parvati, Mej), besides Asan, Sankh, Kuwari, Mahuar (anc. Madhumati of inscriptions) and Betwa, (anc. Vetravati and its tributary Orr, anc. Urvasi) in the Gopacala region and

Son, Ken (anc. Suktimati) and Narmada in the Dahala region (eastern and central Madhya Pradesh).

18. In the Puranas, Vindhya is one of the seven mountain chains (*kulaparvata*) associated with many legends. Agastya kicked it down; Sunda and Upasunda, the fierce Asuras, preformed their intense penance here. It is also the eternal abode of Durga. Cf., Vettam Mani (2010 ed): *Puranic Index*, p. 857.
19. They figure in the *Mahabharata* in reference to Sahadeva's campaign, and in many texts and inscriptions. A valorous Sarabha chieftain Goparaja, son of Madhava was a fierce fighter who died fighting somewhere near Eran in eastern Malwa in 510-11 CE. His wife committed *sati*. See: Fleet, J.F., *Gupta Inscriptions* (1963 rep): 93.
20. Cf., *Harsacarita* (Parab 2005: 231-32).
21. Beal, Samuel (tr.) *Siyuki: Buddhist Record of the Western World*, Delhi (1969), p. 179.
22. Fleet (1963): 114,116. The ruler made a grant for the purpose of observing the *bali, charu* and *sattra* at the temple which he had caused to be built, of the divine (goddess) Pishtapuri...' The rulers of the region sometimes set up boundary pillars (*valaya yasti*) to demarcate the territory of their kingdoms. We have the instance of Parivrajaka Maharaja Hastin and Ucchakla *maharaja* Sarvanatha doing this in 508-9 CE. Fleet (1963): 111.
23. *EI.* 37, p.122, v.5: *yattanubhṛtām paritāpa śāntau...*
24. *EI.* 1, p. 356, v. 23.
25. Ibid. He was a storehouse of merits including self-restraint, humility, prudence in polity (*naya*), propitious intent (*punya*) and spotless character. Ibid, p. 357, v. 26.
26. *E.I.*, 1, v. 29: *...sarvānanddyudayena paurasahitaṃ nītaṃ punastāḥ śriyaḥ.* Vyomasiva's habitat made the people (*praninah*) 'blessed'. Ibid, v. 31.
27. *EI.* 37, p.123, v. 11. The term used is '*trilokavijay*ī'.
28. Chandrehe Inscription, Mirashi, V.V. (1955): 201, v. 12.
29. *EI.* 37, p.124, v.28.
30. Mirashi (1955): 333-336; translation, pp. 336-339.
31. Mirashi (1955): 372: Dhureti Plates: lines 16-17.
32. Pathak (1960) *Saiva Cults in North India*, Varanasi, p. 50. Also, Pathak, (1958) 'Kalacuri rajaguruon ki parampara' (In Hindi), Madhya Bharati, *Saugor University Research Journal*, Vol. 1, (i) pp. 1-6.
33. Mirashi (1955) i, p. 200, v. 4 (for Purandara); v. 5, also p. 231, v. 6 (for Prabhavasiva); ibid p. 220, v. 50 (for Dharmasiva); ibid p.220, v. 51 (for Sadasiva), ibid, p. 221, v. 54 (for Hrdayasiva); Ibid, p. 232, v. 17 (for Isanasiva). In the colophonic verses of the *Prāyaścittasamuccaya* of Hrdayaśiva his *guru* Isvaraśiva is described as one whose 'lotus feet were worshipped by kings': āsittatsaṃtatau muni śriIśvaraśivaiti/ jagatīpatibhirnṛpaiḥpūjitapādapankajaḥ; cf., Sanderson (2009) *The Saiva Age*, in Einoo, Shingo (ed.) *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, University of Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, p. 268, fn. 631.
34. Mirashi (1955): 372.
35 Mirashi (1955): 232, v. 17-18.
36. Ibid, pp.200, 203, vv. 9-10, 12; Vyomaśiva is similarly described. *EI.*,1, pp. 356, 357, 358, vv. 23, 31, 38.
37. Mirashi, (1955): 339, vv. 39, 40, 44.
38. Ibid., p. 372 (Insc. No. 72, line 17).
39. Ibid., p. 337, v. 18.
40. Ibid., p. 335, 337, vv. 23-24.