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## THE MALAVA TRIBE OF INDIA: THEIR MIGRATION AND DIPLOMACY

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**Abstract:** India from ancient times witnessed some of the tribes which established their power, incorporated some of the other tribes and ruled many states. In this paper, the focus will be on how the Malavas migrated from Punjab to other parts of India, especially Rajputana and the challenges they faced from Sakas. The paper will also focus on the diplomatic victory of Mallavas over the Sakas and how that diplomacy saved them from the wrath of Sakas and Guptas.

**Keywords:** Malavas, Punjab, Rajputana, Gupta, Samudragupta, Sakas.

### Introduction

Malavas played an essential role in the history of Ancient India, they first settled in Punjab and then migrated to Rajputana, Central India and various localities of Lata-Desa and finally in Malawa. Their tribal organisation remained intact for a very long time starting from Panini up to the time of Samudragupta. The Macedonian invasion of India remains incomplete without the mention of Malavas, who had been mentioned in the Greek literature as a community that opposed Alexander's invasion of India and stood firm before the invader without surrendering themselves. Alexander's historians refer to Malavas as Malloi, Malli or Mallai associated with Oxydrakai, Sudracae, Hydrakai or Sydracae. These tribes had been identified by historians with Malavas and Kshudrakas of Sanskrit literature.<sup>1</sup> Panini does not refer to them through their name but his Sutra V, 3, 117, speaks of certain tribes as "Ayudhajivi Samghas" or the tribes living by the profession of arms. Additionally, Kasika says that amongst these were Malavas and Kshudrakas. They had been mentioned in Jain work Bhagvati Sutra among the 16 Mahajanapadas along with Malaya.<sup>2</sup> Patanjali also mentions them in his work Mahabhasya.<sup>3</sup>

Although many Greek historians had mentioned Malavas in their work, their exact position is difficult to locate. So many historians of the Modern period while reconstructing India's past, came up with different arguments regarding the original location of Malavas in Punjab. V.A. Smith believes that they were settled in an area located below Hydaspes (Jelum) and Akeshines (Chinab), which is the area between District Jhang and a small portion of District Montgomery<sup>4</sup> (Now Pakistan). McCrindle believes that the territory comprises of modern Doab of Akeshines (Chinab) and Hydraotes (Ravi) and extends to the confluence of Indus and Akeshines, identical to the trendy Multa district of Montgomery.<sup>5</sup> Hemachandra Ray Chaudhury locates them in the valley of lower Hydraotes (Ravi) on both banks of the river.<sup>6</sup>

While sailing along the Hydaspes, Alexander heard that the Malloi and Oxydrakai had combined together to give him a nostalgic reception, but the different perceptions of Greek historical accounts refer to contradictory statements of this conflict. Curtius mentions that their combined army was led by a Kshudraka hero, Diodorus refers that they didn't make an alliance as they failed in choosing their leader. Arrian says that the early entry into the scene by Alexander thwarted their plan and Kshudrakas did not provide support to Malavas. The Mallavas suffered defeat at the hands of Alexander and to save their lives, they made forests and deserts their home. The Malava population which was left behind was put to the sword by the orders of Alexander as mentioned by Arrian and Plutarch. The reason for such a massacre by Alexander has been mentioned by Greek sources as, the wounds of Alexander which he received while fighting against Malavas. This shows us the valour, courage, and spirit of Malavas.

Mahabsaya refers to a tribe named Malavas and Mahabharata locates them in the same place when it couples with the Trigarthas<sup>7</sup> as well as the Sivas and Ambasthas.<sup>8</sup> Before long they seem to have migrated from Punjab and settled in Rajputana where they were holding ground during the time of Samudragupta.

<sup>1</sup> Indian Antiquities, Vol. I, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Law., Tribes in Ancient India, (1943)

<sup>3</sup> Mahabhasya, IV, I, 68

<sup>4</sup> J.R.A.S., 1903, p. 631.

<sup>5</sup> McCrindle, Invasion of India, (2004), App. Note, p.357

<sup>6</sup> Tribes in Ancient India, pp. 62-64

<sup>7</sup> Dronaparvan, Ch. 10, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Subhparvan, Ch. 32, p. 7.



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Some numismatic sources which were found in Nagar about 45 km from Kota have the legend Malavanam Jayah which means victory to the Malavas which according to the analysis of General Cunningham belongs to 250 B.C. to 250 A.D. Cunningham further believes that the Malavas existed as an important and recognised clan long before the time when their tribal constitution, which led to the establishment of their era, took place.<sup>9</sup>

We have some important insights which show us that Malavas had migrated to the Jaipur area of Rajputana from Punjab, this is supported by the fact that legends on some of the Malava coins found in Rajputana have to be read from right to left as in Kharoshti which was the most frequent script of Punjab and northwest from early times. Nasik Cave Inscription of Usavadatta, the son in law of Kshatrapa Nahapana mentions “And by the orders of the lord, I went to release the chief of the Uttamabhadras, who had been besieged for the rainy season by the Malayas, and those Malayas fled by the mere roar (of my approaching) as it were, and were all made prisoners of the Uttamabhadras warriors.<sup>10</sup> From this epigraphical record, it seems that Mallavas had threatened Nahapana and his allies who had besieged the Uttamabhadras.

Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta mentions Malavas in the line 20-23 which says “ (Whose) formidable rule was propitiated with the payment of all tributes, execution of orders and visits (to his court) for Obeisance by such frontier rulers as those of Samatata, Davaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, Kartripura and by the Malavas, Arjuniyanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prararjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas, Kharaparikas and other (tribes).<sup>11</sup> So we can say that Samudragupta mentions Mallavas among the states which accepted the Guptas as supreme power and submitted to their sovereignty. The reasons for this submission of Mallavas to the Gupta was the threat from Guptas and Sakas and the best game was played by Malavas. By their request, all their risks were over. They became allies of Samudragupta, and secondly, it threatened Sakas not to attack the Gupta ally which could invite the wrath of Maharajadhiraja Samudragupta. So Malavas protected themselves from the danger of Sakas and established themselves as feudatory of Samudragupta which although degraded their status but on the other hand it offered them protection which they desperately needed from the other contemporary powers especially Sakas.

## Conclusion

Malavas played an essential role in the history of ancient India. They, according to classical Greek records were settled in Punjab. These records show us their tribal organisation and their fighting spirit against Alexander, which led to their defeat and forced them to migrate to southwards mostly Rajputana. After settling in Rajputana, they emerged as an important independent power and even challenged some of the mighty powers of the area like Sakas. Nasik Cave inscription of Usvadatta and Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta shows us their presence in the area and how the diplomacy to be the part of the Gupta empire saved them from the direct challenge of Sakas.

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<sup>9</sup> Tribes in Ancient India, pp. 61-63.

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<sup>11</sup> Altekar., Vakataka-Gupta Age Circa 200-550 A.D. (1967) pp. 136-55