

VIKRAMA ERA

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The origin of the *Vikrama era* commencing in 57 BC is one of the most controversial problems of Indian history. It has been sought to be connected with various rules, generally of foreign extraction. The commonly accepted notion now is that it was initiated by the Scytho-Parthian king Azes or Vonones and was brought by the Mālava people to Rajasthan and what is now known as Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. But a critical analysis of the extant literary and archaeological data should leave no doubt that it was started deliberately by or marks the victory of the Mālava republic under the leadership of their chief (rājan) Vikrama (or Vikramāditya) over the Śaka invaders in its new-found home in Rajasthan and the Avanti (Malwa) region of Madhya Pradesh.

Key-words : Kali-yuga, Kitab-ul-Hind, Kṛta yuga, Saṃvat, Vikrama era.

The *Vikrama era* is one of the two principal eras in popular use now, the other being called the Śaka era. In fact, this is the earliest known historical Indian era in the true sense of the term. We no doubt have a few other reckonings in use in certain circles tracing their origin to an earlier period. These include the *Kali-yuga*, Buddha's and Mahāvīra's *nirvāṇa* (decease) eras. While the first one is traditionally supposed to have commenced after the Mahabharata war in 3102 BC, the remaining two are believed to have begun at various dates in the sixth-fifth centuries BC. As there are differing traditions about the date of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, the epoch of the Buddha *parinirvāṇa* era differs in the southern (Siṃhalese) and northern (Chinese) traditions. But there is at present absolutely no evidence to indicate their employment for dating purposes in the pre-Christian centuries. As for the Kali era, it is commonly believed by historians that this era was concocted sometime over three thousand years later for the convenience of calculations as Āryabhaṭa I is the first author to use it in his *Āryabhaṭīya*,¹ though this is not acceptable to others who feel that it must have been based on 'a persistent tradition'.² As to the last two reckonings, which were current only among the votaries of Buddhism and Jainism respectively, they appear to have been occasionally used to indicate, not exact dates, but only rough periods in terms of centuries elapsed from the concerned events (*parinirvāṇa*) up to a particular point.³ The Arabic polymath Abu Raihan-ibn Muhammad, better known among historians as Alberuni, no doubt mentions the Śrī-Harṣa era commencing in 457 BC as in use in the Mathurā and Kanauj regions;⁴ but, as he himself points out, there was

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a confusion between it and the homonymous era commencing in 606 AD.⁵

As stated by Alberuni, the Śaka era began 135 years after the era of Vikramāditya, and, as the former commenced in 78 AD, the epoch of the latter lay in 57 BC. As we shall see in the sequel, the use of both expired and current years was prevalent, though the earlier system was more popular and the epoch mentioned here is based on this practice. Unfortunately, there is great controversy regarding the initiator of the era in question. While the medieval Indian tradition is unanimous in attributing the foundation of this era to the king Vikramāditya, several modern historians, both Western and Indian, dispute this tradition and variously ascribe its institution to some Indian or foreign king of importance who might have flourished in the first century BC. The reason for this supposition is that the era up to its year⁶ 794 is not associated with Vikramāditya in any as yet known datable record, literary or archaeological. In earlier epigraphs this era is mentioned variously. In order to facilitate a proper analysis of this problem it would be better to have all the evidence from inscriptions at one glance. In the earlier records the era is found mentioned as follows:

1. Year 282 - *Kṛtaylor=dvayor-śatayor=dvy-aśtyoḥ 200 (+) 80 (+) 2*. Nandsā (Rajasthan) *yūpa* inscription of Śaktigaṇaguru⁷
2. Year 284 - *Kṛtehi 200 (+) 80 (+) 4*, Barnālā (Rajasthan) *yūpa* inscription of Varddhana;⁸
- 3-5. Year 295 - *Kṛtehi 200 (+) 90 (+) 5*, three Badwa (Rajasthan) inscriptions of the Maukhari *Mahāsenāpatīs* Balavarddhana, Somedea and Balasiṃha, sons of Bala;⁹
6. Year 335 - *Kṛtehi 300 (+) 30 (+) 5*, Barnālā *yūpa* inscription of Bhaṭṭa¹⁰
7. Year 428 - *Kṛteṣu caturṣu varṣa-śateṣv-aṣṭāvimśeṣu 400 (+) 20 (+) 8*, Bijaygadh (Rajasthan) *yūpa* inscription of Viṣṇuvardhana;¹¹
8. Year 461 - *Śrīr=Mmālava-gaṇ-āmnāte praśaste Kṛta-samjnite / Eka-ṣaṣṭyadhike prāpte samā-śata-catustaye //* Mandasor inscriptin of the Aulikara king Naravarman;¹²
9. Year 480 - *Yāteṣu caturṣu Kṛteṣu śateṣu sāumyeṣv=āśīta-s-ottarapadeṣv-iha, vatsareṣu*, Gangdhar (Rajasthan) stone inscription of Aulikara king Viśavarman,¹³
10. Year 480 - *Kṛteṣu caturṣu varṣā śateṣv-ekāśi-ty-uttareṣv-asyāṃ Mālavāpūrvvāyām*, Nagari (Rajasthan) inscription of the Vaiśyas,¹⁴

11. Year 493 - *Malavānām gaṇa-sthityā yāte śata-catustaye / Tri-navaty-adhike=abdanam=ritau sevya-ghana-stane // Mandasor inscription of the silk-weavers' guild, verse 34;*¹⁵
12. Year 524 - *vikhyāpake Mālava-vaṃśa-kirtteḥ / śarad=gaṇe pañca-śate vyāṭite tri-ghātī-āṣṭ-ābhyadhike kkramaṇa // Mandasor inscription of the time of Prabhākara;*¹⁶
13. Year 589 - *Pañcasu śateṣu śaradām yāteṣv-ekāmnavati-śata-sahiteṣu / Mālava-gaṇa-sthiti-vaśāt kāla-jñanasya likhiteṣu // Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman -Visnuardhana, verse 34;*¹⁷
14. Year - possibly the year of 'the lord of men, the king of Mālava' (*Mālaveśa* or *Mālavendra*), Chittorgad (Rajasthan) inscription of Māna;¹⁸
15. Year 794 - *Vikrama-saṃvatsara-śateṣu saptasu catur-navaty-adhikeṣv-ankataḥ 794, Dhiniki (Gujrat) inscription of the Saindhava king Jāikadeva;*¹⁹
16. Year 795 - *Saṃvatsara-śatair=yātaiḥ sa-pañca-navaty-argalaiḥ saptabhir=Mālaveśānām, Kaṇaswā (Rajasthan) inscription of Śivagana;*²⁰
17. Year 894 - Kṛta year 894, Mungthal (Rajasthan) inscription;²¹
18. Year 898 - *Vasu-navak-āṣṭau varṣā-gatasya kālasya Vikramākhyasya, Dholpur/ inscription of Cāhamāna Caṇḍamahāsena;*²²
19. Year 973 - *Mālva-kālāc=charadām ṣaṭ-triṃśat-saṃyuteṣv-aṭiteṣu navasu śateṣu, Gyāraspur (Madhya Pradesh) fragmentary inscription;*²³
20. Year 973 - *Rāma-giri-nanda-kalite Vikrama-kāle gate tu śuci-māse saṃat 973, Bijapur (Rajasthan) inscription of Rāshṭrakūṭa Dhavala of Hastikuṇḍi;*²⁴
21. Year 1005 - Year of the Era Vikramāditya', Bodhgayā (Bihar) inscription;²⁵
22. Year 1086 - *Vikrama-saṃvat 1086, Rādhapur (Gujarat) plates of Caulukya Bhīma I;*²⁶
23. Year 1103 - *Vatsarair=Vikramādityaiḥ śatair=ekadaśais-tatha / Try-uttaraiḥ, Tilakwārā (Gujarat) plates of Jasorāja (Yaśorāja), feudatory of Paramāra Bhoja;*²⁷

From about the year 1100 of the reckoning the name of Vikramāditya is found associated with it in the inscriptions of the various parts of the present states of

Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh frequently and in a solitary case in Bihar. It is generally referred to as *Vikrama-saṃvat*²⁸ and *Vikrama-kāla*,²⁹ commonly prefixed by the honorific *śrī* or *śrīmat* to these names.³⁰ In a solitary case the reckoning is referred to as *Vikramāhva-kāla* also.³¹ In a few cases we come across the synonyms of the word *āditya* (sun) added after *Vikrama*.³² There are numerous examples of the word *nṛpa* (king) by itself being either prefixed³³ or suffixed³⁴ to *Vikrama*. But in most cases it is preceded by the honorific *śrī*³⁵ or *śrīmat*.³⁶ In a few instances we find synonyms of *nṛpa* suffixed to *Vikrama*.³⁷ We have several instances of the reckoning being described specifically as 'produced by *Vikramaditya*; which again is preceded or followed by the honorific *śrī*³⁸ or *śrīmat*.³⁹ One of these references comes from Rajasthan while the rest are noticed in the records of the Calukyās of Gujarat. There is also a single instance of the era itself being called *Śrī-Vikramāditya*⁴⁰ or *Vikramendreśa*,⁴¹ or *Vikramaditya-kāla*⁴² or *Vikrama-vatsara*.⁴³ In some records the reckoning is specifically stated to have been counted from king *Vikrama*.⁴⁴ There is a solitary case from Rajasthan of the era being designated *Vikramāṅka-saṃvat*.⁴⁵ In another inscription from the same state we find the era being referred to as 'the year of the lord of Mālava'.^{45a} These allusions culled together at random^{45b} would show that during the period from *circa* 1100 to *circa* 1300 of the reckoning it was firmly believed that it was initiated by king *Vikrama* or *Vikramāditya*. Of course, in a vast majority of cases the era is simply referred to by the common noun *saṃvat* or *saṃvatsara* or its abbreviatin *saṃ* without any specification. The Pratihāra and Gāhaḍavāla inscriptions, for example, are admittedly dated in this reckoning alone, but it is nowhere specified as *Vikrama*. This practice had been prevalent in practically the whole of northern India roughly from around the sixth century AD^{45c} and, surprisingly enough, is found repeated in a large number of instances even in the records of the ruling families and regions some of whose inscriptions take care to mention it by specific names coined after *Vikrama* or *Vikramāditya*. This is not because *Vikramāditya* was not its actual founder or that his association with the reckoning was yet to be fixed in public mind as surmised by A.S. Altekar,^{45d} but due to its extreme popularity and universality as there was no other reckoning to compete with it in the areas concerned which rendered it unnecessary to specify it.^{45e} The same thing happened in the case of a few other Indian reckonings like the Śāka and the Gupta eras in the various stages of their history. In the case of the Gupta era, for instance, the years of the era are often mentioned without any specification: universally before the reign of Kumāra Gupta I when it is first referred to specifically as Gupta and in most cases thereafter as well.^{45f}

It would follow from the foregoing data that the earliest known definite reference to the era of 57 BC commonly known as the *Vikrama saṃvat* or *Vikrama saṃvatsara* in ancient Indian tradition and records goes back to its year 282. But then it is not yet called *Vikrama* or in any way associated with the traditional *Vikramāditya*. The years of the era are found referred to as *Kṛta*^{45g} up to its year 428 (nos. 1-7), and from

the year 461 (no. 8) it gets associated with the Mālava-*gaṇa* (republican constitution), but for a few decades up to the year 481 the name *Kṛta* also continues to occur (nos. 8-10).^{45h} Even though it is associated with Mālava, the nature of this association is not always the same and undergoes perceptible change from time to time. In no. 8 of the year 461 it is stated to have been established by the Mālava republic and named *Kṛta*.⁴⁵ⁱ The same statement regarding its initiation is found repeated in nos. 11 and 13 of the years 493 and 589 respectively where the word *āmnāte* of no. 8 is found substituted by *sthiti* and *sthiti-vaśa* which are apparently identical semantically⁴⁶ and refer to the foundation of the era by the Mālava republic. In no. 10 dated in the year 481 the date (*pūrvā*) is called simply Mālava, while in no. 12 dated in the year 524 the era is described as 'announcing the fame of the Mālava *vaṃśa* or *vaṃśas* (family or families).⁴⁷ It is only from the year 794 (no. 15) onward that it gets specifically associated with Vikrama, but the association with Mālava also continues for another couple of centuries: in no. 16 of the year 794 the specific year is described as belonging to 'the lords of Mālava or the Mālavas' (*Mālaveśānām*), while no. 19 of the year 936 calls the era Mālava-kāla.⁴⁸

However, its association with the name Vikrama becomes most popular, and we come across expressions like *Vikram-ākhyā-kāla* (no. 18 of the year 898), *Vikramā-kāla* (no. 20 of the year 973) and *Vikrama-saṃvat* (no. 22 of the year 1086). Not only is the era styled Vikrama, there is a solitary case of its years themselves being referred to as Vikramāditya (no. 23 of the year 1103). From about the year 1100 its association with king Vikramāditya gets fixed and the only names that we find used for it are after Vikrama. In fact, as we have seen above, it is even specifically stated to have been founded by the illustrious Vikramāditya. However, in most of the instances of its employment it is left unnamed and being referred to only as *saṃvat*, indicating its sole sovereignty and enormous popularity. But it must be noted at the same time that its association with Mālava was not forgotten altogether as indicated by an allusion, though solitary, to this era as 'of the Mālava King'⁴⁹ in a record of the year 1226.⁵⁰ Of course, the expression *Mālaveśa* is here employed definitely for king Vikramāditya as many inscriptions before and after this year call the era by the name Vikrama or words in the formation of which it is the most important element.

There are a few points meriting our special attention in this context. First, up to the third quarter of the third century of this era there is no allusion to this era in any as yet known inscription of indigenous rulers. Secondly, up to the year 428 the years of the era are called *kṛta*. Thirdly, from the year 461 the era gets associated with and regarded as initiated by the Mālava republic (*gaṇa*) along with the name *Kṛta* which continues to be employed for a few years thereafter. In fact, the inscription of the year 461 is the only record yet known where the era is specifically called *Kṛta* (*Kṛta-saṃjñita*) whereas everywhere else it is the years of the era that are called *Kṛta*. Fourthly, the era is associated with the Mālava line (*vaṃśa*) or Mālva lord/lords

indiscriminately. Fifthly, finally the era gets associated with and called after Vikrama, Vikramāditya, king Vikrama, etc. And lastly, there are some overlaps and transitional stages, viz. (i) the continuation of *Kṛta* after its association with the Mālavas/Mālava lineage/Mālava lineage/Mālava, lord or lords; (ii) continuation of its being referred to as the 'era of the Mālava lords' (no. 16) or 'the era of the Mālava, 'i.e. country or people (no. 19) for over a century after it had come to be regarded as initiated or founded by Vikrama or Vikramāditya. And then several centuries after its fixation as the era of Vikrama or Vikramāditya an inscription of the year 1226 still refers to it as 'of the Mālava king'. As will be seen in the sequel, these transitional phases are of great value for the history of this era.

Having thus taken stock of the inscriptional evidence, let us now direct our attention to the traditions regarding the origin of the era. The Jaina writers have preserved age-old traditions in this matter. The several versions of the story of the Jaina patriarch Kālakācārya' when culled together, give us the following details. King Vairisimha of Dhārā (modern Dhār, Madhya Pradesh) had from his queen Surasundari a son named Kālaka and a daughter named Sarasvatī both of whom embraced Jaina ascetic order together at an early age. Once they happened to be at Ujjayinī in course of their routine movements where king Gardabhilla was enamoured by the beauty of Sarasvatī, carried her off and would not restore her despite Kālaka's repeated requests and ravished her. Kālaka, with the object of avenging this humiliation, went westward and after crossing the river Sindhu reached the country where a number of Śaka chiefs who assumed the subordinate title *Sāhi* and were under an overlord who styled himself *Sāhānūsāhi*. Kālaka approached one of them and brought him under his influence. Once the overlord got angry with the *Shāhis* and this provided a golden opportunity to Kālaka who assembled them all secretly and advised them to migrate to India instead of surrendering to the whims of the overlord. They all left for India accompanied by Kālaka, crossed the river Indus by boats and making conquests on the way reached Ujjain and defeated and captured Gardabhilla alive. They established themselves as rulers of Ujjain where they ruled for a few years. The country was divided among the conquerors. Kālaka thus succeeded in recovering his sister Sarasvatī and avenging humiliation. After the Śaka interregnum lasting four years Gardabhilla's son Vikramāditya drove the Śakas away and himself became king and established his own era. Again after another 135 years the Śakas invaded, for the second time, Ujjayinī, uprooted the family of Vikramāditya and initiated an era called after themselves.⁵¹

This tradition is, in the main, supported by the Jaina *Paṭṭāvalis* which supply information about the chronology and order of succession following Mahāvīra's *parinirvāṇa* (passing away) which occurred in 527 BC. According to these texts, king Gardabhilla ruled for thirteen years followed by the Śaka rule lasting four years. Thereafter king Vikramāditya ascended the throne in 57 BC and ruled for sixty years. After him his four successors ruled for a period of seventy-five years after which the

Śakas re-occupied Ujjayinī and started their own era in 78 AD. It must be noted in this context that though Merutuṅga, the author of the *Paṭṭāvalī*, lived in the fourteenth century AD and his work is in Sanskrit, this work is actually in the form of Sanskrit explanation of the earlier Prakrit traditions for which the Prakrit *gāthās* are cited in the original followed by the Sanskrit commentary.⁵²

F. Edgerton, who has collated and studied the different versions of the Vikrama story,⁵³ E.J. Rapson,⁵⁴ Sten Konow⁵⁵ and V.A. Smith,⁵⁶ among others, appear to appreciate the possible factual basis of this tradition.

The Arabic polymath Alberuni, who wrote his *Kitāb-ul-Hind* in 1030 AD, also refers to the era of 57 BC as initiated by king Vikramāditya and alludes to some confused traditions about him,⁵⁷ indicating the passage of a long period of time sufficient enough to result in confusion and conflicting traditions.

Reference may in this connection be also made to the evidence afforded by the much maligned *Jyotirvid-ābharaṇa* of Gaṇaka (astrologer) Kālidāsa who appears to have flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century AD. It is averred in its XXIII.13 that king Vikramāditya started his own era after defeating ninety-five Śaka chiefs. It must be remembered in this connection that in the *Prabhāvākacarita* of the Jaina poet Prabhāvakasūri also the number of the Śaka Sāhāhis (chiefs) brought by Kālakācārya with him from beyond the river Sindhu to Ujjayinī is given as 96 which is almost the same as given in the *Jyotirvid-ābharaṇa*. Even though this text is quite late,⁵⁸ there is no doubt that it represents persistent traditions about Vikramāditya and his era during the early thirteenth century AD.⁵⁹ That there were strong traditions prevalent regarding king Vikramāditya founding his own era after extirpating the Śakas much earlier is vouched for by an hitherto untapped but important evidence. Bhaṭṭa Utpala, a writer and well-known commentator of Varāhamihira's works as well of those of his son Pṛinthuyaśas, completed his commentaries on Varāhamihira's *Bṛhaj-Jātaka* and *Bṛhat-saṃhitā* on March 3rd, 830 and February 2nd, 831, respectively.⁶⁰ In his gloss on *Bṛhat-saṃhitā*, VIII. 20, he avers that the Śaka were *Mleccha* kings the that time when the illustrious Vikramāditya destroyed is known Śaka or Śaka kāla.⁶¹ This statement, with certain minor alterations, is found repeated in the commentaries of Pṛthūdakasvāmin⁶² (circa 864 AD) and Āmarāja⁶³ (circa 1180 AD) in their commentaries on the *Khaṇḍa-khādyaka* of the famed astronomer Brahmagupta. The strange notion that the initiation of the Śaka era coincided with and commemorates the annihilation of the Śaka kings got currency in later times and is echoed by the Arabic writer Alberuni as well.⁶⁴ It is different that he draws a line of demarcation between the *Vikrama* and *Śaka* eras which, he rightly points out, were separated from each other by an interval of 135 years. This is a clear indication of the great confusion about the commencement of the Śaka era which reflects the tradition regarding the destruction of the Śakas by king Vikramāditya before initiating

his era, and there appears to have been a confusion regarding the circumstances leading to the enunciation of the eras known after Vikramāditya and the Śakas which must have been in the air for a long period of time before getting confused. The first author to echo this confusion, viz. Bhaṭṭotpala, lived in the first part of the ninth century AD, and we can justifiably conclude that the original traditions, viz. initiation of the *Vikrama era* by king Vikramāditya and of the *Śaka era* by a Śaka king, must have been in currency at least a couple of centuries earlier in the seventh century AD at the latest, i.e. considerably earlier than the earliest inscription mentioning the *Vikrama era* as such.⁶⁵

VARIOUS THEORIES

The above tradition has been disputed by several scholars primarily on the ground that it is not only not supported but even contradicted by the extant epigraphic evidence. While the tradition would have us believe that there was a king named Vikramāditya in the first century BC who was responsible for the initiation of the era known after him, there is no other dependable evidence to indicate the existence of such a ruler during the period in question. Not only that, the era is variously referred to in inscriptions as *Kṛta* and associated with the *Mālava-gaṇa*/Mālava king or kings. In view of this a number of theories have been propounded some of which regard the era as indigenous to India while others are inclined to trace it to some foreign source, though, it must be pointed out, the evidence relied upon by both groups is the same. Let us see some of these theories, beginning first with the former group.

A.S. Altekar feels that if the era now known after Vikrama were really founded by king Vikramāditya it should have been referred to by that name right from the beginning. On the other hand the era is called first *Kṛta* and then Mālava which, according to him, would show that it was actually founded by *Kṛta* who was probably the leader, general or president of the Mālava republic. Initially the era was confined to parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh adjoining each other. Later when it spread to other regions which had nothing to do with the Mālava people, need was felt for a more popularly acceptable nomenclature which was provided by Candra Gupta II of the Gupta dynasty who had the *viruda* (title) Vikramāditya⁶⁶ and had brought a large part of north India under his sway. Even after the era had been so named in its ninth century⁶⁷, it took quite some time to be accepted universally⁶⁸.

This theory is substantially endorsed by V.V. Mirashi who regards the era as founded by the Mālava people in commemoration of their victory over the Śakas and later named *Vikrama* after the Gupta emperor Candra Gupta II Vikramāditya.⁶⁹ He does not take the word *Kṛta* as the proper name of some hero but as signifying 'made', 'started'.⁷⁰

D.R. Bhandarkar, who also refutes vehemently the existence of any person known as Vikramāditya in the first century BC,⁷¹ takes the name of the era as *Kṛta* meaning *Kṛtayuga* (golden age) which was initiated by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga whose date he brings down to 57 BC.⁷²

B. Bhattacharya gives the credit of the foundation of the era to the Mālavās to commemorate their settlement in the region now known as Malwa in Madhya Pradesh, merging various sections of the tribe under one leader and having a common administration, and called it *Kṛta* or the golden age.⁷³

But the most popular views now making the round in scholarly circles are those tracing the origin of this era from some foreign ruler. Sir John Marshall suggested that the era was really founded by the Scythian king Azes I who carved out an extensive kingdom in North-Western India including Sindh and Punjab in the first century BC, and his era is actually found mentioned in some inscriptions. He especially drew attention to the Taxila silver scroll inscription dated in the year 136 of the era of Aya⁷⁴ and the Kalwan copper-plate inscription dated in the year 134 of the era of Aja⁷⁵ both of whom he regarded as different spellings of the same name (*Aya* or *Aja*) and identified with Azes I. This suggestion found favour with E.J. Rapson who also felt that the so-called Vikrama era was actually established by Azes I.⁷⁶ Recently this view has found a strong advocate in B.N. Mukherjee⁷⁷ who has cited some additional inscriptional data in its support. These inscriptions, five in number,⁷⁸ are as follows:

- (i) An inscription on a casket in the collection of Professor S. Eilenberg, refers in l.3 to the year 63 of Mahārāja Aya when prince Itravarman established the relics of Lord Śākyamuni.⁷⁹
- (ii) A steatite reliquary inscription seen in the Peshawar market perpetuates the installation of the corporeal relics of the Buddha at a place called Kamikalaretra by one Ramaka on the third day of the month of Āśvayuj in the year 74 of the Aya era;⁸⁰
- (iii) A record on a steatite casket refers to the twenty-fourth day of the month of Śrāvana in the seventy-seventh year of the great king Aya;⁸¹
- (iv) Another inscription engraved on the outer face of the lid and the base of a steatite relic casket begins with a reference to the fifth day of the month of Āsāḍha in the year eight-three of *Mahārāja Aya*.⁸²
- (v) Another record incised on the four sides of a stone reliquary was put up on the twenty-third day of the month of Āsāḍha in the year 126 of the great *Mahārāja Aya*.⁸³

The expression *atida* and *varta-kala* (*aīta* and *vṛta-kāla* respectively), which actually refer to the expired years, are of great value in the present context. B.N. Mukherjee takes them to qualify the preceding *Ayasa* and the deceased', 'Aya of past-time' or 'Aya of completed years',⁸⁴ According to him, the Azes era came into use out of the continuation of counting the 'regnal' years of a king even after his death, and the same idea of the currency of an era of an *aīta* or 'past' king is betrayed by the name *Kṛta*, meaning, *inter alia*, 'the past tense', which is found used as an earlier appellation of the Vikrama era. He further observes that the era of Azes I became known as *Kṛta*, meaning 'past tense or tie', in Rajasthan by the third century AD,⁸⁵ as the reckoning of the Mālavas in and around Rajasthan by the early fifth century AD,⁸⁶ and finally as the Vikrama era by about the early eighth century AD,⁸⁷ after the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya.⁸⁸

As against this theory of the origin of the *Vikrama era* from the Azes era, another view attempts tracing its origin from the Parthian king Vonones who also is supposed to have lived in the first century BC⁸⁹ and had an extensive kingdom. This theory has been championed by D.C Sircar who has put forward his view in great detail and very forcefully at so many places.⁹⁰ He first points out that the ancient Indians were not accustomed to the use of eras, the Kali, Yudhiṣṭhira, Buddha and *Vīra parinirvāṇa* eras being either fictitious inventions of a later age of used only to indicate rough periods and not exact dates. The absence of any trace of the use of an era in the dates records of early Indian kings taken together with the fact that the earliest use of the regular eras in India is noticed in the epigraphic and numismatic records of the foreign rulers of Indian rulers employed no era for dating their records, that the foreign rulers who ruled in parts of India points to the extraneous origin of the custom of dating records according to the years of an era.⁹¹ Considering the facts that the early Indian Rulers who ruled in parts of India between the second century BC and the third century AD used two different reckonings separated from each other by a period of time and that the epochs of the Vikrama and Śaka eras are separated from one another by 135 years within this period lead one to think that these two reckonings may be the same as the two eras of foreign extraction known from the epigraphic records of the foreign rulers of the outlying portions of India.⁹² Earlier he was not quite certain about the identity of the foreign ruler who was responsible for initiating the era of 57 BC.⁹³ But later he propounded the view that it was founded or initiated by Vonones, who was the earliest Parthian ruler of Drangiana (east Iran) and is known to have assumed the imperial title 'great king of kings',⁹⁴ and flourished after the Parthian emperor Mithradates II (125-88 BC) and ruled over Afghanistan and the eastern parts of his domain through his viceroys, viz. Spalirises and Azes. It was carried from there to India proper by the Scythians and ultimately got the name *Vikrama-saṃvat*.⁹⁵ However, *Vikrama-saṃvat* (or the likes of it) was only its final name. The ancient Mālavas, called Malloi by Alexander's historians, lived in the Panjab in the land north of the confluence of the rivers Ravi and Cenab in the latter half of the fourth century

BC when Alexander invaded India. Under the continuous pressure of the foreigners including the Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians when situation became unbearable to the freedom-loving Mālavas, the latter were left with no option but to leave the Punjab. They left the Punjab and in course of their migrations they reached Rajasthan and established themselves in the Jaipur region where their coins have been spotted in thousands.⁹⁶ As they were in the Punjab originally, they were familiar with the Vonones' era of 57 BC which they carried with the first to Rajasthan and then to the region of Madhya Pradesh which later came to be known after them as Mālava (Malwa)⁹⁷. In inscriptions it is first called *Kṛta*, then associated with and called after the Mālava people, and finally Vikrama. As for *Kṛta*, D.C Sircar is not sure of the exact import, and at one place he is inclined to take it as the name of an illustrious leader of the Mālavas who secured independence for his tribe from foreign yoke.⁹⁸ Later, however, he appears to have shifted his stand and felt that the actual word might have been *Kṛita*, 'purchased', which is often used to denote foreigners who are often described as bought in the ancient Indian tradition, The Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang, it is pointed out, refers to a Buddhist tradition according to which some barbarian rulers of the north-western parts of India including Gandhāra and Kaśmīra were known to the Indians as *Kṛta* or purchased.⁹⁹ In the Bhaturiya (Rajashahi district, Bangladesh) the Pāla king Rājyapāla (c. 911-35 AD) is described as having conquered, *inter alia*, a people called *Kṛīta*.¹⁰⁰ Thus, he regarded the spelling *Kṛta* as an error for *Kṛīta*. Later when the Imperial Guptas occupied Ujjayini after annihilating the Śaka rules of Western India, a feat that was accomplished eventually by Candra Gupta II who assumed the title Vikramāditya, the era not only got associated with him but even came to be regarded as established by him. The development of the Vikramāditya saṅga also contributed to this phenomenon.¹⁰¹ This is also the supposition of those who envisage its initiation by Azes I.¹⁰²

The above theories, which reject the Indian tradition on the question outright and are based almost entirely on extant epigraphic evidence, suffer from some serious disabilities some of the most important of which must be highlighted here.

Several scholars have taken *Kṛta* as the name of the era. Two of them, A. S. Altekar and D.C. Sircar,¹⁰³ regard it as derived from that of its initiator, who is supposed to have been a great Mālava general, president or leader. However, this is just not possible. First, it is not the era but its years that are called *Kṛita*. As pointed out above, it is only in the Mandisor inscription of the Aulikara king Naravarman, dated in its year 461, which is the first to mention its Mālava association, that the era is specifically said to have been known as *Kṛta* (*Kṛta-saṅjñita*). While in all other cases which are quite numerous¹⁰⁴ its years alone are referred to by this name. As we have suggested earlier, the statement of this solitary inscriptoin is evidently due to oversight. Secondly, the years of the era are called *Kṛta* for the first time in the year 281 of the era and it is first found associated with the Mālavas a little over one century

and three quarters of another century later still. Are we justified in taking this association, even though long removed from the initiation of the era, and by over one and three quarters of a century from one another, for granted whereas we reject its association with Vikramāditya only on the ground that it is far removed in time from its initiation? If we are prepared to grant its association with the Mālava republic even though it is first mentioned in a record dated in its year 461 (viz. removed from this event by 461 years), why should one reject its association with Vikramāditya which is removed from its earliest association with the Mālava *gaṇa* only by 333 years? Then again to justify this theory the transitional phases when even after its association with the Mālavas the name *Kṛta* continues for some centuries and several centuries after its association with and christening after Vikramāditya it is still called Mālaveśa era in an inscription from Rajasthan dated in its year 1226 are just ignored. According to another view the era was called *Kṛta* as it was supposed to inaugurate a golden age (*Kṛta-yuga*). This is the theory not only of D.R. Bhandarkar¹⁰⁵ and B. Bhattacharya¹⁰⁶ but also of some scholars upholding the traditional view of the origin of this era. Like Raj Bali Pandey.¹⁰⁷ Whenever a ruler inaugurates a reckoning deliberately, he thinks he is initiating a golden era; but for that reason he would just not call it *Kṛta-yuga*. This view, therefore, does not look quite likely either. It is also negated by the fact that it is not the era itself but its years that are named *Kṛta*. The same is true about the strongly argued suggestion of D.C. Sircar that the actual name of the era might have been *Kṛīta*, 'purchased', in allusion to its foreign extraction which is based squarely on the rather tenuous evidence of the description by Yuan Chwang of some barbarian kings of the Gandhāra and Kashmir regions as 'purchased' and mention of a people named *Kṛīta* along with the Chīnas in the Bhaturiya inscription as one of the peoples conquered by the Pāla king Rājyapāla. He thinks it not improbable that *Kṛīta* (purchased) is an Indian adaptation of some foreign term.¹⁰⁸ Even ignoring the obvious tenuousness of the supporting argument arising out of the anxiety to establish an extraneous origin of the era, the statistical analysis¹⁰⁹ would reveal that the correct and more popular form of the concerned expression is actually *Kṛta* while *Kṛta* (supposed to stand for *Kṛīta*, 'purchased', is evidently a scribal error for *Kṛta*. Such scribal errors are quite common in ancient Indian epigraphic records and manuscripts even in such important and crucial matters as personal and geographical names as well as the extent of the reign of a king which have also quite often given rise to numerous historical controversies. It would be hazardous to build such an important theory on such a fragile base. B.N. Mukherjee understands the expressions like *atida* (*aīta*), *vertta-kala* (*vṛitta-kāla*) and *kala-gada* (*kāla-gata*) employed following the name Aya (Azes) in a few inscriptions as referring to a reckoning counted from the reign of Azes I who was no more on the dates of the records in question¹¹⁰ and *Kṛta* as connected with the Azes era conceptually and treats it as meaning 'past tense' and strongly pleads that it at the same time 'clinches the identification of the reckoning denoted by it with the Azes era,¹¹¹ However, we think that the expression *Kṛta* can be normally used in the language of the period in question only as an adjective and not as a noun by itself.¹¹²

Though so averred by M. Monier Williams, the word *Kṛita* in the *Aitareya-brāhmaṇa* (V.1)¹¹³ is not used in the sense of past tense but only as a past participle form of the root *Kṛiñ* (=to do) as symbolising a verbal form in the past tense and, for that matter, any other verb would have served the purpose.¹¹³ Moreover and that is most pertinent, as pointed out above, it is not the era but its years that are referred to by *Kṛita*, and this objection is equally well applicable to this view as well.¹¹⁴

As will be seen from the above discussion all the fanciful theories about the significance of the name emanated from the baseless assumption that it refers to the era as such as against the fact that it refers to its years only. Had this fact been realised much uncalled for discussion could have been avoided.

Next as regards the theories of its foreign origin. The very fact that the same data have led to two different views tracing it to two different personages (Azes I and Vonoues) would show how tenuous they are. The same Azes I whom a group of scholars credit with the initiation of this era flourished long after its initiation according to D.C. Sircar who gives the credit of its foundation to Vonones. However, for Vonones we have only a mass of silver and base metal coins and neither we have his inscription nor of others mentioning him. Azes, on the other hand, is at least known from some dated inscriptions, no matter whether they belong to two different kings named Azes¹¹⁵ separated by an *be* Azilyses or to an era initiated by him or counted from the accession of Azes I. To us it looks more probable that the era came into being, whether deliberately founded or counted from his accession, with Azes I as we have several inscriptions dated in this reckoning and specifically mentioning it. But it is clearly mentioned in all the records in question as *Aya* or *Aja* era and in some early inscriptions of this era it also appears to have been stated that king Azes was dead at the time when they were put up. Had the *Mālavas* brought it with them to the interior of India they would not have been required to alter its name. If they were aware of an era and were eager to use an era, they could as well have initiated their own era instead of adopting an alien era under a new name, especially when it is admitted on all hands they immigrated into Rajasthan from the Punjab mainly due to pressure from alien rulers and their great love of freedom. And that they were a very proud lot is also indicated by their extensive base metal coinage proclaiming their victory, evidently over foreigners. Thus it is impossible to believe that the Azes era was adopted by the *Mālava* republic under a different nomenclature and consequently to identify it with the *Kṛta-Mālava-Vikrama* reckoning of 57 BC. It is under the circumstances most probable that with the end of the Scytho-Parthian rule in the *Upparāpatha* region of ancient India owing to the spread and consolidation of the *Kuṣāna* rule, the Scytho-Parthian era also died a natural death.

Most of the propounders of the foregoing views are of the opinion that the *Kṛta-Mālava* era of 57 BC came to be known as *Vikrama* era after the Gupta emperor

Chandra Gupta II who had Vikrama or Vikramāditya for his *viruda*.¹¹⁶ Let us scrutinise this theory. First, the era is traditionally believed to have been initiated by a king whose personal name was Vikramāditya. In the case of Candra Gupta II it was just a *virtue* and not his name which was, of course, Candra or Candra Gupta. Secondly, it is true that he had uprooted the rule of the Śaka Kṣatrapas from western India including Gujarat and Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh as we learn from his silver coinage which was initiated to meet the monetary requirements of these newly conquered territories.¹¹⁷ However, it was not indeed as great an achievement as it is made out to be by modern historians. First, it is not unlikely that this process was initiated by his father Samudra Gupta. Rudradeva, who is included in the list of Āryāvarta kings uprooted by Samudra Gupta in his Allahabad pillar inscription, has been identified by D.C. Sircar with Rudrasena III (348-78 AD) of the Śaka dynasty of Western India.¹¹⁸ Secondly, the task was perhaps not fully completed by Candra Gupta II and it was left for his son and successor Kumāra Gupta I to accomplish it finally. For the recently discovered numismatic evidence seems to indicate that Rudrasimha III, the last known Śaka Kṣatrapa of western India continued to rule and issue coins in his name till at least 415 AD¹¹⁹ which is well within the reign of Kumāra Gupta I. It appears therefore that while Rudrasimha III's power was considerably crushed and most of the territory under him was annexed by Candra Gupta II, he continued to rule over a small area till at least 415 AD. This success against the Śakas was indeed not so great as it is made out by modern historians and as to merit re-naming of an existing era after him. Thirdly, even after this conquest and acquisition of western Indian territory there is at present nothing to indicate that he gave any importance to Ujjayinī which is said to have been the capital of the initiator of the Vikrama samvat. It is, of course, believed by the supporters of this theory that following this annexation Chandra Gupta II turned Ujjayinī into his second capital. There is, however, absolutely no evidence to strengthen this view. Not a single inscription of the Imperial Guptas, not to speak of Candra Gupta II alone, has yet been reported from the hundred km proximity of Ujjayinī, not to specify the city itself. No Gupta emperor is mentioned anywhere in connection with Ujjayinī if only we keep aside the literary allusions to Sāhasāṅka or Vikramāditya which have been unduly imposed upon him. Moreover, the hold of the Imperial Guptas over this territory was not that long-lasting as to lead result into a permanent impress. As we have shown elsewhere, there is at present absolutely no evidence, epigraphic or numismatic, to prove the Gupta rule over this region after Skanda Gupta. Budha Gupta discontinued the series of Western India type silver coins that were initiated by Candra Gupta II and continued by Kumāra Gupta I and Skanda Gupta, showing thereby that the area had slipped away from the authority of the Guptas sometime after Skanda Gupta and prior to Budha Gupta.¹²⁰ Fourthly, the Guptas had their own era called Gupta-kāla or its variations which specifications are first met with in the reign of Kumāra Gupta I. Earlier the years of the era were just mentioned without any specification. Had the latter people been eager to name an era after Candra Gupta II Vikramāditya, as suggested by scholars, they would have chosen for this purpose the Gupta era instead

of a reckoning current for hundreds of years prior to the time of the Guptas in a limited area (Rajasthan and Malwa¹²¹). To add to it, not a single Gupta inscription dated in this era has yet been found. The Aulikaras of Rajasthan and Malwa, who were perhaps related to the Mālavas, continued to date their records in the era of 57 BC even though early members of this family had conceded the supremacy of the Gupta. And lastly, even though acknowledged as a great patron of literature and a liberal donor, Candra Gupta II was not held in such a great esteem by later people as to feel the urge of re-naming an existing era after him. Let us see what the later writers had to say of him. The author of the Sanjan plates of the Rāshtrakūṭa emperor Amoghavarṣa (814-878 AD) speaks of him as a poor (*dīna*) Gupta scion (*Gupta-ānvaya*) who had killed his brother and seized his kingdom and queen and got crores written for lacs given by him.¹²² Another stanza occurring in the Cambay¹²³, Sangli,¹²⁴ and Andura¹²⁵ plates of the Rāshtrakūṭa emperor Govinda IV (929-934 AD) observes that even though capable, he was Sāhasāṅka in the world only by dint of his liberality and incomparable courage but he did not practice cruelty towards his elder brother and tarnish his name by such bad conduct as cohabiting with his brother's spouse and resort to the Paiśāca rites ignoring considerations of purity and impurity. Here we have a clear allusion to the Rāmagupta episode. In these stanzas we find the Rāshtrakūṭa kings comparing themselves with Candra Gupta II, who was also known as Sāhasāṅka, in charity and courage whose other actions, which they deplored, including cruelty to his elder brother, marrying his elder brother's widowed queen and pretending madness, they did not copy. This was the feeling in the Rāshtrakūṭa court about Candra Gupta II who had murdered his elder brother Rama Gupta and later married his widowed queen Dhruvadevī which were still remembered by the posterity which did not excuse him in spite of his exemplary bravery and courage in vanquishing the Śakas. This was approximately the period when the era of 57 BC is first referred to as Vikrama era in inscriptions. How could it think of re-naming an already existing era after such a man? And, not to speak of just Candra Gupta II, even the Imperial Guptas as such did not enjoy a high reputation with the posterity. Alberuni, writing about the Gupta era, mentions the tradition current during his time (early eleventh century AD) regarding its initiation. He reports that 'the Guptas were wicked powerful people, and that when they ceased to exist this date was used as the epoch of an era.'¹²⁶ All these allusions are transparent enough to show that the Imperial Guptas did not command such a high reputation in the eye of the posterity as to make them re-name an era after him.

It would follow from the foregoing discussion that none of the above theories is capable of satisfactorily explaining the known facts, and it would be desirable to reconsider the whole problem in a detached manner taking into consideration both the archaeological evidence and literary tradition with an attempt, if possible, to reconcile them. The attempts of scholars relying exclusively on either tradition or archaeological data are doomed to failure to unknot the riddle. Not that such efforts were not made earlier, the two scholars who made a concerted attempt in this direction being

Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha¹²⁸ and Raj Bali Pandey.¹²⁹ But the former had access to the miniscule data available in the teens of this century¹³⁰ while the latter appeared inclined in favour of the Indian tradition. Our attempt here would be to deal with the problem objectively on the basis of the evidence now available.

As we have seen above, *Kṛta* in our inscriptions is not the name of the era but is used as an adjective for its years only. It has to be taken in the sense of 'made', 'artificial' or 'initiated', and it has been definitely used in this sense. It is intended to distinguish the years of an era from the regnal years which were used earlier. What is meant to state is that these years belonged to a definite era as against the natural ones, viz. of individual reigns, as were current thitherto and remained current in several areas for a long time thereafter.¹³¹ If this point is borne in mind, most of the theories about the origin of the era will evaporate automatically.

We also feel that king Vikramāditya of the first century BC is not purely a mythical figure. As has been pointed out above, the Jaina Paṭṭāvalis state unanimously that the era of 57 BC was initiated by king Vikramāditya. Even though this tradition is quite late, there is reason to believe that it is based on some historical facts. There are allusions to king Vikramāditya in some early texts. The well-known Prakrit anthology called *Gāhāsattasāi* attributed to the poet Hāla contains a stanza alluding to the proverbial generosity of Vikramāditya.¹³²

Hāla, its compiler, was a member of the Sātavāhana dynasty¹³³ and appears to have flourished sometime in the first century AD. This work is a compilation of some seven hundred stanzas in the Mahārāshṭra Prakrit and appears to have been originally known as *Koṣa* by which name it is referred to by several ancient literary celebrities including Bāṇa.¹³⁴ Though its kernel thus belongs to the first century AD, it received several additions for several centuries, and the period of each stanza has to be determined independently of this general date.¹³⁵ However, it has yet to be proved that the stanza in question¹³⁶ does not belong to the original compilation and is a later addition. For determining this question one has to find out whether this verse is met with in a majority of versions or not. And since it is included in all the editions of this work, it may justifiably be believed to have belonged to the work from the very beginning. And this would prove that already in the first-second centuries AD king Vikramāditya was a well-known personage reputed for his generosity and victories.

Guṇādhyā was a great writer of Prākṛit and all the traditions indicate that he enjoyed patronage of an early Sātavāhana king. He composed a great work called *Vaḍḍakahā* (*Bṛhatkathā*) in Paiśācī Prakrit. The original text is unfortunately not now traceable, but some of its later Sanskrit versions have come down to us. Two of these, both Kashmiri, viz. The *Bṛhat-kathā-maṅjarī* by the polymath Kṣemendra¹³⁷ and the *Kathā-sarīt-sāgara* by Somadeva Sūri,¹³⁸ and belonging to the eleventh century AD,

narrate the story of king Vikramāditya of Ujjayinī who defeated the Mlecchas and ruled gloriously. Although these versions are highly adumbrated and confused, the lives of several Vikramādityas that flourished till the early mediaeval period, especially the one of the first century BC and Candra Gupta II and Skanda Gupta who assumed Vikramāditya as their *viruda*, there is no doubt that they are based in outline on the original work of Guṇāḍhya. At least it is clearly averred by Somadeva Sūri in his *Kathā-sarit-sāgara* that the work is exactly what the original was and that he did not even sightly deviate from the original.¹³⁹ That in spite of this statement the version is highly exaggerated and confused cannot be gainsaid. But there should be no doubt that the original text of the *Bṛhat-kathā* did contain an account of king Vikramāditya who lived prior to its composition in the early Sātavāhana period. This was the view of that great historian of ancient Indian literature, M. Winternitz, and K.A. Subramania Iyer thinks that this possibility cannot be absolutely ruled out.¹⁴⁰ The *Vāsavadatā* of Subandhu, who is mentioned by Bāṇa, also pays his glowing tribute to the proverbial patronage extended to the literateurs by Vikramāditya who, in our opinion, cannot be but the traditional Vikramāditya of the century BC.¹⁴¹ As already stated later tradition represented by the *Kālkācārya-kathānaka*, the Jaina *Paṭṭāvālī*s and the *Jyotirvid-ābharaṇa* contain explicit allusions to the foundation of the era by king Vikramāditya who lived in the first century BC. According to the Jaina tradition, Vikramāditya's father was Gardabhilla. The dynastic portions of the Purāṇas are Gardabhilla; but there it is not a personal name of a ruler but of a ruling family, that, *inter alia*, followed the Āndhra-Sātavāhanas in various regions.¹⁴² Two points deserve particular notice in this connection. First, the number of the kings of this dynasty is given generally as seven.¹⁴³ Secondly, they are said to have been followed by the Śaka kings¹⁴⁴ whose number of Gardabhilla and his successors, according to the Jaina tradition, was six which is just one short of the number in the Purāṇas. According to both the traditions Gardabhilla and his successors or the Gardabhins/Gardabhilas were succeeded by the Śaka kings. We would not be unjustified in taking both these as one and the same, and what the Purāṇas probably mean by Gardabhins/Gardabhilas is king Gardabhilla and his descendants. Unfortunately, they do not give the names of individual rulers; otherwise it is very likely that we might find the name Vikrama or Vikramāditya.¹⁴⁵ Even though Pargiter takes these rulers among the dynasties that followed the Āndhra-Sātavāhanas, the phrase used in the *Matsya*, *Vāyu* and *Bhahmāṇḍa*, viz. *Āndhrāṇām Saṁsthite rājye*,¹⁴⁶ may as will be taken to mean that at least some of these dynasties were also their contemporaries. And actually this appears to be true about at least some of the dynasties listed in this connection while others were definitely later. So like the Śakas of western India and *Tusāras* (viz. Kusāṇas) of the North, who are known to have been contemporaries of the Āndhra-Sātavāhanas, it may be taken for granted that the Gardabhillas (Gardabhilla and his descendants) were their senior contemporaries.¹⁴⁷ It is also noteworthy that while we have persistent traditions attributing the initiation of this reckoning to king Vikramāditya of the first century BC, there is no other claimant to this honour.

In view of the above facts, we have to take the tradition as substantially correct and try to reconcile the extant epigraphic evidence with it. As we have seen above, prior to the year 461, its years are simply mentioned as 'made' or 'artificial' (viz. of an era as against the regnal ones) without any specification of its actual name. It is from its year 461 that the era is first associated with the Mālavas and even after this for over a century at least the years continue to be referred to as Kṛita either together with its specification as Mālava or by other allied names or by themselves. We have hinted at the possibility that the tradition attributing it to king Vikramāditya was very popular around its sixth century and got confused with the Śaka era regarding the circumstances of their origin by its eighth century as reflected in the commentaries of Bhaṭṭotapala, Pṛthūdaka and Āmarāja on astrological-astronomical texts. In inscriptions the era is first called Vikrama towards the close of its eighth century. Such references are thereafter encountered in inscriptions whereas mention of its association with the Mālveśa continues for a few centuries well within its thirteenth century. Alongside reference to it merely as the era (*saṃvatsara*, *saṃvat* or the abbreviation *saṃ*) are quite numerous, in fact in majority, showing thereby that it was only era in vogue in the area, so much so that it was not felt necessary to name it. Thus, one has to take into consideration its association with the Mālava republic (king/kings) and king Vikramāditya and it is not difficult with the extant evidence.

As we have seen above, the Mālavas were in the Punjab in the late fourth century BC when that region was invaded by Alexander. While some of them might have continued to live in that region,¹⁴⁸ at least a very large section of the people are found to have immigrated into the Jaipur region of Rajasthan where their base metal coins have been spotted in thousands. However, about the date of these coins there is a great divergence of opinion among the numismatists. As for the *terminus adquem*, there is general agreement and they are supposed to have continued to be minted right up to about early fourth century AD. But their beginnings have been dated by scholars widely differently. A.C. Carlyle and A. Cunningham were inclined to date the earliest coins to about the mid-third century BC,¹⁴⁹ A. Smith, on the other hand, dated these coins about the second century BC¹⁵⁰ while J. Allan dates them in the second century AD.¹⁵¹ D.C. Sircar favours placing at least a few of them in the century BC¹⁵² while K.K. Das Gupta believes in dating them in the second century BC.¹⁵³ We ourselves feel that while a few of them can easily be dated about the close of the second century BC, a vast majority has to be dated from the first century BC to about the beginning of the fourth century AD, the latest being those with the Sanskrit legend *Mālavanām jaya (h*)* or its variants. Most of the coins with queer legends found along with them and generally attributed to the people belong, in our opinion, to chiefs of foreign extraction, perhaps the Śakas. It is quite likely that the Mālavas extended their sway up to the adjoining region of Madhya Pradesh including Mandasar and Ujjayinī where also the Śakas had their stronghold. Recently coins with some strange names of foreign origin have been reported from western Malwa and have been taken to belong

to the early Śakas, who flourished in the first century BC.¹⁵⁴ Coming from Ujjain and Vidiśā region as they do, they appear to corroborate the Jaina and *Jyotirid-ābharāṇa* tradition about the Śaka invasion of Avanti. It may thus be concluded reasonably that the Mālavas, who had left the Punjab and started on their migration towards Rajasthan sometime early in the second century BC had again to face a serious challenge from the Scythians in early first century BC in their new-found home in Rajasthan and western Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh in which they ultimately came out successful. Their leader, called *rājā* or king was Vikramāditya. This victory was commemorated by (i) issuing a series of *jaya* (victory) coins and (ii) establishing a new era in 57 BC. Initially for several centuries its years were referred to just as *Kṛta* or 'made', 'artificial' as against the regnal years in use earlier. So long as there was no other era in the field this was sufficient. But when the Gupta era came into use and specifically called by names coined after the Guptas, it was felt necessary to specify its name also. And as the era was initiated by the Mālavas, from the latter half of its fifth century it came to be called after them. About the early fourth century AD the Mālavas had to acknowledge the suzerainty of Samudra Gupta and a few decades later they completely disappeared as a political power and monarchy became the established order, it becoming unthinkable that any thing like a republican state could have existed. And so the era came to be called as the 'era of the Mālava King/kings'. Still later it also was found to be inadequate and the era came to be called Vikrama-kāla or - *saṃvat* and as established by king Vikramāditya as Vikrama, who was the leader under whom the Mālavas had fought against the Śaka invaders, came to be regarded as a full-fledged king. Still for quite a few centuries the reckoning also continued to be called as that of the Mālava lord/lords. However, as there was no real competitor in the field with the Gupta era and Harṣa era, which had in the meanwhile been initiated in 606 AD, being almost extinct in the area, it also continued to be referred to without any specification only as *saṃvat* till the early decades of the twentieth century.

It is not difficult to trace the spread of the use of the Vikrama era from Rajasthan and Malwa to other regions. It were the Maukharis who carried it to eastern U.P. where an inscription of the time of king Isānavarman, dated (Vikrama) year 611 has been found at the village Haṛahā in the Bārābankī district.¹⁵⁵ Next it was patronised by the Gurjara-Pratihāras who hailed from Rajasthan and dated all their records in this era which they carried far and wide including practically the whole of North India. Its use was carried by the Malayaketus of the Gorakhpur region¹⁵⁶ to Bihar,¹⁵⁷ It was used in dating their records by the Paramāras of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Calukyās and Vāghelas of Gujarat and the Gāhaḍavālas as well as several other ruling families. However, it did not become popular in Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Maharashtra and South India where records dated in this era are few and far between. But it is mentioned in the almanacs.

The Vikrama era commenced after the completion of 3044 years of the *Kali-yuga*;

thus expired Kali year 3045 was coeval with Vikrama year 1 expired. And as it began 135 years earlier than the Śaka era, one has to add the same number to a given Śaka year to get its Vikrama equivalent. Likewise one has to add 57-56 and 58-57 years to a given year of the Christian era to arrive at its expired and current Vikrama equivalent respectively. Normally expired (*atīta, gata*) years were employed, current (*Vidyamāna, vartamāna*) years being used rather rarely.¹⁵⁸ The year of the Vikrama era commences on *Chaitra śukla* (bright half) 1 in North India but on *Kārttika śukla* 1 in South India. That the system now in vogue in South India is the original one and was followed in the North also up to the medieval period is clearly vouched for by an analysis of the extant inscriptional evidence. The Mandasor inscription of the Aulikara king Yaśodharman-Visnuvardhana, dated in the Mālava year 589,¹⁵⁹ refers to the years as *śarad* (autumn) which, though employed in the sense of 'year', is at the same time indicative of the fact that it commenced from the month of Kārttika which is now the second month of the *śarad* (autumn) season and might originally have been the first.¹⁶⁰ The Gyāraspur inscription of the Mālava year 936¹⁶¹ also uses the same term to connote a year and has to be explained in the same manner. The continuance of this practice up to at least the Vikrama year 1320 is indicated clearly by an inscription from Verāval dated in *Vikrama-saṃvat* 1320 and *Rasūla Mahanmada-saṃvat* (viz. *Hijri year*) 662.¹⁶² In the North its months begin on the first *tithi* of the dark fortnight and end on the fifteenth day of the bright half (*pūrṇimā*) and are accordingly called *pūrṇimānta*. As against this, in South India the months are *amānta*, viz. they begin on the first day of the bright fortnight and terminate on the fifteenth day of the dark half (*amāvāsyā*). The bright fortnight would thus belong to the same month according to both the systems, viz. the bright half of Kārttika would be of the same month in both the systems, but the dark fortnight of the southern system is counted as belonging to the next month in North India, viz. *Kārttika kṛṣṇa* (dark half of Kārttika) of the southern system would be the dark fortnight of the month of *māiryatisha* according to the Northern system. In Gujarat and some parts of Rajasthan its year begins on *Āsāḍha śukla* 1 and in the Udaypur region of the latter state on *Śravana kṛṣṇa* 1 as it ought to be according to the *pūrṇimānta* system. Following these various points of the commencement of its years, the year is called Chaitrādi, Kārttikādi, Āṣaḍhādi and Śrāvāṇādi.¹⁶³

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASIAR	<i>Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports.</i>
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, Hanoi.</i>
BL	<i>Bhandarkar's List, EI, XIX-XXIII, Appendix.</i>
BMC, AI	<i>Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British museum: Coins of Ancient India by J. Allan</i>

CASR	<i>Cunningham's Archaeological Survey Reports.</i>
CII	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.</i>
EI	<i>Epigraphia Indica.</i>
IA	<i>Indian Antiquary.</i>
IMB	<i>Indian Museum Bulletin.</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society.</i>
JBBRAS	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
JBORS	<i>Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research society</i>
JESI	<i>Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India.</i>
JNSI	<i>Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
JUPHS	<i>Journal of the U.P. Historical Society.</i>
PAIOC	<i>Proceedings of the All-India Oriental Conference.</i>

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. He gives his date of birth as follows: *Sasty-abdanam sastiryadā vyafitastryasca yuga-pādāh Tryadhikā vimśatirabdūstadeha mama janmanītāh Āryabhaṭīya*, *Kālakriyāpāda*, v, 1.
2. Kane, P.V. (1958) *History of Dharmasāstra*, V, Pune, p. 650.
3. Sircar, D.C. (1948) "The Vikrama Saṃvat", *Vikrama Volume*, Ujjain, pp. 561-64; *Indian Epigraphy*, 1965, Delhi, pp. 238-40; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, (1969) Delhi, pp. 150-52. It is pertinent to note in this context that Alberuni does not mention these reckonings in his 'summary description of eras' (E. Sachau (1910) *Alberuni's India*, II, London, Ch. XLIX).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.* Alberuni was informed by some of the inhabitants of these (Mathurā and Kanoj) regions that there was an interval/of 400/years between Śrī-Harsa and Vikramāditya, but in the Kashmirian calendar he read that Sri-Harsa was 664 years later than Vikramāditya.
6. Dhiniki inscription of the Saindhava king Jāikadeva, *IA*, XII, p. 155, line 1. This is the earliest known record to mention the era as Vikramasamvatsara, 'the era of Vikrama'.
7. Bhandarkar's List, N. 1.
8. *EL*, XXVI, p. 120.
9. *Ibid.*, XXIII, p. 52.
10. *Ibid.*, XXVI, p. 123.
11. Fleet, J.F. *CII* III, p. 253. Bhandarkar's List, N. 2.
12. *Ibid.*, No. 3.

13. *CII*, III, p. 75; Bhandarkar's List, No. 4; Sircar, D.C. (1965) *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I, second ed., Calcutta., p. 402, *ersa* 14 for amended reading.
 14. Bhandarkar's List, No. 5.
 15. *CII*, III, revised by Bhandarkar, D.R. and edited by Chhabra B.Ch. and G.S. Gai, (1981), New Delhi, p. 327, *verse* 34
 16. *Select Inscriptions*, I, p. 409, *verse* 13.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 417, *erse* 24.
 18. Bhandarkar's List, No. 16; Sircar, D.C. (1965) *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, p. 252.
 19. *IA*, XII, p. 155, line 1. Kielhorn F. (*ibid.*, XIX, pp. 369-70) is inclined to regard the date as irreconcilable with the actualities, and Ojha G.H. (*Bhārāṭīya Prācīna Lipimāla. Ajmer*, 1918, p. 166, fn.1) also seems to agree with this opinion, though without citing any further reasons. A.S. Altekar gives some further reasons of a historical nature to show that it does not go well with the known facts of the history of the Saindhavas (*EI*, XXVI, p. 189). G. Buhler (*IA*, XII, pp. 153 ff), however, explains the date part satisfactorily. We personally feel that we should await further evidence before finally pronouncing the plates as spurious.
 20. *Ibid.*, XIX, p. 57; Bhandarkar's List, No. 18.
 21. *JUPHS*, New Series, III, pp. 1 ff., cited by Sircar, D.C. in his *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 251, fn. 2.
 22. Bhandarkar's List, No. 27.
 23. *CASR*, X, p. 33; Bhandarkar's List, No. 37.
 24. *Ibid.*, No. 48. See also *EI*, X, p. 24, lines 30 and 32 for the original. At p. 17 of *EI*, X, however, the year in question is erroneously given as 1058 in the caption of the paper which reads 'Bijapur Inscription of Dhavala of Hastikundi, Vikrama-Saṃvat 1058'.
 25. *Asiatic Researches*, I, p. 284; Bhandarkar's List, No. 63. Nowhere the text of the date-portion is given.
 26. *Ibid.*, No. 117. As we shall see in the sequel, in some of the records of the Chaulukyas the era is called descriptively as produced by Vikramāditya (*Vikramāditya-otpādita-saṃvatsara*).
 27. *PAIOC*, I, pp. 324ff.; Bhandarkar's List, No. 128.
 28. (i) Sunak (Gujarat) plates of Chaulukya Karṇa Traliokyamalla, year 1148- BL, No. 155; (ii) Ārthūnā (Rajasthan) plates of paramāra Chamundaraja, year 1157 - BL, No. 165; (iii) Ārthūnā inscription of Paramāra Vijayarāja, year 1166 - BL, No. 179; (iv) Bhadreśvara (Gujarat) fragmentary inscription of Chaulukya Jayasimha Siddarāja, year 1195 - BL, No. 241; (v) Kīrādū (Rajasthan) inscription of Chaulukya Kumārapāla, year 1218 - BL, No. 312.
 29. Āhār (Rajasthan) inscription of Gahila Allāta, year 1010 - BL, No. 67. We have already mentioned the Bījāpur inscription where such a reference is known to occur for the first time.
 30. *Śrī-Vikrama-saṃvat*:
(i) Royal Asiatic Society's plates of Chaulukya Bhīma II, year 1266 - BL, No. 455; (ii) Mt. Ābu (Rajasthan) inscriptin of Paramāra somasimha, year 1287 - BL, No. 488; (iii) Gīrnār (Gujarat) inscription of Chaulukya-Vāghela Vīradhavala, year 1288 -BL, No. 491.
- Srīmad-Vikrama-saṃvat*:
(i) Māngrol (Gujarat) inscription of Chaulukya Kumārapala, year 1202 - BL, No. 268; (ii) Royal Asiatic Society's plates of Chaulukya Bhīma II, year 1226 - BL, No. 455.

Śrī-Vikrama-kāla:

(i) Kaḍmal (Rajasthan) inscription of Guhila Vijayasimha, year 1164- BL, No. 176; (ii) A grant of Paramāra Yaśvarman, year 1191 - BL, No. 232; (iii) Pipalīānagar (Madhya Pradesh) plates of Parmāra *Mahākumāra* Hariśchandra, years 1235 and 1236 - BL, No. 382, (iv) Bhopāl (Madhya Pradesh) plates of Paramāra *Mahākumāra* Udayavarman, year 1258 - BL, No. 439.

31. In the already-mentioned Dholpur inscription, year 898 - BL, No. 27.
32. (i) *Śrī-Vikram-ārka-nṛipa-kāla*, Gwālīor (Madhya Pradesh) inscription of Kach chhapaghāta Mahīpāla, year 1161 - BL, No. 169; (ii) *Vikrama-bhānoh kāla*, Ārthūnā inscriptin of Paramāra Vijayarāja, year 1166 - BL, No. 179; (iii) *Vikrama-bhāsvataḥ kāla*, Bijoliā (Rajasthan) inscription of Chāhamāna Someśvara, year 1266 - BL, No. 344.
33. Mt. Ābū (Rajasthan) inscriptions of the minister Tejahpāla, years 1287 and 1288 (*nṛipa-vikrama-saṃvat*) - BL, Nos. 489 and 504.
34. Ujjain fragmentary inscription of Chaulukya Jayasimha Siddharāja, year 1195 (*Vikrama-nṛipa-kāla*) - BL, No. 240.
35. (i) Dohad (Gujarat) inscription of Chalukya Jayasimha Siddharāja, year 1196 - BL, No. 245; (ii) Uñjha (Gujarat) inscription of Chaulukya Ajayapāla, year 1231-BL, No. 363; (ii-xxiii) Mt. Ābū inscriptions of Tejahpāla, years 1287, 1288, 1290 and 1293 - BL, Nos. 489, 492-501, 503, 505-506, 512, 514, 518-519 and 522-524. These records contain the expression *śrī-nṛipa-Vikrama-saṃvat* while the plates of Chaulukya Ajayapāla, year 1231-BL, No. 361, hae the concluding word *saṃvat* replaced by *kāla*.
36. (i) Royal Asiatic Society's plates of Chaulukya Bhīma, II, year 1266 (*śrīmād-Vikrama-nṛipa-kāla*) - BL, No. 455; (ii) Verāval (Gujarat) inscription of Chaulukya Bhīma II, year 1273 (*śrīmād-Vikrama-nṛipa-saṃvat*) - BL, No. 467.
37. (i) Kīrāḍū (Rajasthan inscription of Chaulykya Jayasimha Siddharaja, year 1198 (?) (*Vikrama-bhūateḥ verṣha*) - BL, No. 250; (ii) Ekalingajī (Rajasthan) inscription of Guhila Naravāhana, year 1028 (*Vikramāditya-bhūbhrituḥ*) - BL, No. 80.
38. (i) Navasārī (Gujarat) plates of Chaulukya Karṇa and *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* Durlabharāja, year 1131 - BL, No. 141; Sevadi (Rajasthan) plates of Chāhamāna Ratnapāla, year 1176 - Bl, No. 200. The relevant expression is *śrī-Vikramāditya-otpādita-saṃvatsara*.
39. This phrase differs from the preceding one only in replacing the word *śrīmat* for *śrī* and the phrase in question now is *śrīmad-Vikramāditya-otpādita-saṃvatsara* which is met with in the (i) Pāṭan (Gujarat) plates of Chaulujkya Bhīma II, year 1176 - BL, No. 438; (ii-vii) Kādī (Gujarat) plates of Chaulukya Bhīma II, years 1263, 1283, 1287, 1288, 1295 and 1296 - BL, Nos. 451, 481, 486, 490, 526 and 527 respectively; (viii) Kādī plates of Chaulukya Tribhuvanapāla, year 1299 * BL, No. 534.
40. Delhi-Siwalik pillar inscription of Chāhamāna Viśaladeva-Vigraharāja of Śākambhari, year 1220 - BL, No. 316. The expression is *saṃvat-śrī-Vikramāditya*.
41. Udaypur (Madhya Pradesh) inscription of Paramāra Udayāditya, year 1116 (*Vikramendreśa-saṃvat*). - BL, No. 134.
42. Baghārī (Uttar Pradesh) inscription of Chandella Paramardideva, year 1252 - BL, No. 431.
43. Bijoliā (Rujasthan) inscription of Chāhamāna Someśvara, year 1226 - BL, No. 344.
44. (i) Sāsbahū (Gwālīor) temple inscription of Kachchhapaghātā Mahīpāla, year 1150 (*Vikramāt*) - BL, No. 156; (ii) Mt. Ābū inscription of Tejahpāla, year 1293 (*śrī-Vikrama-nṛipāt*) - BL, No. 520.
45. Jhālrapāṭan (Rajasthan) inscription mentioning Paramāra Naravarman and Yaśovarman, year 119(9) - Bl., No. 252,

- 45 a. Menalgadh (Rajasthan) inscription of Chāhamāna Prithvirāja III, year 1226 (*Mālaeśa-vatsara*) - BL, No. 346.
- b. The foregoing allusions have been culled together from D.R. Bhandarkar's *List of Inscriptions of Northern India in Brāhmī and its Derivative Scripts, from about 300 AC* published as an appendix to the *Epigraphia Indica*, XIX-XXIII. We have restricted ourselves up to the year 1300. After this numerous inscriptions have been published; but this list can still be taken to be an index of the true situation and there has been no substantial change in this matter.
- c. The earliest such inscription hails from Harahā, Bārābankī district, Uttar Pradesh, and belongs to the Maukhari king Śānavarman's time and is dated year 611. EI, XIV pp. 115 ff.; BL, N. 10.
- d. "The Riddle of the Vikrama Era", *Vikrama Volume*, Ujjain, 1948, pp. 5-6. Altekar is wrong in stating that in the Mathurā inscription of Chandra Gupta II we find the year 61 described as *Gupta-kāl-ānuvartamāna-samyatsara* (ibid., p. 6) which was apparently based on D.R. Bhandarkar's restoration (EI, XXI, pp.8 ff.). However, there is absolutely no trace of *Gupta* in the facsimile accompanying his paper. The very fact that in some records of a dynasty or region the era is specifically named and not in others is enough to prove that it was not felt necessary to mention it specifically. It was taken for granted.
- e. The Gupta era had become extinct and the Śaka era could never gain popularity in North India.
- f. See BL, Nos. 1257 ff. for the list of inscriptions dated in the Gupta era. However, the Gupta era is not specified, the years are mentioned as if they were the years of the reigns of individual kings. This was also the case with the Śaka era till it came to be called by a specific name in its year 191.
- g. The word is sometimes spelt as *Kṛita* and, as would be seen in the sequel, much is sought to be made of this spelling. The word is sought to be explained in a variety of ways, but as we shall see presently, it means just 'made' or 'initiated' or 'artificial' years as against the regnal years used earlier for dating purposes.
- h. The latest use of this word for year occurs in the Mungthal (Rajasthan) inscription of the year 894. See no 17 above.
- i. It is only in this inscription that the era is said to have been named as *Kṛita* (*Kṛita-samyāta*), as against the rest of inscriptions which refer only to the years as *Kṛita*, while the era is left unnamed in so far as the early history of the era is concerned. This sole allusion to it as the name of the era is, therefore, obviously due to oversight on the part of the composer of the record.
46. The words *gaṇa* and *sthiti* are sought to be explained variously. But when we know that the Mālavas had a republican constitution (*gaṇa*), it is evidently wrong to attribute the meaning 'counting' to *gaṇa*. Likewise, it is too much to take the word *sthiti* in the sense of 'convention', 'agreement' or 'settlement' instead of 'establishment', 'coming into existence'.
47. The original reads *vikhyāpake Mālava-vaṃśa-kittēḥ* which can yield this sense alone.
48. The latest reference to its association with the 'Mālava lords' (*Mālaeśa*) is encountered in the Menalgadh (Rajasthan) inscription of Chāhamāna Prithvirāja dated in the year 1226. See BL, No. 346.
51. For details, see Edgerton, F. *Vikrama's Adventures*, Harvard Oriental Series, Also see Raj Bali Pandey, *Vikramāditya of Ujjainī*, Varanasi, 1951, pp. 28-35 for summary and discussion.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27; Majumdar R.C. "Vikramāditya and the Vikrama Samvat", *Vikrama Volume*, pp.291-93.
53. Edgerton, F. *op.cit.*, introduction, pp. 1xiff.

54. *Cambridge History of India*, I, (ed.) Rapson, E.J. Indian reprint, Delhi 1955, p.p. 532-33.
55. *Kharoshthī Inscriptions with the exception of those of Aśoka*, CII, II, Part I, London, 1929, introduction, pp. xxvi-xxviii.
56. *Oxford History of India*, Oxford, 1919, p. 131.
57. Sachau E. *Alberuni's India*, II, London, 1910, pp. 5-6.
58. Sudhakara Dvivedī (*Gaṇaka-taraṅginī*) (*Lives of Astronomers* (Sanskrit), 2nd ed., Varanasi, 1933, pp. 45-46) and Shankar Balkrishna Dikshit (*Bhārāṅīya Jyotiṣha: History of Indian Astronomy* (Marathi), 2nd ed. Pune, 1931, p. 534) have arrived at 1242-43 AD as the date of this work on the basis of some astronomical data supplied by its author.
59. The work is generally treated as a late forgery by scholars. We ourselves, once supported this view (*Varāhamitra's India*, New Delhi, 1966, pp. 5-6). But on further consideration we feel that it is not that untrustworthy. In fact, the work was actually composed in the thirteenth century AD as indicated by astronomical considerations as pointed out by Sudhakara Dvivedī and Shankar Balkrishna Dikshit. Its composer was an astrologer named Kālidāsa who flourished in the thirteenth century AD, but its copyists confused him with the great poet Kālidāsa because of identity of names and, perhaps, also deliberately with the desire to give its author great respectability. The verses stating that he was a court poet under Vikramāditya and was the same as the author of the three poems, viz. *Raghu-vaṃśa*, *Kumāra-sambhava* and *megha-dūta* must accordingly be treated as later interpolations. On the basis of these stanzas the work as a whole cannot be regarded as a late forgery. And even admitting for the sake of argument that it is a forgery, the tradition recorded by it cannot on that ground be regarded as unreliable, for similar traditions are recorded in contemporary and later Jaina texts. And especially the statement regarding Vikramāditya vanquishing 95 Śaka chiefs in the *Jyotirvid-ābharāṇa* is highly significant for it almost tallies with the Jaina tradition about Kālaka meeting 96 Śaka chiefs styling themselves sāhi.
60. For the date of Bhaṭṭotpala, see our *Varahāmihira and his Times*, Jodhpur, 1991, pp. 201-204.
61. *Śaka nāma mleccha-jātayo rājānas=te yasmin kāle Vikramāditya-devena vyapaditāḥ sa kālo loke Śaka iti prasiddhaḥ / tasmāch-Chakendra-kālāt Śaka-nripa-valha-kālāt.*
62. *Śakā nāma mleccha-rājānas=te yasmin kāle Vikramādityaena vyāpaditah sa kālo-ty-artham prasiddhaḥ. Khaṇḍa-khādyaka*, edited by Sengupta, P.C. with Prthūdadasvāin's commentary, Calcutta, p.3.
63. *Śakā nāma mleccha-rājānas-te yasmin kāle Vikramādityena vyāpādītāḥ sa Śaka-sabandhū kālāḥ Śaka ity-uchyate. Khaṇḍa-khādyaka* with Āmarāja's gloss, Calcutta, 1925, p.2.
64. "The epoch of the era of Śaka or Śakakāla", says Alberuni, "falls 135 years later than that of Vikramāditya. The here mentioned Śaka tyrannised over their country between the river Sindh and the ocean after he had made Āryāvarta in the midst of this realm his dwelling place..... The Hindus had much to suffer from him, till at last they received help from the east, when Vikramāditya marched against him, put him to flight and killed him in the region of Karur, between Multan and the castle of Loni. Now this date became famous since there is a long interval between the era which is called the era of Vikramāditya and the killing of Śaka, we think that the Vikramāditya from whom the era has got its name is not identical with that one who killed Śaka, but only a namesake of his." E. Sachau, *Alberunii's India*, II, p. 6.
65. The earliest inscription mentioning the Vikrama era as such is the Dhiniki plates of the Saindhava chief Jāikadeva, dated Vikrama-saṃvat 794. However, according to some, it is a late forgery. In that case the earliest datable inscription dated in the Vikrama era is the Dholpur inscription of the Chāhamāna king Chandra-mahāsena dated in its year 898.
66. It is known from his gold coins which give on their reverse either Vikramāditya (Chhatra type) or

other *virudas* containing Vikrama as their major component such as Śrī-Vikrama (Archer type), Ajita-Vikrama (Horseman type) and Siṃha-Vikrama (Lion-slayer type: its obverse legend also ends with this *viruda*).

67. Altekar regards the Dhiniki plates dated in the Vikrama year 794 as a forgery of a later period.
68. For quite a few centuries the era continued to be referred to only as *saṃvat*, as pointed out above. According to Altekar, it reflects people's unwillingness to accept its new name, viz. Vikrama.
69. *Studies in Ancient Indian History*, Bombay, 1984, pp.115-29.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 123. He is firm that the era was started by the Mālavas and the word *Kṛita*, according to him, refers to this fact.
71. "The Vikrama Era". *Commemorative Essays presented to Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar*, Pune, 1917, pp. 187ff.
72. "Vikrama Saṃvat: Its Origin and Nomenclature in Different Periods", *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 57-69. In this paper he abandoned his earlier view, made by astronomers' in favour of the 'years of the Kṛita-yuga', regarding the significance of the word *kṛita*. See also CII, III (revised) pp. 186 ff.
73. "The Nine Gems in the Court of Vikramāditya", *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 71-83. he also believes that later after the occupation of Ujjayinī as a result of his victory over the western Kṣhatrapas ruling from that city the era came to be known after Chandra Gupta II Vikramāditya (*ibid.*, pp. 83-86). However, his reliance on the *Bhavishyottara-purāna* account for the history of the Imperial Guptas (*ibid.*, pp. 84-85) is problematic.
74. *JRAS*, 1914, pp. 973 ff.; Sten Konow. "Taxila Inscription of the Year 136". *EI*, XIV, pp. 284 ff. This inscription records the consecration of the bodily relics of the Buddha by a certain person during the reign of an unnamed Kūshāna king who is styled *mahārāja rājātīrāja* and *devaputra* on the 15th day of the month of Āshāḍha of year 136 of the Azes era (*sa 100 (+) 20 (+) 10 (+) 4 (+) 1 (+) 1 Ayasa Ashadhasa masasa divase 10 (*) 4 (+) 1isa diase*). See *EI*, XIV, p. 295; CII, II (i), p. 77. S. Konow took the word *aya* as an adjective of the following Ashadha in the sense of *adya*; first' 917 ff.; *ibid.*, 1915, pp. 191 ff.; *ASIAR*. 1912-13. pp. 18 ff.) who took it to be the king's name. Later, while editing the Kalwan plate of the year 134, Sten Konow agreed to take Ajasa in this inscription as well as Ayasa in the Taxila Silver Scroll inscription as standing for Azes, though he assigned the dates to the older Śaka era and rendered Ajasa /Ayasa by 'of Azes'. See "Kalwan Copyer-Plate Inscription of the Year 134", *EI*, XXI, p. 259.
75. *JRAS*, 1932, p. p. 549ff.
76. *Cambridge History of India*, I, pp. 515 and 525.
77. "The Vikrama and Śaka Eras - Observations on their Beginnings and their Early Use in Eastern India", *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, 1985, pp. 7-25.
78. At p. 8 of his paper (see previous note) he mentions the last reference as 'sixth', whereas it is really fifth.
79. *Samasarae treshathimae 20 (+) 20 (+) 20 (+) 3 maharayasa Ayasa atidasa Kartiasa masasa divasae shodasae*. Bailey H.W. in *JRAS*, 1978, pp. 3-13. Cited in B.N. Mukherjee. "An Interesting Kharoshthi Inscription", *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, XI, 1977-78, p. 102.
80. *Samvatsatae chadusatimae 20 (+) 20 (+) 20 (+) 10 (+) 4 maharayasa mahatasa Ayasa artakalasa Aspaisa masasa di (va) samunim 1 (+) 1 (+) 1*. Bailey, H. W. *Jras*, 1978, p. 4; B.N. Mukherjee. "A Note on an Inscription of the Year Seenty-four of the Azes Era". *JAS*, Calcutta, 1981, pp. 161-62.
81. *Savatsaraya satasatatiaye maharajasa Ayasa varta-kalasa Śravaṇasa masasa diasaye chatuisaye 20 (+) 4*. *JRAS*, 1982, p. 150; *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, p. 8.

82. *Samvatsarae treasitii maharajasa Ayasa vartakalasa Ashadhasa masasa diasaye pamchamaya 4 (+) I. BEFEO, LXXIII, 1984, p. 39; Indian Museum Bulletin, xx, 1985, p. 8.*
83. *Savatsarae shaviśaashaśatimae maharajasa mahamtasa Ayasa kalagadasa Ashadhasa masasa diasami treīśāmi. Fussman ibid.; Indian Museum Bulletin, XX, 1985, p. 8.*
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 10.
85. *Ibid.*, p.10. The earliest inscription era as Kṛita (no. 1 above) is of the year 282 and its Christian era equivalent would be 225 current.
86. The earliest reference to it as started by the Mālava gaṇa occurs in no. 8 above dated the year 461 equivalent to 403 AD.
87. It is first called Vikrama in no. 16 of the year 794=737 AD.
88. This actually follows so many other scholars including celebrities like A. S. Altekar, H.C. Raychaudhury, D.C. Sircar, etc.
89. However, his name is not mentioned in any dated or otherwise inscription and all our knowledge about him is derived from his extensive coinage.
90. "The Vikrama Saṃvat", *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 557-86; *The History and Culture of the Indian People, II: The Age of Imperial Unity*, 2nd ed., edited by R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalkar, Bombay, 1951, pp. 124-25, 163; *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, 1965, pp. 256-57; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, Delhi, 1969, 154 ff.
91. *Vikrama Volume*, p. 564.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 571
93. In his paper on the Vikrama-saṃvat in the *Vikrama Volume* he is content with only stressing the scytho-Parthian origin of the era without pinpointing any ruler.
94. El. *Basiles Basilion Megas* in genitive singular (*Basileos Basileon Megalou*) in Greek or *maharaja mahata* in genitive singular (*maharajasa mahatasa*) in Prakrit.
95. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 125, fn. 1 and pp. 163-64; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, p. 162.
96. For an account of these coins, see V.A. Smith, *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, I, Oxford, 1906, pp. 170 ff.; B.B. Bidyabinod, *Supplementary Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, 1923, pp. 37 ff.; K.K. Das Gupta, *A Tribal History of Ancient India: A Numismatic Approach*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 115 ff.
97. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 125, fn. 1 and pp. 163-64; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, p. 163
98. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 163-64 p. 125, fn. 1; pp. 164-65; elsewhere (*Indian Epigraphy*, pp. 255-56; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, pp. 163-64) he mentions it as one of the guesses that it is impossible to substantiate with any evidence' (*Indian Epigraphy*, pp. 255-56); still later (*Ancient Malwa and Vikramāditya Tradition*, pp. 163-64) he mentions it as a probability without any comment
99. Watters, T. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, I, p. 265.
100. *El. XXXIII*, p. 154, line 11.
101. *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 238; *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, p. 165. S.R. Goyal (*Māgadha-*

Sātavāhana-Kushāṇa Sāmrajyoni kā Yuga (Hindi), Meerut, 1988, pp. 666-67) regards this view as most convincing.

102. *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, p. 10.
103. Earlier this was his view (*The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 164-65), but later he just mentions it as one of opinions.
- 103 a. *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 15-19.
104. As against this one record saying that the era was named Kṛita' there are as many as ten inscriptions referring to its years by this name.
105. *Vikrama Volume*, pp. 66-67. As stated earlier, Bhandarkar regards the so-called Kṛita era as founded by Pushyamitra Śunga and in order to establish his point he brings the date of Pushyamitra down from the second century BC to 57 BC, which is strange indeed.
- 106 *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. Bhattacharya is, however, against the identity of the Kṛita or Mālava era with the reckoning known as Vikrama era.
107. *Vikramāditya of Ujjayinī*, pp. 41-42; *Indian Palaeography*, I, pp. 202-3.
108. *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 256; *Ancient Malva and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, p. 164.
109. Of the total of eleven inscriptions in question (our nos. 1-10 and 17) only four have the spelling Kṛita as against seven spelling the name as Kṛita. Of these four also, three are of the same year and from the same place and were apparently engraved by the same scribe.
110. *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, p. 8.
- 111 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
112. *Kṛita* by itself does not denote anything and it has to be used as an adjective qualifying something only. In the inscriptions it is used as an adjectives for years, either specifically or understood.
113. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Indian reprint Delhi 1901, S.V. *Kṛita*, p. 301.
- 113 a. I have checked the original for myself.
114. The word *kṛita* has been taken by scholars to refer to various things including the settlement of the Mālava people, their unification under one leader and state, invented by astronomers, etc. Even P.V. Kane regards it as the earlier name of the era before it came to be associated with and named after the Mālava-gaṇa even though he admits that its exact connotation is not clear. See *History of Dharmasāstra*, V(I), pp. 651-52.
115. Most numismatists believe in the existence of two kings named Azes entirely on numismatic considerations. Some numismatists, on the other hand, hold that the same evidence when correctly handled indicates the existence of two kings known as Azilyses separated by an Azes.
116. As pointed out earlier, this is known from some reverse legends on his coins.
117. For his silver coinage, see J. Allan, *BMC, GD*, pp. lxxxviii, 49-51; A.S. Altekar, *Coinage of the Gupta Empires*, Varanasi, 1957, pp. 150-54
118. *Select Inscriptions*, I, p. 265, fn. 2. For the relevant text, see *ibid.*, p. 265, line 21. The Śaka-Muruṇḍas (Śaka kings or Śakas and Muruṇḍas) are also mentioned separately as his subordinates. *Vide ibid.*, p. 266, line 23.
119. Rajgor, Dilip. "An Inventory of Dates Known on the Coins and Inscriptions of the Western Kshatrapas", *Numismatic Studies*, II (edited by Devendra Handa), New Delhi, 1992, p. 102

120. See Ajay Mitra Shastri, "Overlord of the Early Maitrakas", *JESI*, XVI, pp. 8-13.
121. Even till the end of the Gupta period inscriptions dated in this era have been found at various places in Rajasthan and Mandasor in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh only.
122. *Hatvā bhrām=eva rājyam=aharad=devīm cha dīnas=tato Lakṣmaṃ Koṣim=alekḥayat kila kalau dātā sa Gupt-ānvayah EI*, XVIII, p. 248, verse 48.
123. *Sāmarthya sati ninditā pravahitā n-aiv-āgraje krūrātā Bandhu-strī-gaman-ādibhiḥ kucaritair=āvarjitaṃ n-āyaśaḥ. Sauc-āsauca-parāṇmucam na ca bhīyā paiśācya=angikṛitaṃ Tyāgen-āsama-sāhasaiś=ca bhuvana yah Sāhasāṅko=bhaat. Ibid.*, VII, p. 38, verse 22.
124. *IA*, XII, p 250, lines 23-25
125. *EI*, XXXVI, p. 269, verse 21.
126. Sachau E., *Alberuni's India*, II, p.7.
It is rather strange to find that both the Śāka and Gupta eras has come to be believed as initiated from the destruction of the people after whom they were named. Regarding the Śāka era, as we have seen above, such a notion had come into being by early ninth century AD at the latest. And we notice here a similar notion regarding the Gupta era early in the eleventh century AD. As against these, we know from the extant references that the two eras, as can be reasonably expected, originated either from the people concerned coming to power or from their assuming a sovereign status, and not from their end.
127. There are some inconsistencies in D.C. Sircar's averments about the circumstances of the initiation of an era. On the one hand he observes that an era was generally not deliberately founded by a ruler and merely arose from the continuation of the regnal years of an independent king by his successors (*Vikrama Volume*, pp. 664-65), and on the other he states with reference to the so-called Vonones era that Vonones established an era from his accession to supercede simultaneously the Parthian rule and the Parthian era starting from 247 BC (*Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*, p. 154) and about the Śāka era that Kaniṣka founded an era from his accession in order to supercede the scythoparthian era in use in North-western India (*ibid.*, p.155).
128. He explains the name Kṛita as referring to the Vedic concept of *yugas* (Kṛita, Tretā, Dapara and kali) of four years each out of which that number of expired years by dividing which by 4 nothing remains is called Kṛita. He applied this definition to the four inscriptional instances of the use of Kṛita with reference to the dates of this era known till then and pointed out that this explanation satisfies three of these instances (Bijaygadh, Mandasor year 461 and Gangdhar) completely if we take the years concerned as expired years, while the fourth instance (Nagari) may also be explained for if we take the year 481 as current (*Bhārataīya Prāchīna Lipimālā*, 2nd ed., Ajer, 1918, Reprint, Delhi, 1971, pp. 166-67, fn. 8). He also felt that the Vikrama, whose name is associated with the era, was most probably the leader of the Mālava people and flourished earlier than the Gupta emperor Candra Gupta II Vikramāditya (*ibid.*, pp. 168-69).
129. He strongly supports the tradition and feels that the Mālava people under the leadership of Vikrama, who was their chief, defeated the Śākas and started the era which came to be known as Kṛita being the name given to it as it marked the golden age following the termination of the foreign (Śāka) rule. Later people forgot the original meaning of this name and called the era after the Mālava republic and later still when the republics went out of vogue with the upsurge of monarchy the era came to be known after the Mālava chief Vikramāditya who again came to be regarded as a monarch in the normal sense of the term. Vide *Vikramāditya of Ujjainī*, Chs. I-II; *Indian Palaeography*, I, pp. 199-204.

We are not referring here to the views of Fergusson (*JRAS*, 1870, pp. 814ff.) F. Max Muller (*India: What Can it Teach us?*, 280) F. Kielhorn (*IA XIX-XX*, pp. 403-404) and K.P. Jayaswal (*JBORS*, XVI,

- pp. 226-313) which no scholar now takes seriously.
130. The first edition of his work was published under the title *Prāchīna Lipimāla* in 1894 and the second revised edition under the title *Bhāratiya Prāchīna Lipimālā* in 1918.
131. The earliest deciphered and definitely datable Indian inscriptions, viz. those of the Maurya emperor Aśoka, are dated only in his regnal years counted from his coronation. This practice was followed by several later ruling families including the Sātavāhana.
132. *Samvāhana-sukha-rasa-tosieṇa deṇṭena tuha kara lakkhaṇi, Chalaṇeṇa Vikkamāichcha-chariaṇi anusikkhiam tissa.*
Gāthāsaptaśatī, Nirnayasar Press, Bombay, 1911, V.64. Its Sanskrit shadow (*chhāyā*) as given by Radhagovinda Basak (*The Prakrit Gāthā-suptaśatī*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1971) is as follows:
Samvāhana (samvādhana) - sukha rasa-toshitena dadatā tava Kara lākshām (laksham).
Charaṇena Vikramāditya-charita anusikshitam tasyāḥ.
133. According to the Purānas, Hāla was the seventeenth in the list of Āndhra-Sātavāhana king and ruled for five (or one) years. *Vide* F.E. Pargiter. *The Purāna Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*. London, 1913, pp. 41 and 71.
134. Mirashi, V.V., *Studies in Indology*, I, 2nd ed., Nagpur, 1968, pp. 82-87.
135. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-101. D.R. Bhandarkar, who believed that the *Kosha* and the *Gāthāsapasṭī* were two distinct works tried, following Weber, to date the entire work to a very late period. See "The Vikrama Era", *Commemorative Essays dedicated to Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar*, pp. 187ff.
136. Several scholars, who don't believe in the existence of Vikramāditya in the first century BC and hold that the earliest Vikramāditya was Candra Gupta II Vikramāditya, are at pains to explain away this stanza as a later addition. See, for instance, V.V. Mirashi *Studies in Indology*, I, pp. 99-101, where he drawn attention to the reference to Candra Gupta II in the Rāshṭrakūṭa inscriptions. But while the Rāshṭrakūṭa records do contain a reference to Candra Gupta II, they don't mention his title Vikramāditya.
137. X.I.8-13; for its summary, see Raj Bali Pandey, *Vikramāditya of Ujjayinī*, p. 15.
138. Although there are several allusions to Vikramāditya, the main story is narrated in its concluding (18th) lambaka captioned 'Vishamaśīla'. See *Kathāsaritsāgara*, With Hindi translation by Jatashankar Jha and Praphullachandra Ojha, III, Patna, 1973, pp. 1058ff.
139. *Ibid.*, With Hindi Translation by Kedarnath Shara Saraswat, I, Patna, 1960, Lambaka I, verse 10:
Yathā mūlaṇi tath-aiv-etan=na manāg=apy-atikramaḥ, Grantha-vistara-saṅkshhepa-mātram bhāshā cha bhidyate.
140. "Vikramaditya in the Sanskrit Tradition", *Vikrama Volume*, p. 157.
141. Subandhu is generally taken to have flourished about the sixth century AD. and the Gupta emperor Candra Gupta II, who had only assumed the *viruda* Vikramāditya only about a little over a century could not have been perhaps referred to only as Vikramāditya in such glowing terms.
142. Pargiter, F. E. *op.cit.*, pp. 45-46.
143. The *Matsya Vāyu* and *Brahāṇḍa* give the number as seven, but the *Bhāishya* as well as *Vishṇu* state that there were ten Gardabhin kings. See Pargiter, *ibid.* p. 45.
144. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
145. The number of Śaka kings is stated variously as eighteen or sixteen and their rule is stated to have

lasted three hundred eighty years.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 45. in fact.
147. The list is a mix up of the earlier/senior contemporary and subsequent ruling families. While the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks) were earlier than the Andhra-Sātavāhanas, and Gardabhins or Gardabhilas Śakas and Tushāras (Kushānas) were their contemporaries the Ābhīās, Śrīparatīya Āndhras, Hūnas, etc. were later
148. *Varahamihira's India*, New Delhi 1969.
149. *ASR* VI, pp. 162 ff.: XIV, pp. 149-50 (Calleyle); *ibid.*, pp. 149-51. (Cunningham).
150. *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum*, I: *Coins of Ancient India*, p. 162.
151. *BMC*, *AI*. Introduction, p. cvi.
152. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 163. This opinion is followed by Bela Lahiri. See her *Indigenous States of Northern India*, Calcutta 1974, p. 268.
153. *A Tribal History of Ancient India: A Numismatic Approach*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 113, 125.
154. K.D. Bajpai, "Newly Discovered Rare Coins of Early Śakas", *JNSI*, XXVIII, pp. 46-50; *Indian Numismatic Studies*, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 98-104.
155. *EI*, XIV, pp. 115 ff.
156. Bhandarkar's List, No. 34, dated V. 927, from Gumhā in Gorakhpur district, U.P.
157. *EI*, XXXV, pp. 130 ff. These two grants fro Bihar were issued by king Sūryāditya of the Malayaketu family and are dated Vikrama 1077 and 1083
158. It has been suggested that initially the years of this era might hae been counted as current . See B.N. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, p. 7.
159. Fleet, J.F., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*, CII. III. Indian Reprint, Varanasi, 1970. p. 154, text-line 21.
160. *Ibid.*, Introductin, p. 66. fn. 2.
161. Bhandarkar's List, No. 27.
162. For the inscription, see D.C. Sircar, *EI*, XXIV, pp. 141 ff.: for a discussion of its bearing of the point in question, see B.N. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XX, p. 7.
163. Ojha G.H., *op. cit.*, pp. 169-70.

