

# RELIGIOUS EPITHET IN ORISSAN INSCRIPTION

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Epigraphy is the study of inscription and inscription literally means any writing engraved on some object like stone, metal and other permanent materials like wood, shell, etc. The art of writing was one of momentous inventions which have shaped the destiny of man, because it has proved the most stable medium of the propagation of knowledge and the diffusion of human culture. Inscription have contributed largely to the reconstruction of history.

Orissa is comparatively rich in materials for the study of epigraphy. Her rocky hills, caves and temples build of hard stones contains inscription from 3rd Century B. C. down to the modern period. Eleven of the fourteen rock edicts of emperor Ashoka and his two special Kalinga edicts found on the Dhauli hill near Bhubaneswar and Jaugada in Ganjam.

The imagining of kings with reference to or comparison with one or more deities occurs frequently in the prasastis of the inscriptions of the ancient and early medieval kings of Orissa. The king is eulogized in a few inscription as the protector of his people and as the maintainer of Dharmma. There are several instances where the king is compared with the deity like Vishnu or Siva.

In all the inscription of Ashoka, he used the title Devanampriya Priyadarsin Raja or the king beloved to the God.

The prasasti of the royal grants conveys an idealised image of kinship. The king appear as a great warrior and as a protector of his subjects.

The early copper plate grants of Matharas, Pitribhaktas and Vasishthas do not reveal any clear sectarian affiliations. However the Ningondi plate of the Mathara king Prabhanjana Varman refer to the kings grandfather Sankara Varman as who mediates on the feet of Lord Narayana (Bhagavat-Svami-Narayana-Pad-anudhyatah). The Andhavaram plates of Anantasakti Varman refer to him as a devout worshipper of the lotus-feet of the Lord Narayana whose chest is embraced by Kamalanilaya (Lakshmi).

The prasasti of the Vasishthas king Ananta Varman indicates his Saiva affiliation. One of his epithets is *Parama Mahesvara*.

## **Gangas of Kalinga Nagara**

Most of the inscription of this group of Ganga king describe them as *Parama Mahesvara*. These kings are also described in their prasasti as having been freed the

stain of the Kaliage through their obesance at the lotus-feet of the Lord Gokarnasvamin, the deity who has the moon as his creast jewel, who is the sole architect of the creation of all the world, who is the lord of moving and unmoving creation and who is established on the firm and pure summit of the Mahendra mountain. From the Narasimhapalli inscription of Hasti Varman onwards, the prasasti of the early Ganga kings in almost all cases refers these kings as *Parama Mahasvara*.

### **The Sailodbhavas**

The invocation in the Sailodbhava copper plate grants from the time of the Buguda plates of Madhava Varman consistently associates these kings with the worshipper of Siva. It invokes the protection of the matted locks of Sambhu, which are embraced by the soft rays of the moon.

The prasasti of the Ganjam plates of Madhavaraja Sainyabhita speaks of the king as devoted to the feet of the blessed lord of the three worlds(Siva). The Banapur plates of Madhyamaraja refer to the king being favoured by Siva, the cause of the worlds origin, maintenance and dissolution.

The Buguda plates of Madhava Varman Sainyabhita give following account of the origin of the Sailodbhava dynasty. It is stated that there was a person named Pulindasena famous among the peoples of Kalinga. He worshipped Brahma who created the lord Sailodbhava who became the founder of the dynasty. The name Sailodbhava literally means one who was born from a rock or mountain.

Another notable feature of the royal prasasti in the Buguda plates that Madhava Varman is said to have caused satisfaction to the gods by his performance of the Asvamedha and other sacrifices. The reference to the performance of the *Asvamedha* and other sacrifices by Madhava Varman Sainyabhita occurs in the Banapur and Nivina plates of his grandson Dharmaraja. The Parikud plates Madhyamarajadeva refers that he performed the *Vajpeya* and *Asvamedha* sacrifice. He claimed the supreme monarch or *Chakra Vartin*.

The eulogy of Madhava Varman in the Buguda plate is noteworthy, compares him with Siva and refers to him having cleansed the impurities of Kali age. The Banapur plates of Madhyamaraja compare the king with Sambhu (Siva). It is feats of archery are compared with those of the son Prutha (Arjuna) by piercing from a distance at a time four boards, each covered with two sheilds with arrow discharge from two bows simultaneously by his two hands. Again he is said to have been able to run with two stout persons on his soulders like Hanumana.

Dharmaraja is said to have learned in all the sastras *Sakala-Sastra-Visesha-Vedah* and one who listened devoutly to the tales of Siva dazzling deeds and engaged in discussion of dharma amidst Brahmanas.

## The Bhaumakaras

The early Bhaumakaras were Buddhist. Maharaja Subhakara of the Neulpur plate is endowed with epithet *Parama Saugata* (a great devotee of the Saugata, the Buddha). He is further described as the son of the *Parama Tathagata* (Buddha).

Sri Sivakaradeva assumed the title *Parama Opasaka* (or lay Buddhist). In the Terundia plate Subhakara II, describes him as a *Parama Saugata*.

The latter Bhaumakaras kings were affiliated to Brahmanical religion. Some describing themselves as devout worshippers of Vishnu as well as Siva. Tribhuvana Mahadevi is described in the Dhenkanal plate as *Parama Bhattarika Maharajadhiraja Paramesvari* and compared in her prasasti with goddess Katyani and Sri. The Talcher plate of Subhakara describes the queen Tribhuvana Mahadevi as one whose head was sanctified by the dust of the lotus-feet of Hari, and one who on death attained the feet of Hari which she had worshipped with unparalleled during her lifetime.

The Bhauma king Kusumahara is described in the Talcher plate as an incarnation (avatara) of Bharata, Bhagadatta and Bhagiratha and possess the valour uncommon in the kings of other countries.

Dandi Mahadevi described as *Parama Mahesvari*. She is described as the support of virtue afflicted by the vice of Kali age. Dharma Mahadevi of the Taltari plates was a *Parama Mahesvari* and is compared with the *Goddess Lakshmi*.

## The Bhanjas

The Kumurukela plates of Satru Bhanja begin with an invocation to Vishnu, the god whose chest is embraced by his consort Lakshmi, followed by a verse that invokes Siva in his fearsome aspects of Bhairava, the terrible destroyer who killed the demon Andhaka.

The early Bhanjas of Khinjali Mandala to the egg born lineage (Andaja-Vamsa-Prabhavah). As far as royal epithets are concerned Satru Bhanja is compared with Brahaspati in the Sonpur plates while Ranabhanja's inscription compare him with *Svayambhu*.

The grant of the later Bhanjas of Khinjali Mandala begin with an invocation to Hara (Siva).

The grants of Netta Bhanja Kalayana Kalasa describe him as a *Parama Mahesvara*, however Netta Bhanja Prithivi Kalasa, the son and successor of Vidhyadhara Bhanja is described as a *Parama Vaishnava*. All the inscription of the Bhanjas of Khinjali Mandala describe these kings as having removed the impurities or stain of the Kali age (Nirdhuta-Kali-Kalusha-Kalamasha).

## The Panduvamsis

The Panduvamsi copperplate grants contain elaborate prasasti, replete with epic and puranic imagery. This dynasty claimed to belong to the lineage of the Pandavas. The earliest Panduvamsi kings were Saivas. They used in their epithets of *Parama-Mahesvara*, *Parama-Brahmanya* and *Parama-guru-daivat-adhidaivat visesha* (a great devotee of the teachers, the gods and the supreme god). But the Panduvamsi king Mahasivagupta Tivara, son of Nannadeva is describe in his inscription as a Parama-Vaishnava, Tivars prasasti eulogizes his martial achievements, the lightness of the taxes levied by him and the many excellent qualities of his skill of in uprooting serpents is compared with that of Garuda (the vehicle of the God Vishnu). The Sirpur stone inscription of Vasata the mother of Mahasivagupta begins with an envocation to Vishnu as Purushottam and goes to eulogize Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, Vasata is compared with Parvati, the mother of God Karttikeya and Ganesha.

## The Somavamsis

The inscription of Mahabhavagupta which begins with an auspicious invocation "*Om Namaha Sivaya*" most of the ruler used the word *Bhava* or *Siva* and are also indicative of their Saiva leanings. The Orissa State Museum plate of Mahasivagupta Yayati States, the joy created among people at Janamejaya's accession to the throne of Kosala is compared with that aroused by Yudhishtira's accession to the throne. The Jatesinga and Dungari plates of Mahasivagupta yayati compare this king with legendry kings such as Nala, Nahusha, Dilipa, Bharata and Bhagiratha. He is also described as one who is free from the stain of the *Kali* age, and as a builder of many temples (devakul-ayatana) pleasure gardens and parks. In the Brahmesvara temple inscription of the time of Udyotakesari, Bhimarath is said to be the Kalpa tree of the Kalinga. His son Dharmaratha is said to be the second Parasurama Udyotakesari mother Kolavati is compared with Goddess *Durga* and *Lakshmi* in beauty and action. The Somavamsi kings claimed to belong to the Lunar dynasty. This is evident from the epithet '*Soma-Kula-Tilaka*'.

## Imperial Ganga

The copperplate grant of the imperial Gangas contain an elaborate prasasti. The inscription of Vajrahasta (III) refer to the Ganga king as one by whom the stains of impurities of the Kali age was washed away with the pure water of their taintless thoughts and deeds. It also speaks of the grandeur of their sovereignty (samrajya) being resplendent with the conch shell (sankha), the drum(bheri) the five great sounds (Pancha Mahasabda) the white parasol (dhavala-chattra), the golden fly-whisk (hema-chamara) and the excellent bull crest(vara-vrushabha lanchana) which they had obtained through the favour of the deity Gokarna Svamin established on the summit of the lofty Mahendra Mountain the lord of all things moving and unmoving, the sole architect of the creation of all the worlds who has the moon as his crest jewel.

The genealogical account of the imperial Ganga begins with Gunamaharava, who is described as having conquered the circle of the earth with his prowess as did the God Vishnu. From the inscription of Chodaganga begin with the God Ananta (Vishnu). From the water-lily that grew from Ananta's navel sprang from the God Brahma.

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