



Reference on Lord Purushottam in Odishan Inscriptions

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Purushottama Jagannatha, the Lord of the universe, the supreme God has been worshipped in various names and forms, from time to time with different modes of doctrines and rituals. The literary and epigraphic sources throw considerable light on the revival of this cult.

The earliest epigraphic evidence regarding the Lord is found from the Kalian Copper Plate Grant of Sridharana Rata of Bengal, who flourished about second half of the 7th century A.D.

The plate describes that Sridharana was born to Bhanudevi, who was the *agramahish* (Chief Queen) of Jivadharana, whom the charter describes as *Parama Vaishnava* and a devout worshipper of Vishnu.

The next epigraphs is the Sripur Stone Inscription of Mahasivagupta. The inscription begins with an invocation to *Purushottama*.

The first three verses are elevated to the praise of *Narasimha* incarnation of *Vishnu* and construction of a temple for *Hari* by queen Vasata, the mother of Mahasivagupta.

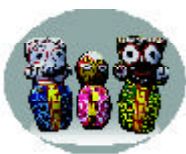
The Gaya inscription which belongs to about the 7th decade of 9th century A.D. begins with an invocation to Purushottama and then immediately proceeds to describe and praise him.

“Who conquers as Jagatinatha who appears as Narasimha..... Who has destructed by His nails the kings of the demon.

A stone inscription which found from Maihar in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh, beautifully narrates the story of a Brahman boy named Damodar, who was originally a son of Sarasvati and lived in the heaven. But once he defeated Bruhaspati, the preceptor of the gods in a disputation. He was cursed by the latter to go to earth. On the request of his mother, Bruhaspati ordained that the boy would not live long on the earth. When the young boy would undertake a pilgrimage to ‘*Purushottama* in the country of Odisha shall thereafter take a bath in the ocean where he shall be drowned and thus come back to heaven. The epigraphs belongs to the 10th Century A.D.

The Mehore plate of Damodoradeva, begins with invocation as “Om, on whose awakening the world comes to manifestation, in whom, while reposing, it becomes merged again instantaneously obeisance to that *Purushottama*.

The Nagpur stone inscription dated in Vikram Samvat 1160 (1104 A.D.) records the military campaign of the Paramara king Lakshmanadeva led towards Eastern India. The inscription describes “near the eastern ocean



cleaver men thus artfully proclaimed his praise, while he looked pleased on bashfully: 'O' - Lord, it was the holy *Purushottama* to whom fortune restored who relieved this universe by subduing the enemy *Bali* and who supported the earth."

The Kalidindi grant of eastern Chalukya Rajaraja describes in the introductory verse that *Brahma* as born from the lotus which grows from the navel of great Lord *Narayana Purushottama* at Sridham. Sridham or Sriksheeta is one of the names of the sacred area of Puri.

The cult of *Purushottama Jagannatha* took an important form with the construction of a temple for Lord *Purushottama* at the sea shore of Puri by Anantavarman Chodagangadeva. Chodagangadeva the founder of the Ganga dynasty occupied Utkala and shifted his capital from *Kalinganagara* to Kataka. Anantavarman like his predecessor was a great devotee of *Siva* and assumed the title *Parama Mahesvara*. But in the Korni Copper Plate grant he changed his attitude and appeared to demonstrate religious universality by applying to himself as *Parama Mahesvara Parama Vaishnava and Parama Brahmanaya*.

Many scholars have spoken of a conversion of Chodaganga from *Saivism* to *Vaishnavism* and think that due to the influence of Ramanuja this conversion took place. It was during his reign Ramanuja visited his kingdom and stayed at Puri. The effect of his visit was the change of the religious faith of Chodaganga who became a *Parama Vaishnava*.

The construction of a temple for God *Purushottama* at Puri by Chodaganga proves his inclination towards *Vaishnavism*. The first epigraphical record of the construction of the present *Purushottama* temple in the vicinity of ocean by the powerful monarch Chodaganga who coming from South, and subjugated the

Utkaladesa in the year 1112 A.D. is found in the Dasogaba copper plate grants of his grandson Rajarajadeva III, who succeeded the throne of Orissa after the death of his father Anangabhima III.

The first verse of this epigraph refers to the *Visvarupa* of Vishnu says that only Gangasvara could construct a suitable palace (Temple) for a God like *Purushottama*, whose feet are the earth, navel the mid region, the head the heaven, the ears the directions and the two eyes the sun and the moon respectively.

The second verse refers the joy of *Purushottama* and his consort *Lakshmi*. Till the construction of this residence (vasa) for *Purushottama*, he lived in the milk ocean, since ocean is the birth place of *Lakshmi*, *Purushottama* felt rather ashamed living there, since a respectable person is not accented proper honour if he lives in his father-in-law palace. He was therefore pleased to get a new place of residence for Himself and His wife *Lakshmi*. *Lakshmi* found residing independently in the house of her husband much preferable to living in her fathers house and hence she became very happy. Again in the verse 17 of the Nagari Plate of Anangabhima III states that Chodaganga built a temple for the God *Purushottama* at Puri on the sea shore of Bay of Bengal. The plate further describes that Lord *Purushottama* had been in worship at Puri for many years before the conquest of that region by Chodaganga, but that *Saivite* Somavamsi kings who were supplanted from Utkala by the Gangas had neglected the erection of a temple for the *Vaishnava* deity. *Purushottama Jagannatha* of Puri was originally worshipped by the aboriginal Savara people in an inaccessible forest on the Nilachal and that the priest of king Indradyumna of Avanti, who popularized the god, received information regarding the deity and his worship from a Savara named Visvasasu.



On the door jamb of the *Narasimha* temple there is an important inscription of Chodaganga which records offering of a perennial lamp (*Akhandavartika*) to Sri *Purushottama* by him.

The next important ruler after Chodaganga who patronized *Vaishnavacult* was Anangabhima III. In many of his records he has described himself as a deputy of the Lord *Purushottama*. In the Nagari Plate he assumed the title Anangabhima-Rautta-deva and by assuming this title he considered himself a mere deputy of the God *Jagannatha* of Puri whom he regarded as the real Lord of the kingdom. He is the first imperial Ganga monarch who so far known to have assumed the subordinate title *Rautta* and claimed theoretically at least to have been a feudatory of the God *Purushottama-Jagannatha*.

In the Draksharama temple inscription he stated himself as Parama Vaishnava and Parama *Mahesvara* as well as *Purushottama Putra*, *Rudra Putra* and *Durga Putra*. In this context we think that the formation of a Jagannatha Triad by Anangabhima during his early years proves his ritual relationship with the three dominant deities of Odisha. *Purushottama* at Puri, *Lingaraj Siva* at Bhubaneswar and *Viraja at Jajpur*.

It was only under the king Anangabhima Deva that the God *Purushottama* at Puri became official state deity of the Ganga empire. In the Bhubaneswar inscription which is dated 1230 A.D., he has been declared as a son and deputy of Lord *Purushottama* and similarly pronounced his dominions as *Purushottama Samrajya* and he was the servant of the God *Purushottama*.

In the same year his wife Somaladevi made an valuable donation to the God Vishnu Allaranatha at Kanchipuram. The inscription records the gift of the village named Udaiya Kamam in Antarudra vishaya by Somaladevi for

offering and worship to the god Allaranatha while she was at *Abhinava Varanasi Kataka*. The inscription dated in the 19th regnal year of Anangabhima. The epigraphs further describes him as the son of Lord *Purushottama* and a Parama Vaishnava who regularly observed *Ekadasi-Vrata* and constantly meditated at the feet of his Lord and the grant was made by the command (*adesa*) of Lord *Purushottama*.

During the same year Anangabhima has consecrated a temple for *Purushottama* in his newly capital *Abhinava Varanasi Kataka* and donated land to several *Brahmanas*. It is therefore quite logical that in one of his last inscriptions dated 1238 A.D. he declared his regnal year or Anka as the regnal year of Lord *Purushottama*. The sources leave no doubt that Anangabhima acknowledged *Jagannatha* as the overlord of Orissa and remained his deputy.

According to the temple chronicle, king Anangabhima has been renounced his royal consecration (*abhiseka*) because he considered himself only as the deputy of *Purushottama Jagannatha*.

The next ruler *Narasimha-I*, the son and successor of Anangabhima III, followed the deputy ideology of his father, and like him he also declared himself a son and deputy of *Purushottama*, the Lord of the universe. In one of his inscriptions at *Kapilas* he stated that the king succeeded in subduing his enemies in numerous battles at the command of the God *Purushottama*. The God is none other than Lord *Purushottama Jagannath*, Who is worshipped in the temple of Puri. Further the epigraph describes *Narasimha* as *Paramavaishnava* and *Parama Mahesvara* as well as *Purusottama Putra*, who built a temple for Lord *Siva* at *Kapilas hill*.



But it is not surprising in view of the fact that his father Anangabhima himself is also called both *Parama Vaishnava* and *Parama Mahesvara* as well as *Purushottama Putra*, *Rudra Putra* and *Durga Putra* in one of his inscriptions in the Siva temple at Draksharama .

The next important ruler of the Ganga dynasty who considered himself as the mere deputy of Lord Purushottama was Bhanudeva. In his Puri inscription he called himself as Bhanudeva *Rautta* and declared his own regnal year as the prosperous and victorious reign of Sri *Purushottamadeva*. He considered himself as a deputy of the God in matter of ruling the Ganga dominion.

The Gangas were followed by the Suryavamsi Gajapatis. Under the able leadership of Kapilendra this dynasty emerged a very strong political force in Orissa. *Purushottama-Jagannatha* became their tutelary deity, which gleaned from numerous inscriptions. Kapilendra went even a step further and allowed his courtiers and priests to call him an elected of Jagannatha. The Warangal inscription of Raghudeva describes Kapilendra became a Lord of Utkala at the command of *Purushottama*, the Lord of the fourteen worlds.

The Madala Panji, the temple chronicle relates that Lord Jagannatha had ordered the last Ganga Bhanudeva IV in a dream to nominate Kapilendra as his successor.

The Warangal inscription describes in the first line the God *Vishnu* as the imperial ruler of the earth and apparently as the overlord of the emperor Kapilesvara of Suryavamsi Gajapati family of Orissa. The date of the record has been put against the background of eternity as it is represented as falling in the eternal reign period of the said god. This is because of the fact as it is presumed from the Ganga inscription that Anagabhima dedicated his kingdom in favour of

the God *Purushottama Jagannatha* of Puri, who is regarded as a form of *Vishnu*, and that the Ganga king's successor as well as the later imperial ruler of Orissa including their theoretical successors, the present Maharaja of Puri regarded themselves as the viceroy of the deity Who was considered the real Lord of the country. This conception is noticed in several inscriptions of the Ganga dynasty. The present epigraph is the only record out side the Ganga family which echoes the same idea. There is however a slight difference in the conception as found in the inscription under review. The idea expressed in our record is that the God was the Lord of the earth while Kapilesvara endowed with imperial style was the king of the Utkala country under him. This mode of introducing a king is possibly the only case of the kind in the whole range of Indian Epigraphy.

Further the inscription states that Kapilesvara assumed the title as Mahesvara-Putra, *Purushottama-Putra* and *Durga-Putra*. The above passage is copied from the records lies in the Draksharama, Bhubaneswar and Kanchipuram inscription of Anangabhima III and one of the Kapilas inscription of Narasimha I of Ganga. In the similar representation of Anangabhima III and his son Narasimha-I, one may notice the fact that these kings inspite of their staunch devotion to the God *Vishnu* in the shape of *Purushottama-Jagannatha* of Puri, could not possibly dissociate themselves totally from the Saiva leanings of their ancestors, since however the hold of *Vaishnavism* became gradually stronger and stronger on the kings of Orissa. It is rather strange that the same epithets were applied to Kapilesvara who flourished two centuries later. He was the first of its members who was devoted to the God *Purushottama - Jagannatha*.

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