

DEMOCRATIC ETHOS IN BHARAT OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS



Bharat is the official name of the country.
It is mentioned in the Constitution as also
in the discussions of 1946-48.



6000 BCE to Now



In Bharat that is India, taking the consent of the people in governance has been part of life since earliest recorded history.

According to the Indian ethos, democracy comprises the values of harmony, freedom of choice, freedom to hold multiple ideas, acceptability, equality, governance for the welfare of the people, and inclusivity in a society. All of these allow its common citizens to lead a dignified life.

6000 BCE to 2000 BCE

DANCING GIRL



Archaeological site of the 5,000 year old well-planned city of the Sindhu-Saraswati Civilisation.

The Girl from Sindhu–Saraswati civilisation. She stands confident. Self-assured and looking at the world eye-to-eye. Independent. Liberated. On her body she wears jewellery much like the adornments that are worn everyday by women in western India.

*Time period: About 5000 years old.
Height: 10.5 cm. Material – Bronze.*

Public Participation in the Vedic Era

(ऋग्वेद, दशम मण्डल, संज्ञान सूक्त, 2-4)

संगच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम्।
देवा भागं यथापूर्वं संजानाना उपासते॥
समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी
समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम्।



There are four Vedas – Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Samveda and Yajurveda – which together with other texts convey an entire civilisational value system incorporating political, societal and educational principles.

In the Rigveda, the world's oldest composition, and the Atharvaveda, the terms Sabha (assembly of elders), Samiti (assembly of common folk), & Sansad (Parliament), each a

representative body, find frequent mention, terms used even today!

A Rigveda 'Sukta' (beautiful statement) says: "Come together, speak together; together let the thoughts agree.

Common to all is the solemn utterance, common the assembly, common the thought along with the perception."

THE KING, CHOSEN BY HIS PEOPLE.



Governance for the welfare of the people was the central feature of all thought and action in India since times immemorial. Nothing epitomizes this better than the Ramayana, the great epic of India.

When the ancient kingdom of Ayodhya needed a new king, the old King Dasharatha sought the approval of his council of ministers and people's representatives.

They unanimously confirmed Rama as the people's choice after detailed consultations with all sections of the society.

The Ramayana is a living guide in India and also in many parts of the world. Ram-Rajya - the rule of Lord Rama - is the epitome of an ideal government. In Ram-Rajya, people live secure, prosperous lives knowing that their welfare is paramount to the ruler they have chosen.

UPHOLD DHARMA... THE RIGHT WAY



Krishna teaching the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna, in the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

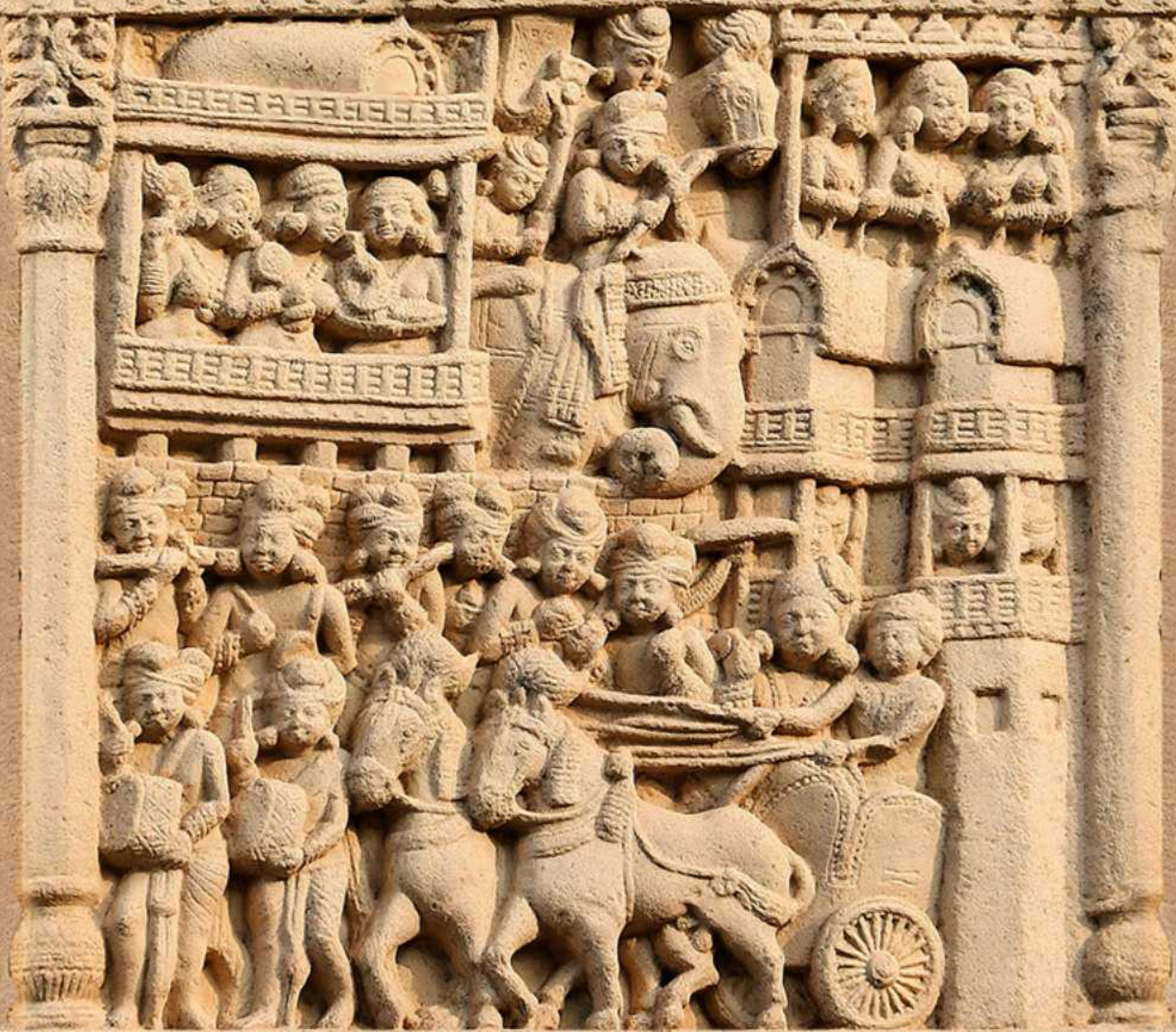
Democracy is about doing things right for the people. This is brought to life in the Mahabharata, the great epic of India.

It covers in its sweep ethics, morality, societal norms and governance. A notable section is the advice given by the dying patriarch Bhishma to his grand-nephew Yudhishtira, the eldest of

the Pandavas, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra on the canons of good governance. The essence of a king's dharma is to secure his subjects' prosperity and happiness.

The Bhagavad Gita which comprises of 700/745 verses in the Mahabharata is one of the oldest instructions on duties and responsibilities of civilized beings.

COLLECTIVE RULE OF THE PEOPLE



On the call of Chedak the Mallas of Kushinara, set out to fight against Kunik Ajatashatru (The railing from Sanchi, 2nd century BCE)

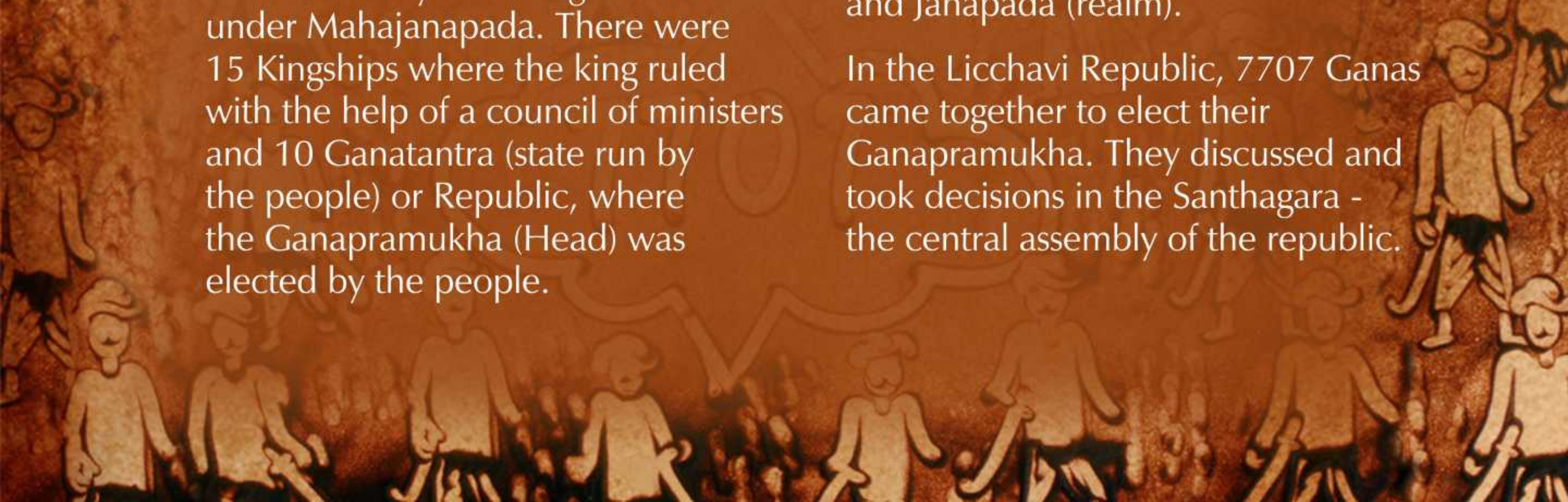


Constantly involving people in governance and decision making was the hallmark of the systems of governance practiced in India.

Depending on local contexts, there evolved two systems of governance under Mahajanapada. There were 15 Kingships where the king ruled with the help of a council of ministers and 10 Ganatantra (state run by the people) or Republic, where the Ganapramukha (Head) was elected by the people.

Various ancient texts of India - Ashtadhyayi, Mahavagga, Digha Nikaya, Acharangasutra, and Bhagvatisutra - highlight 'Loktantrik' (governance by elected representatives) institutions such as Gana (assembly), Puga (group), Nigama (corporation), and Janapada (realm).

In the Licchavi Republic, 7707 Ganas came together to elect their Ganapramukha. They discussed and took decisions in the Santhagara - the central assembly of the republic.



Since 650 BCE



Pluralism & Tolerance

Jainism is one of the oldest belief systems in the world. Its prevalence in India is dated to as early as the 7th century BCE. Its key values involve an appreciation of plurality. Anekantavada is the word used for this. The idea that people can perceive only parts of the truth, that the whole truth has multiple attributes.

Co-existence and tolerance, key principles of democracy, naturally flow from this pluralistic vision.

In combination with non-violence, another important tenet, Jainism envisions a world of peaceful co-existence. It is a way of life practiced in India even today.



Since 500 BCE

BHARAT
THE MOTHER
OF DEMOCRACY

Compassion &

Equality

In its working, the Bauddha Sangha (Collective) was the earliest example of democratic practices.

Established by Gautama Buddha in the 5th century BCE, for those who wished to embrace monkhood and live a religious life, the Bauddha Sangha, has been the custodian of Buddhist doctrines and democratic traditions ever since.

The Sangha encouraged open discussions, debates and deliberations. Buddhist Monks voted in elections to choose their leaders, to decide important questions, and to formulate their laws. Decisions were taken by majority. Voting could be through whispering in the ear or by secret ballot.

The principles of Buddhism have continued to influence the spread of democratic ethos in India.

THE BUDDHIST CANON DESCRIBED NORMS AND PROCESSES FOR THE ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE BAUDDHA SANGHA.

The Buddhist canon described norms and processes for the election of the leader of the Bauddha Sangha.

Since 500 BCE

BHARAT
THE MOTHER
OF DEMOCRACY

THE PEOPLE'S LEADER



Early India had a culture of people's participation in governance.

When threatened by anarchy, an election was called to choose a leader, the Mahasammata (Great Elect). The election was conducted in the great hall of the people. The King was chosen by the whole people, 'Vasetha' (head), for their protection. He ruled in their name. The state was called Ganarajya, literally, People's State.

Buddhism influenced a large number of rulers. The practices of democratic ethos in Buddhism got transferred to the kingdoms and ensured that democratic values were accepted.

The inscriptions advise that as long as a people met often and elected their leaders, they could expect not to decline, but to prosper.



The Buddhist canon described the circumstances and norms for the election of the king or Mahasammata (the great elect).

350-275 BCE

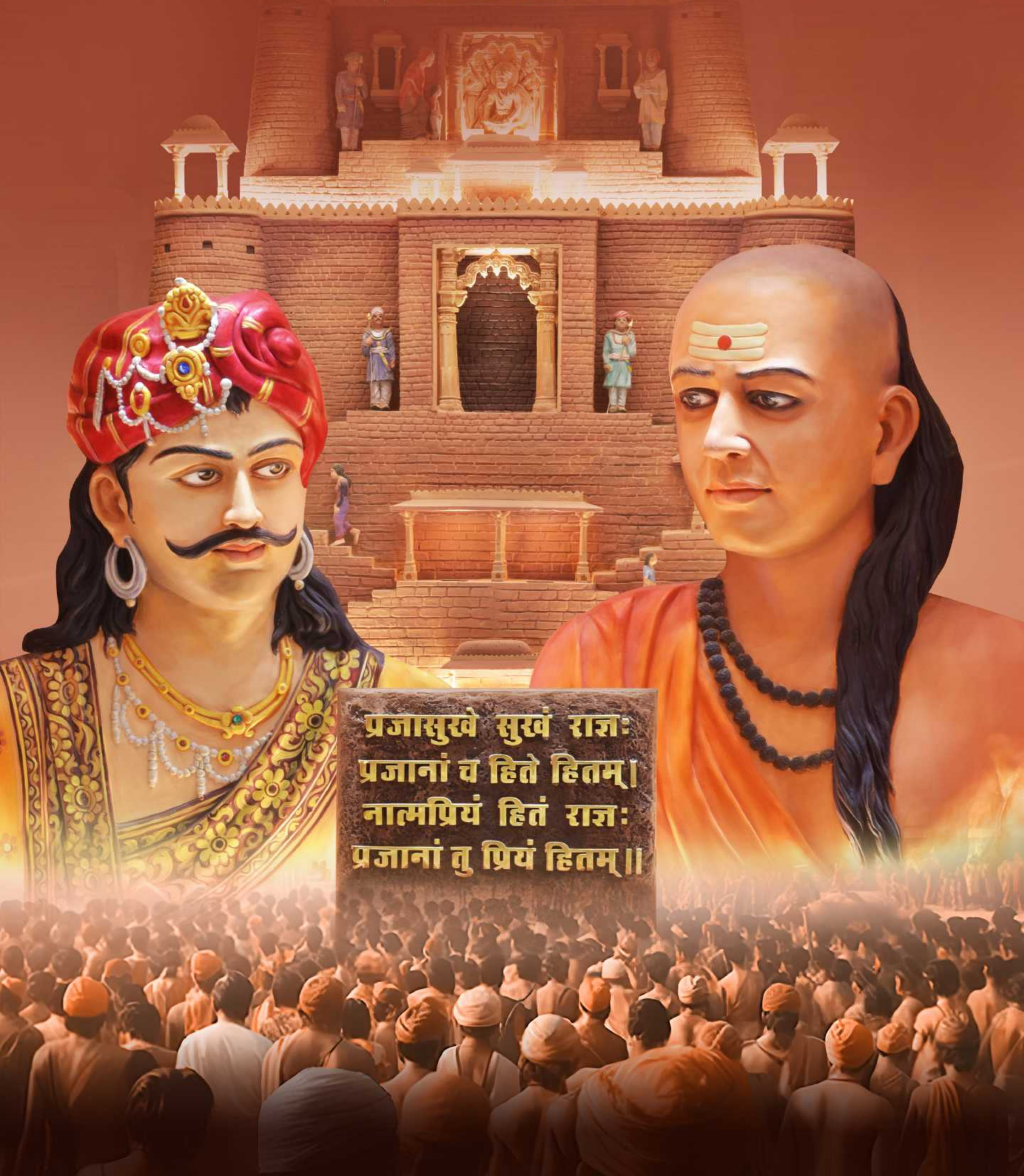


THE KING SERVES THE PEOPLE

Democracy at its heart is about putting citizens first. An ideal and a virtue talked about at length in one of the world's first treatises on governance – Arthashastra expressed around 3rd Century BCE. Authored by Kautilya, close

confidante, and royal advisor to emperor Chandragupta Maurya, the Arthashastra says: "In the happiness of the people lies the happiness of the Ruler and in the welfare of people lies the welfare of the Ruler. There is nothing beneficial to the Ruler

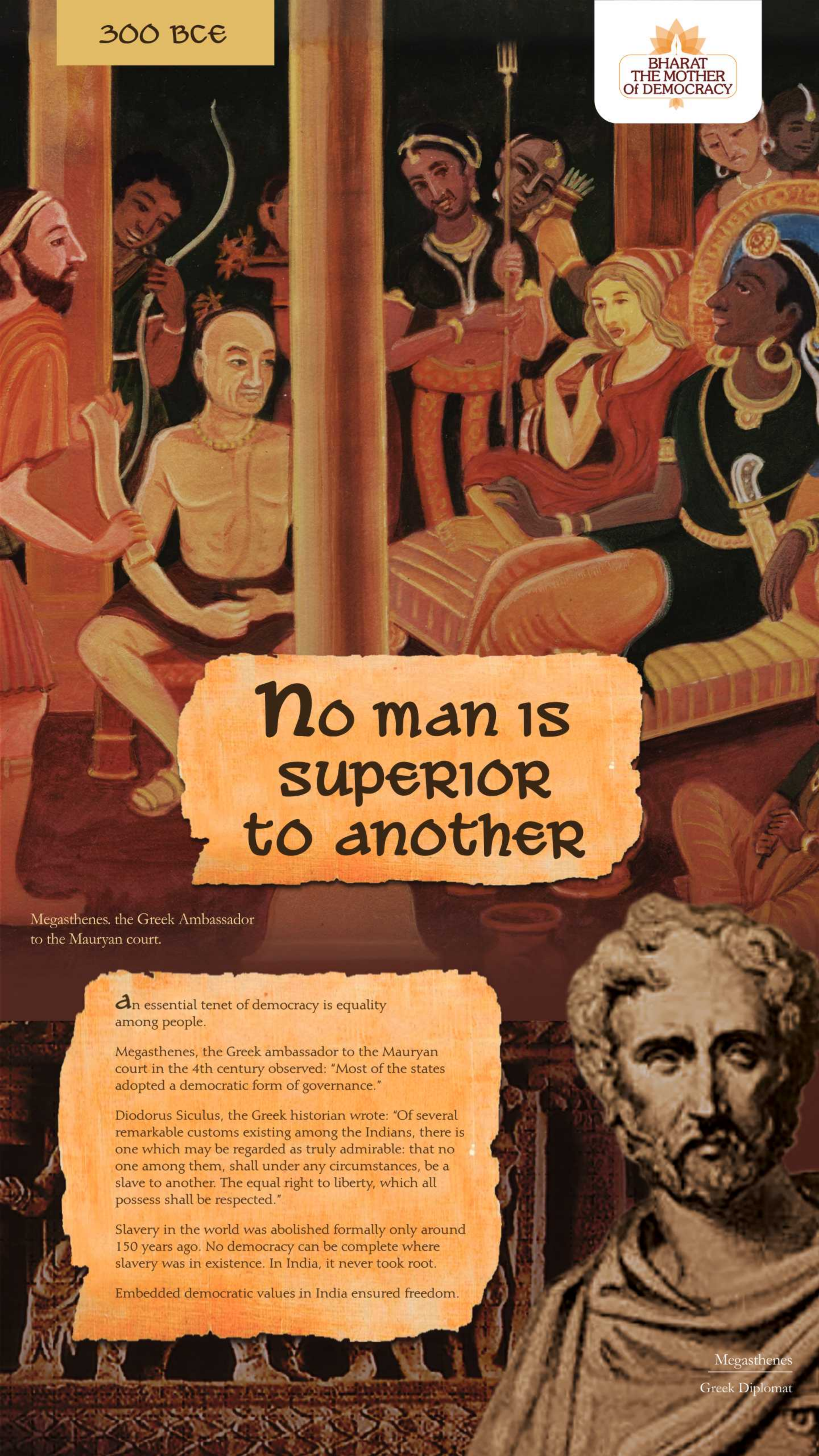
which pleases him alone, but to him, beneficial is that which pleases the people." This deep-rooted value of serving, not ruling, is a democratic ideal that has always defined India.



प्रजासुखे सुखं राजः
प्रजानां च हिते हितम्।
नात्मप्रियं हितं राजः
प्रजानां तु प्रियं हितम्॥

300 BCE

BHARAT
THE MOTHER
OF DEMOCRACY



No man is SUPERIOR to another

Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador
to the Mauryan court.

An essential tenet of democracy is equality among people.

Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the Mauryan court in the 4th century observed: "Most of the states adopted a democratic form of governance."

Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian wrote: "Of several remarkable customs existing among the Indians, there is one which may be regarded as truly admirable: that no one among them, shall under any circumstances, be a slave to another. The equal right to liberty, which all possess shall be respected."

Slavery in the world was abolished formally only around 150 years ago. No democracy can be complete where slavery was in existence. In India, it never took root.

Embedded democratic values in India ensured freedom.



Megasthenes
Greek Diplomat

265 - 238 BCE



PEOPLE'S WELFARE, FRONT AND CENTRE.

When every being can enjoy equal rights and respect protected by the law, a state can be said to embrace democracy. A kind of state that the Mauryan emperor Ashoka successfully established with his people-oriented governance. It began with a systematic election of ministers every five years.

After winning the war over Kalinga (in East India), an enlightened Ashoka renounced war. He dedicated his life to promote Dharma (the right way) and the wellbeing of his people.

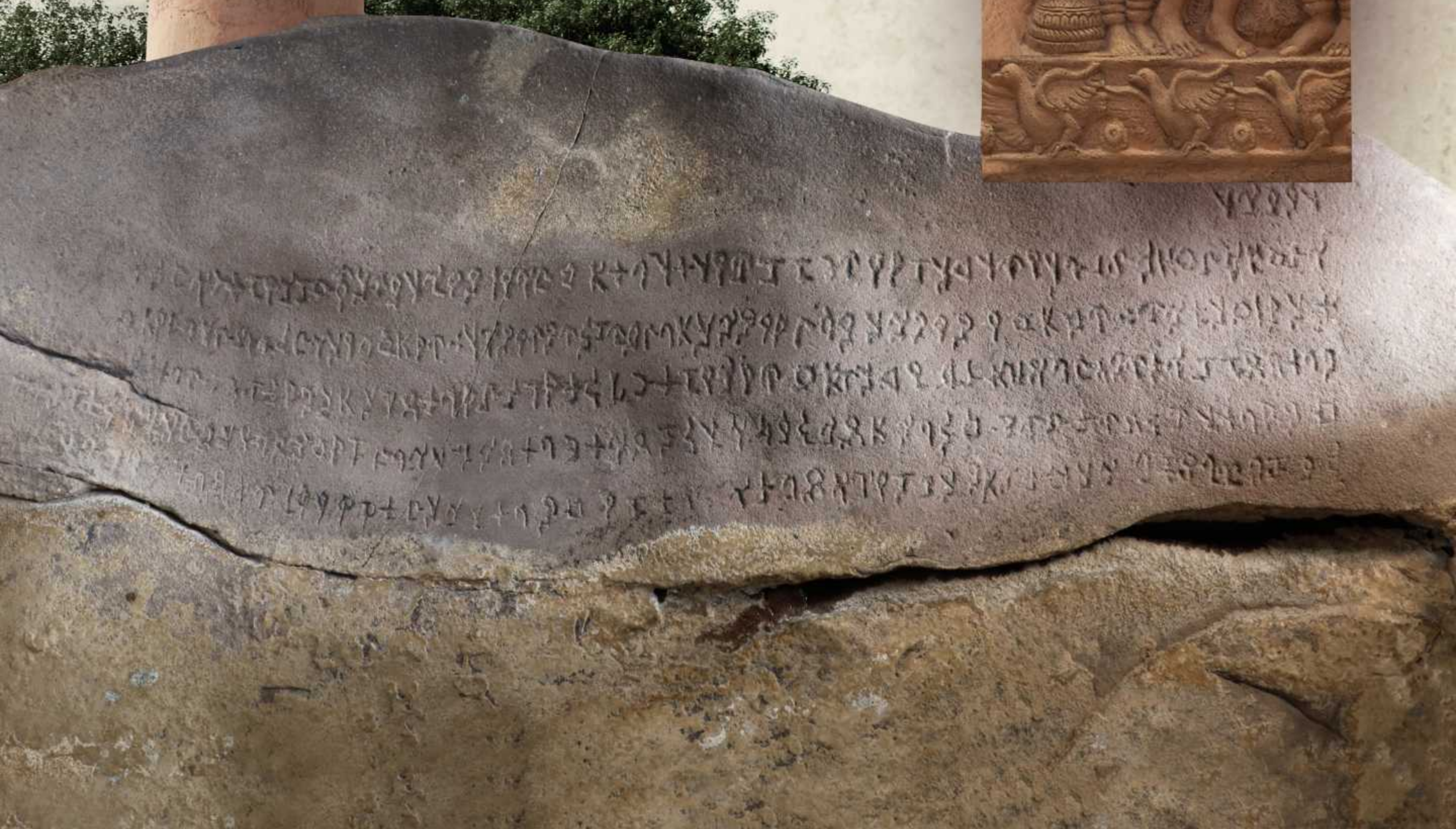
Ashoka's ideologies of peace, welfare and universal brotherhood are preserved in the form of his edicts across the Indian subcontinent even today.

The national emblem of India is from Ashoka's capital. It serves as a constant reminder of democracy in India.

The Lion Capital, Vaishali

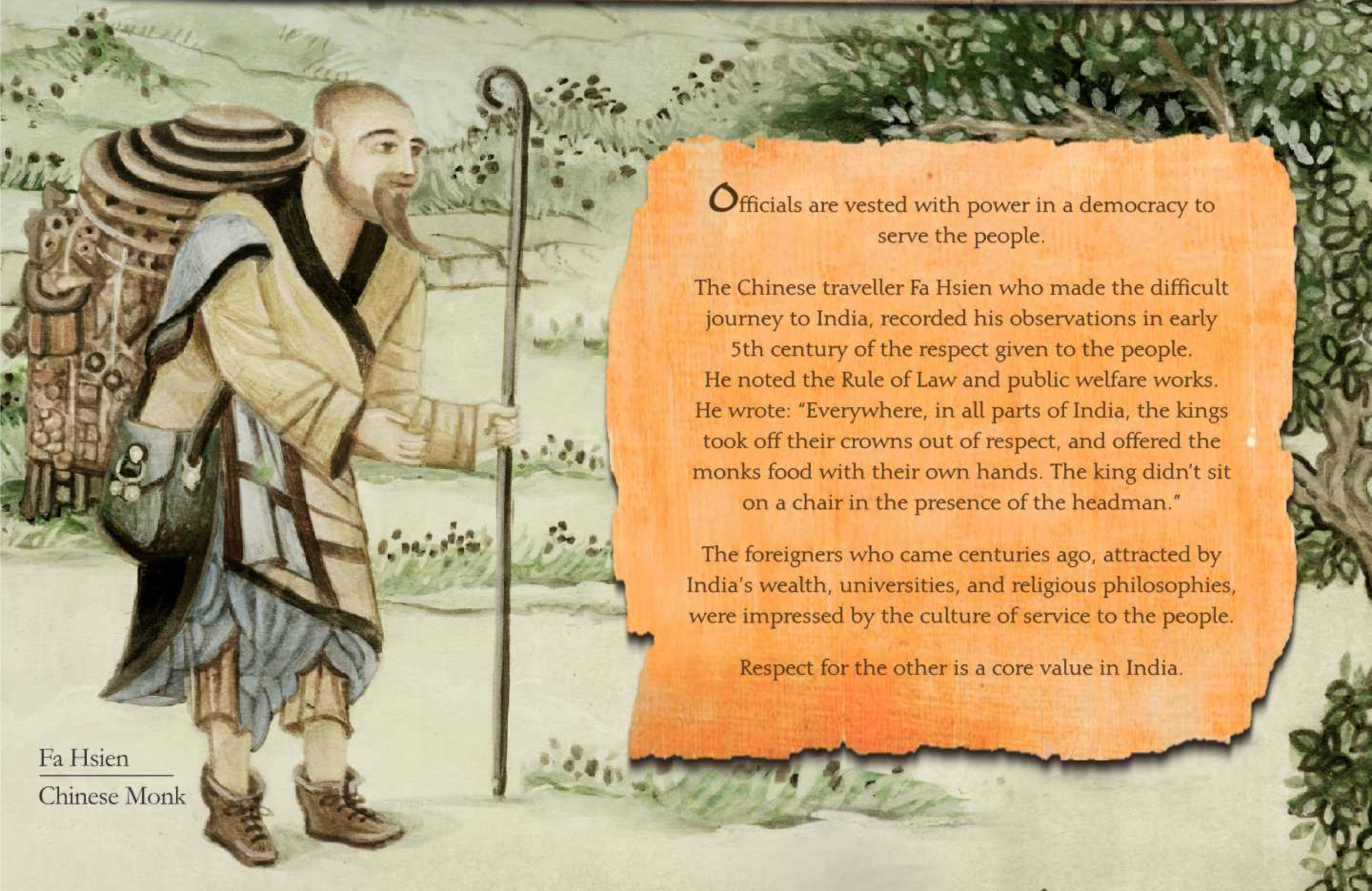
Artistic representation of Sannati Sculpture

Edicts at Rupnagar, Madhya Pradesh





SERVICE IS THE FIRST ORDER



Fa Hsien
Chinese Monk

Officials are vested with power in a democracy to serve the people.

The Chinese traveller Fa Hsien who made the difficult journey to India, recorded his observations in early 5th century of the respect given to the people. He noted the Rule of Law and public welfare works. He wrote: "Everywhere, in all parts of India, the kings took off their crowns out of respect, and offered the monks food with their own hands. The king didn't sit on a chair in the presence of the headman."

The foreigners who came centuries ago, attracted by India's wealth, universities, and religious philosophies, were impressed by the culture of service to the people.

Respect for the other is a core value in India.

THE POWER TO CHOOSE & TO CHANGE

A ruler rules not by birth right or coercion but by bowing to the will of the people. This democratic principle is seen throughout India's history.

The Khalimpur Copperplate inscriptions, talk of how King Gopala was elected by the people to replace an unfit ruler:

"His son was the crest-jewel of the heads of rulers, the glorious Gopala, whom the elements of the state made take the hand of Fortune, to put an end to

disorder and Matsya Nyaya – the law of the big fish eating the small one."

There are numerous historical references of the people choosing their King. Rudradaman I, King Kharevala and even the pillar of Samudragupta of India's golden Gupta era, at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, mentions similar principles.

Inscription of
Samudragupta

Khalimpur
Inscription

Mahasthan
Inscription

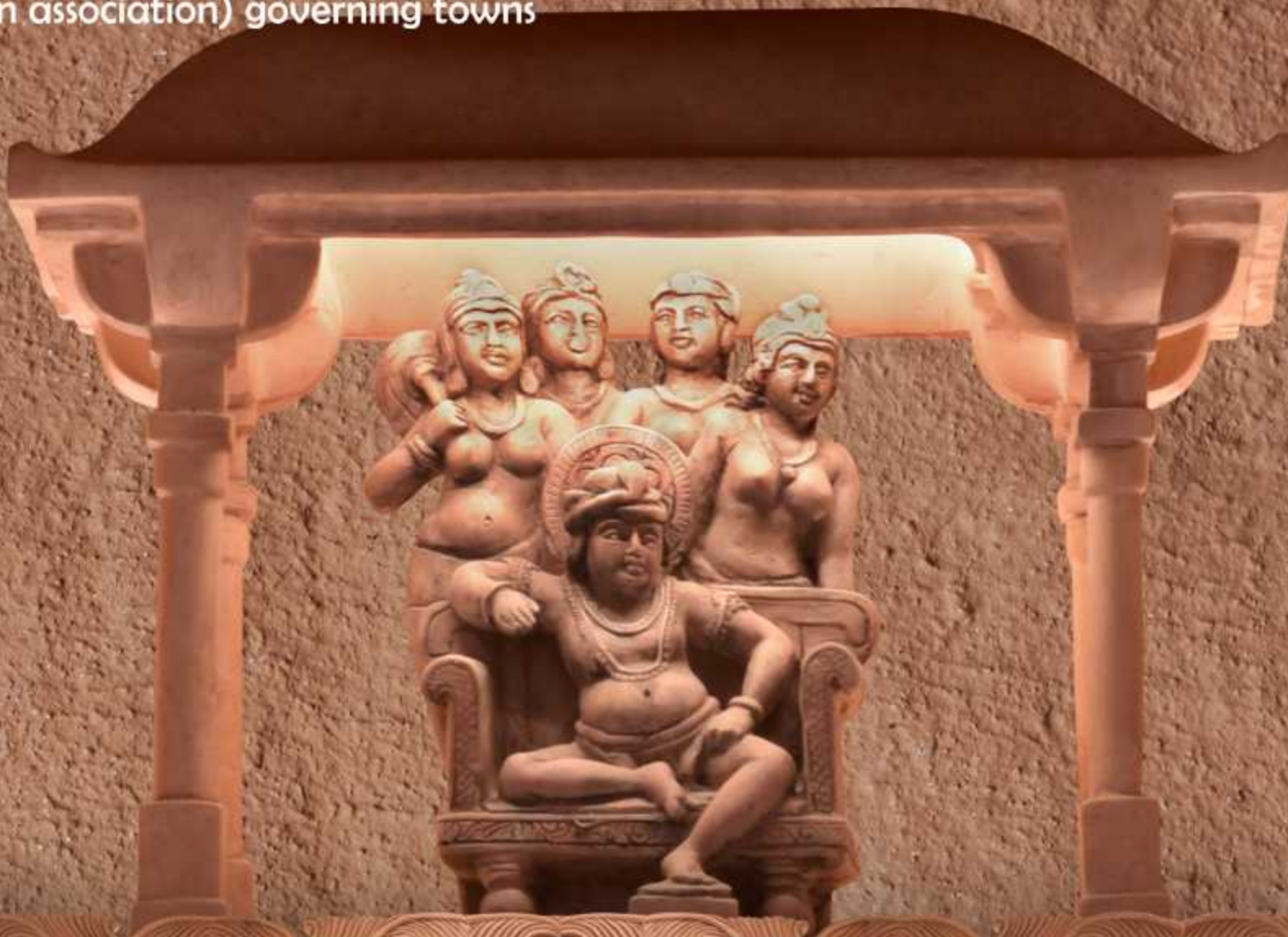


Guilds & Democratic Administration

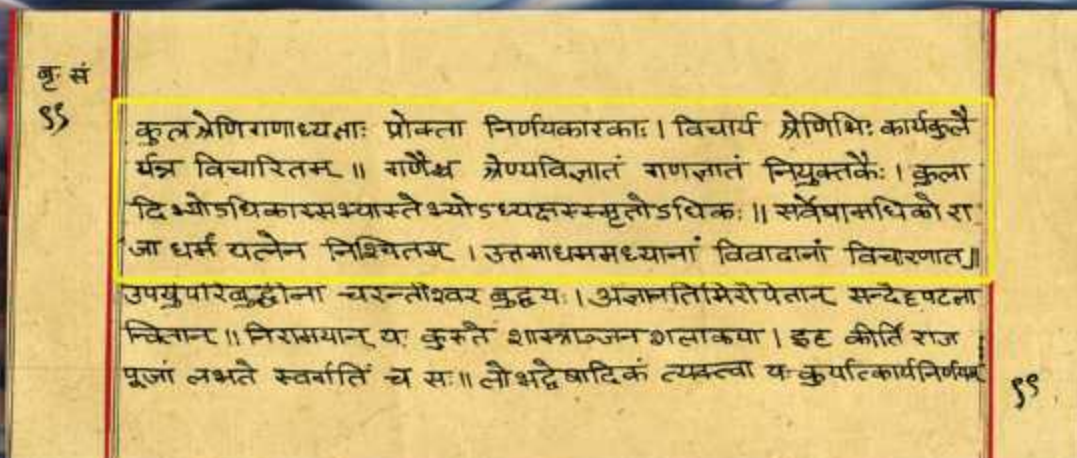
In a democracy, the people have the right to elect and hold accountable those who administer them.

Across India, this principle often manifested itself as a multi-layered system comprising of merchant-guilds (Shreni Sangha), town administration (Nigam), and elected administrative officers like Jethaka (Chief) and Shreshthi (heads of an association) governing towns and villages.

The Vaillabhattasvamin Temple Inscription describes how Sri-Gopagiri, Gwalior of today, was ruled by the Kottapala (chief of the Fort), Sri Bhojadeva Alla, and the commander of the fort, Tattaka. The city was administered by Vavviyaka, the merchant, and Ichchhuvaka, the trader with the support of the members of the Board.



A depiction of Nagarashreshthi, a folio of the Brihaspatismriti-manuscript, a market scene, a city wall, and a merchant ship sailing in the river.



Participation of people, inscribed.

Deep in South India, in the little town of Uthiramerur, the inscriptions on the walls of a temple from a thousand years ago, made by a ruler, Parantaka Chola I, stand testimony to the practice of democratic elections and local self-governance.

These inscriptions describe the eligibility for selecting candidates - from age and income requirements to qualifications; the method to carry out fair elections - from writing the name on a *kudav ollai* (palm leaf), to putting it into an earthen pot tied with a cloth, the ballot box, to picking of the palm leaf by a young child for verification. Thus candidates were selected to manage the village's affairs.

1100 to 1500 CE

BHARAT
THE MOTHER
OF DEMOCRACY

Spreading the Spirit of Equality



एकं सद्
विप्रा बहुधा
वदन्ति

The ancient Indian scripture, Rigveda, states:

Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti
(Rigveda 1/164/46)

*“The Supreme Reality is one,
the sages call him by various names.”*

Equality is the soul of democracy.
Philosophers, saints and poets across India
recognised this and preached its importance
over centuries. Here are a few examples:

“All are equal in the eyes of God”
Swami Ramanujacharya

“Consider everyone equal to
attain inner and outer purity.”
Saint Basavanna

“There is no difference between me
and you just like water and waves.”
Saint Ravidas

“The spiritual light that shines
within me is in fact everywhere.”
Poetess Lal Ded

“Devotion is above caste, creed
and knowledge of the scriptures.”
Srimanta Sankardev

14th - 16th century CE



The power of participation

'Sarv-sammati' or *'consent of the people'* is the foundation of democracy in any state.

Vijayanagar in south India is the finest example of responsive government, democratic ethos and trade linkages across the world. Krishnadeva Raya was the greatest king of this empire. He believed in the power of participatory governance. He ruled with great efficiency with the consent of his Amarnayakas (Governors) and their representatives.

Encouraging self-governance, Krishnadeva Raya divided his empire into mandalams (provinces), nadus (districts) and sthals (sub-districts). The grama (village) was the basic unit of political organisation.

Apart from the larger assembly of Amarnayakas, he also made a smaller council of experts who advised him on most administrative decisions.

Vijayanagar was an example of a state that worked for the benefit of the people.



Stone Chariot
at Vittala Temple, Hampi

Representative Image
of Krishnadeva Raya

1556 - 1605 CE



The UNDERSTANDING MONARCH

Good administration should embrace everyone's welfare, regardless of religion. That was the kind of democracy the 3rd Mughal Padishah Akbar practiced.

Akbar introduced the doctrine of "Sulh-i-Kul" i.e. universal peace, as a tool against religious discrimination. He abolished Jizyah, a tax levied on non-Muslims.

To create a harmonious society, he propounded a new syncretic religion known as "Din-i-Ilahi"

or Divine Faith. He also established the 'Ibadat Khana' (House of Worship) where wise men from different sects met and debated.

A group of nine wise people, known as Navaratna, served as his counsellors, while implementing his pro-people schemes.

Akbar's democratic thinking was unusual and way ahead of its time.

Representative
image of
Mughal Padishah Akbar



1630 - 1680 CE



Democratic Legacy of a legend

In a Democracy, the representatives are aware of their duties and the people enjoy equal rights. A proponent of such governance was Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the great Maratha Empire in India.

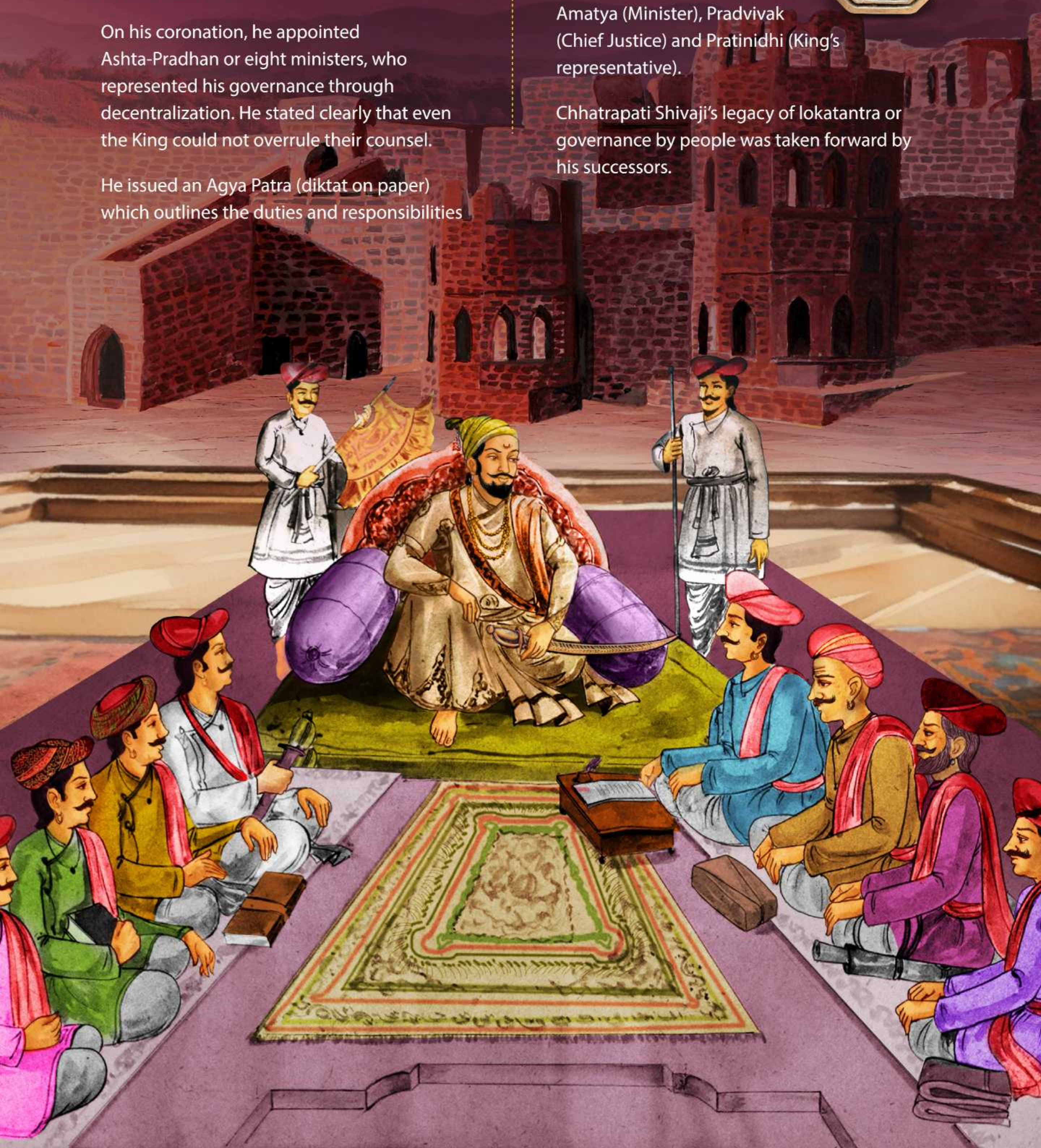
On his coronation, he appointed Ashta-Pradhan or eight ministers, who represented his governance through decentralization. He stated clearly that even the King could not overrule their counsel.

He issued an Agya Patra (diktat on paper) which outlines the duties and responsibilities

of the Ashtha-Pradhan who were Sumantra (Minister), Pandit (Priest), Mantri (Minister), Pradhana (Prime Minister), Sachiva (Secretary), Amatya (Minister), Pradvivak (Chief Justice) and Pratinidhi (King's representative).

Chhatrapati Shivaji's legacy of lokatantra or governance by people was taken forward by his successors.

Royal Seal



5000 BCE
to Now



DEMOCRACY at the GRASSROOTS



Kula Panchayat of the Kolam tribes, Telangana



Rai Sabha of the Gond tribes, Bihar



Hakima council, Malana village, Himachal Pradesh



Manji Parganit of the Santhaal community, Jharkhand

Public participation is the cornerstone of democracy.

Nothing exemplifies this better than the local self-governance systems that have thrived in India for thousands of years. Governing bodies such as the Gram Sabha (village assembly), Gram Panchayat (village council), Nagar Nigam (town council), and Parishad (council), have played key roles in enabling local communities to manage their affairs.

Such systems were observed and documented by the British in the 19th century.

Various systems of local governance are continuing unchanged. Notable examples are Malana village in Northern India, the Santhaal and Gond communities in Central India, and the Kollam community in Southern India.

Several communities and groups in the North Eastern states have preserved their traditional self-governance practices to this day.

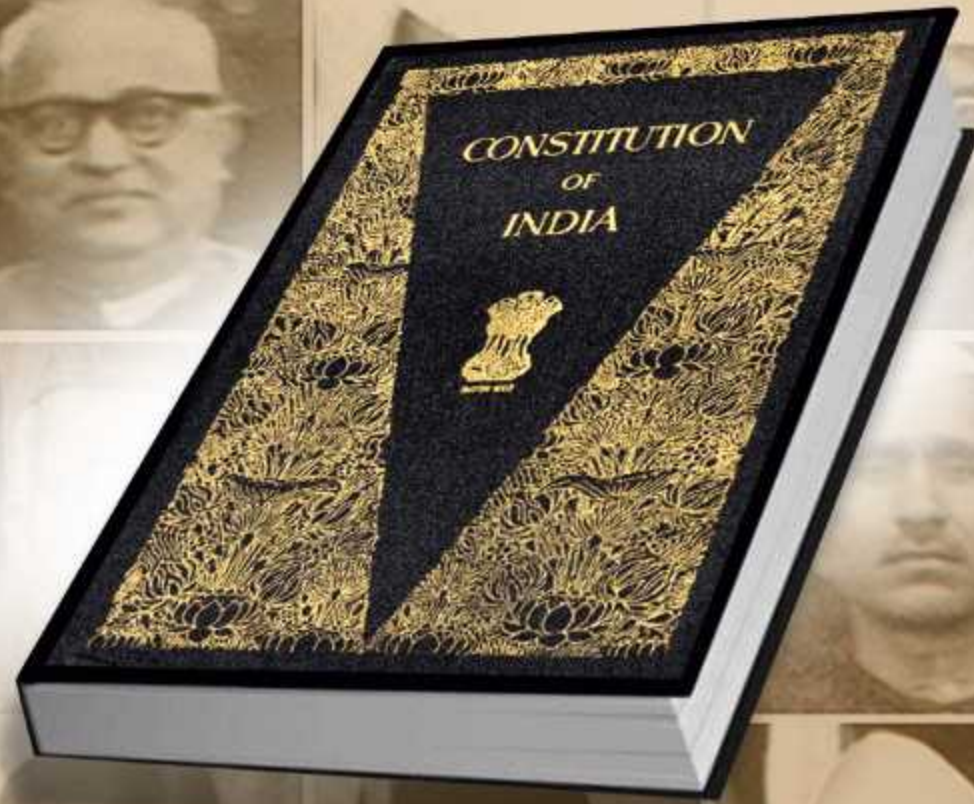
Local self-governance systems are storehouses of democratic values in India.

1947 onwards



WE THE PEOPLE

MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF INDIA, 1950



The Constitution of India outlines a modern, democratic Republic, while retaining aspects of past democratic models from our rich history.

It was created by the Indian Constituent Assembly, comprising 389 members from diverse backgrounds, including 15 women representatives, with Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee.

It establishes the three pillars of governance - the Legislature, Judiciary and Executive - defining their powers, responsibilities and relationships. All citizens are considered equal; enjoying equal rights, protection and universal adult suffrage.

India's Constitution contains numerous Articles and Schedules, and has been amended many times since its adoption, in consonance with changing needs and times.

The Constitution of India is an organic and contemporary document, consistently evolving to resonate with the pulse of the people.

1947 onwards



Embracing **One** and **All**

**For a democracy to function,
it must truly be inclusive. Here,
India's Constitution leads the way.**

**It establishes a bicameral Parliamentary
system, with a Lok Sabha (Lower House)
and a Rajya Sabha (Upper House).**

**The President is the Head of State.
The Executive Powers are exercised
by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.**

**The Constitution provides for an
independent Judiciary, with the
Supreme Court at the apex and
each state having its High Court.**

**India follows a three-tier system of
governance; the Union, the States,
and the Local Self-Government.**

**A democracy designed by the people
for the most diverse country on Earth.**

1952-2023



PEACEFUL TRANSFERS OF POWER

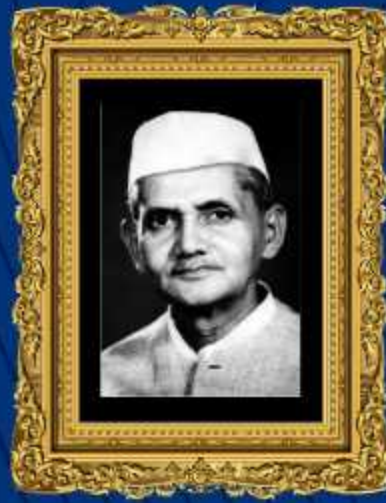
HON'BLE PRIME MINISTERS OF INDIA



SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU
15 Aug 1947 - 27 May 1964



SHRI GULZARILAL NANDA
27 May 1964 - 9 Jun 1964
11 Jan 1966 - 24 Jan 1966



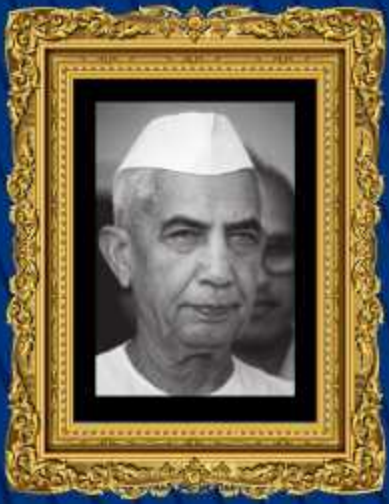
SHRI LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI
9 Jun 1964 - 11 Jan 1966



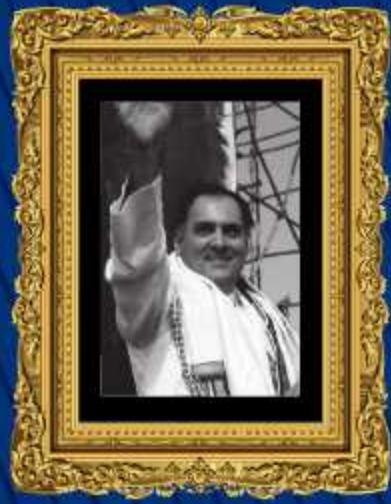
SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI
24 Jan 1966 - 24 Mar 1977
14 Jan 1980 - 31 Oct 1984



SHRI MORARJI DESAI
24 Mar 1977 - 28 Jul 1979



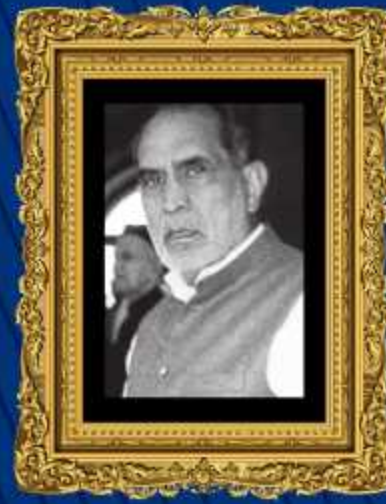
SHRI CHAUDHARY CHARAN SINGH
28 Jul 1979 - 14 Jan 1980



SHRI RAJIV GANDHI
31 Oct 1984 - 2 Dec 1989



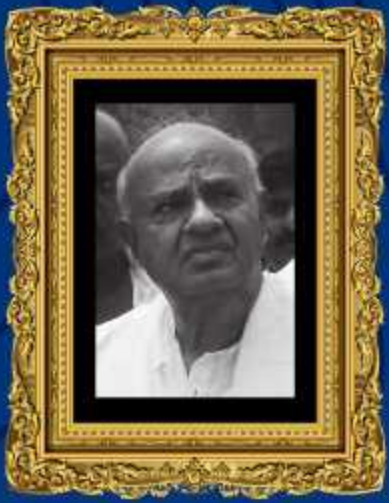
SHRI VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH
2 Dec 1989 - 10 Nov 1990



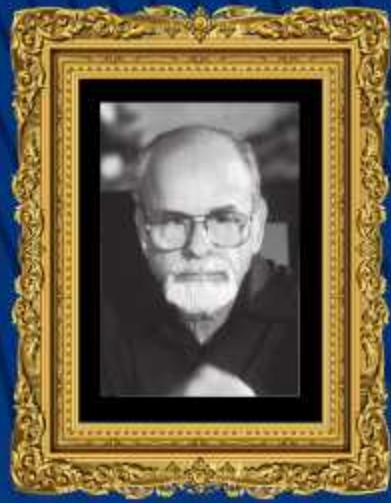
SHRI CHANDRA SHEKHAR
10 Nov 1990 - 21 Jun 1991



SHRI NARASIMHA RAO
21 Jun 1991 - 16 May 1996



SHRI H. D. DEVE GOWDA
1 Jun 1996 - 21 Apr 1997



SHRI INDER KUMAR GUJRAL
21 Apr 1997 - 19 Mar 1998



SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE
16 May 1996 - 1 Jun 1996
19 Mar 1998 - 29 Apr 1999
3 Oct 1999 - 10 May 2004



DR. MANMOHAN SINGH
22 May 2004 - 26 May 2014



SHRI NARENDRA MODI
26 May 2014 to Present

Free India is a pillar of global democracy.

India never had any doubt about democracy and its practices, that involved everyone irrespective of wealth, education, gender or creed.

Since independence, India has witnessed peaceful transfers of power through 17 national elections, over 400 state elections

and over a million elections to local self - governments. Elections happened, and keep happening, like clockwork. The Election Commission of India reports directly to the President. It is a fiercely independent body.

From the village to the national parliament, democracy thrives in India. But then, the democratic ethos has been a part of the people for millennia.

1952-2023



A FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY

INDIA'S NATIONAL ELECTIONS OF 2019

Total number of Candidates

8,054

Over

10,000,000

Election Officials

Total number of Women Voters

294,624,323

In India, democracy is a celebration. Much like the festivals the country is famous for.

The latest national elections of 2019 were conducted across deserts, forests, mountains, remote villages and megacities. No area, howsoever remote, was left out of the elections.

Nearly one million polling booths were set up to ensure that all citizens had easy access to vote. Care was taken to locate the polling stations in such a manner that no voter had to walk more than a kilometer to reach the booth for casting their vote.

India has deployed its own technologies, like the Electronic Voting Machine since the mid-1990s. With this, the results of the world's largest election are counted without errors in just one day.

The Election Commission of India trains over 40 countries on how to run elections. India thus spreads democratic values worldwide.



Total number of Voters

614,684,398

Covering

3,200,000

square kilometres of total area

Total number of Polling Stations

10,378,000

