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Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India

Scholars have long studied classical Sanskrit culture in almost total isolation from its courtly context. As the first study to focus exclusively on the royal court as a social and cultural institution, this book fills a gap in the literature. Using both literary and inscriptional sources, it begins with the rise and spread of royal households and political hierarchies from the Gupta period (*c.* 350–750), and traces the emergence of a coherent courtly worldview, which would remain stable for almost a millennium to 1200. Later chapters examine key features of courtly life which have been all but ignored by the previous literature on ancient Indian society: manners, ethics, concepts of personal beauty and theories of disposition. The book ends with a sustained examination of the theory and practice of erotic love, in the context of the wider social dynamics and anxieties which faced the people of the court.

DAUD ALI is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

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For my mother and father,
who must surely be amused that their son has finally
taken an interest in manners!

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Transliteration of Indic words follows the accepted style for South Asian languages. The citation of primary sources, barring inscriptions, in footnotes will not include publication information as in some cases multiple editions and translations, where available, were consulted. For readers who wish to check the original sources, the edition cited will usually be the first entry, unless otherwise noted, under the text’s title in

the bibliography. Citation of Sanskrit texts is usually by book, chapter and verse (of the first Sanskrit edition cited in the Bibliography) as necessary. Prose works have been cited similarly, but with reference to chapter and page. In mixed prose and verse works, particularly dramas, note of the act/chapter is followed by a verse number, with '+' referring to following prose sections. For the sake of brevity, I have shortened citations to published inscriptions in important epigraphical journals like *Indian Antiquary (IA)*, *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*, *South Indian Inscriptions (SII)*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum (CII)*, and *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India (JESI)* by omitting the details of particular inscriptions and including only the volume, date, inscription number (where relevant) and page number.

Abbreviations

<i>AK</i>	Amarakośa
<i>AS</i>	Arthaśāstra
<i>AV</i>	Atharvaveda
<i>BS</i>	Bṛhatsaṁhitā
<i>BC</i>	Buddhacarita
<i>BSOAS</i>	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
<i>CHI</i>	Comprehensive History of India
<i>CII</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
<i>CkS</i>	Carakasāṁhitā
<i>DhVS</i>	Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda
<i>DK</i>	Daśakumāracarita
<i>EC</i>	Epigraphia Carnatica (new series)
<i>EI</i>	Epigraphia Indica
<i>GkS</i>	Gaṇikāvṛttasaṁgraha
<i>HC</i>	Harṣacarita
<i>IA</i>	Indian Antiquary
<i>IHR</i>	Indian Historical Review
<i>IHQ</i>	Indian Historical Quarterly
<i>IIf</i>	Indo-Iranian Journal
<i>ISPS</i>	Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas, Pāṇḍuvarṁśins and Somavarṁśins
<i>JAOs</i>	Journal of the American Oriental Society
<i>JAS</i>	Journal of Asian Studies
<i>JESHO</i>	Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
<i>JESI</i>	Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India
<i>JIH</i>	Journal of Indian History
<i>JRAS</i>	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
<i>Kd</i>	Kādambarī
<i>KS</i>	Kāmasūtra
<i>MDh</i>	Mānavadhāramaśāstra
<i>MhB</i>	Mahābhārata
<i>MK</i>	Mṛcchakaṭika

List of abbreviations

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<i>MkA</i>	Mālavikāgnimitra
<i>MR</i>	Mudrārakṣasa
<i>MSS</i>	Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha
<i>NiS</i>	Nītisāra
<i>NiV</i>	Nītivākyāmṛta
<i>NS</i>	Nāṭyaśāstra
<i>Pd</i>	Priyadarśikā
<i>PIHC</i>	Proceedings of the Indian History Congress
<i>PT</i>	Pañcatantra
<i>PY</i>	Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa
<i>RghV</i>	Raghuvamśa
<i>Rv</i>	Ratnāvalī
<i>SG</i>	Sigiriya (Sigiri) Graffiti
<i>SII</i>	South Indian Inscriptions
<i>Sk</i>	Abhijñānaśākuntala
<i>STr</i>	Subhāṣitatriṣaṭi
<i>SV</i>	Svapnavāsavadatta
<i>VkU</i>	Vikramorvaśīya

Glossary

ākāra	facial expression or gesture
alaṅkāra	ornamentation, literally ‘making sufficient’
amātya	minister
añjali	gesture of greeting involving the putting together of the palms
antaḥpura	a term originally denoting royal palace as a whole but which eventually came to designate women’s quarters therein bhāva – state, disposition, emotion
anugraha	favour or kindness
anurāga	attachment, affection
artha	wealth
ārya	‘noble’, elevated
bhakti	participatory devotion
bhāṇa	genre of monologue play narrated by the viṭa
dākṣiṇya	consideration, courtesy
daṇḍanāyaka	military retainer
digvijaya	a conquest of the four directions necessary to claim imperial overlordship
dūtaka	envoy, messenger
goṣṭhī	salon-like gathering of men for entertainment and conversation
indriyas	the senses
īṅgita	physical movement, gesture
kalā	‘art’ or skill
kāma	pleasure or desire, particularly sexual desire
kañcukin	doorkeeper, chamberlain
kīrti	fame, notoriety
kumāra	prince
kumārāmātya	prince among ministers
lalita	grace or charm
līlā	playful grace or charm

mahāmātra	‘one of great estimation’, high ranking courtier or official
mahārāja	subordinate king
mahāsandhivigrahaka	minister of peace and war
māna	respect, estimation
manas	mind, locus of feelings, volition, thought
maṇḍaleśvara	a lord of a province
mantrin	counsellor
nāgaraka	man of the town, urbane sophisticate
nāyaka	hero of drama
nāyikā	heroine of drama
nīti	political and worldly policy
parīkṣā	test or examination
paṭṭabandha	turban-like fillet or headband
prasāda	favour, particularly as physically manifested by a lord
praśasti	eulogy
pūjā	reverence, honouring
puruṣārtha	four goals of man, referring to kāma, artha, dharma and mokṣa
rājamaṇḍala	‘circle of kings’, term used to designate a hierarchically ordered array of kings in the <i>Arthaśāstra</i>
rājādhirāja	title referring to higher ranking king or emperor
rājayaḥṣman	‘royal disease’ of physical attenuation
rasa	essence, flavour, second-order aesthetic experience
rasika	connoisseur, or aesthete
sabhā	assembly or assembly hall
sabhya	fit for an assembly, courtly; courtier, person of good society
sajjana	‘good people’
sāmanta	‘lord of the marches’, a term which came to refer to subordinate vassal-kings
śṛṅgāra	second order aesthetic experience of sexual love
sevā	service
subhāṣita	sententious, gnomic, or paradigmatic verse, literally ‘well spoken’
trivarga	‘threefold path’, worldly life, constituted by the pursuit of kāma, artha and dharma

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xx Glossary

upacāra	an act of service or courtesy
vaśa	influence or will
vijigīṣu	king desiring paramount overlordship of the rājamaṇḍala
vinaya	discipline, humility
viṭa	a well-regarded man, a former nāgaraka reduced to the role of dependency through poverty
yuvarāja	heir apparent