



Lord Purushottama in the Ganga Inscriptions of Orissa

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The history of the Gangas is a landmark in the history of Orissa. The dynasty reached the height of glory for its political achievements, temple building activities, economic prosperity and religious movements. The advent of the imperial Ganga marked a great revival of the Vaishnava cult in Orissa. Under the royal patronage of the Ganga rulers the fame of Purushottama Jagannatha reached the pinnacle of glory. The cult of Vaishnavism took an important form with the construction of a temple for Lord Purushottama at the sea-shore of Puri.

Anantavarman 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 grant¹ dated 1112 A.D. he changed his attitude and appeared to demonstrate religious universality by applying to himself titles such as *Parama-Mahesvara*, *Parama-Vaishnava* and *Parama-Brahmanya*. In the Narasimha and Markanda temple inscriptions of Chodaganga the name of Purushottama² is found to have been mentioned.

Many scholars have spoken of a conversion of Chodagangadeva from Saivism

to Vaishnavism and thinks that due to the influence of Ramanuja this conversion took place. It was during his reign Ramanuja³ 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.

Secondly the influence of his queens should not be ignored. His chief queen Jayamgonda Chodadevi was the daughter of Virochoda and grand daughter of the great Kullotunga Choda. Virochoda erected a Vishnu temple at Sarvavaram, and nine inscriptions⁴ of this temple record grants by Anantavarman Chodagangadeva's younger brother Paramadideva and his wives and refers to the god as Purushottama.

Lastly the construction of a temple for god Purushottama at Puri by Chodaganga proof his inclination towards Vaishnavism. Line 17 of the Nagari plates⁵ of Anangabhima III states that Chodaganga built a temple for the great god Purushottama at Puri on the sea-shore of the 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 Vaishnavite deity. Purushottama-Jagannath of Puri was originally worshipped by the aboriginal Savara people in an inaccessible forest on the Nilachala 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 Viswvasu. So the identification of this deity with the Brahmanical god Vishnu apparently earlier than the beginning of the 12th century when Chodaganga conquered Utkala country, and the construction of the great temple of Purushottama Jagannath at Puri by Chodagangadeva has reflected his great devotion to and popularization of the Vaishnava cult.

In the Chattesvara temple inscription⁶ of Vishnu, the victorious general of Anangabhima III, king Chodaganga has been praised as a king in whom the glory of the "Narasimha *avatara* of Vishnu manifest itself. As we know from other records that Chodaganga ancestors were all staunch devotee of the god Siva and Chodaganga's himself was one such in the earlier part of his life but later on a devotee of Vishnu alone for the above-said reason.

The next important ruler of Ganga dynasty who patronized Vaishnava cult was Anangabhima III. In many of his records he has described himself as a deputy of the Lord Purushottama. In the Nagari plate⁷, he assumed the title Anankabhima-*rautta*-deva, and by assuming this title he considered himself a mere deputy of the god Purushottama Jagannath of Puri whom he regarded as the real Lord of the kingdom. He is the first imperial Ganga monarch who is so far known to have assumed the subordinate title *Rautta* and claimed theoretically atleast to have been a feudatory of the god Purushottama Jagannath. In the

Draksharama temple inscription⁸ 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 Jagannath Triad by Anangabhima during his early years proves his ritual relationship with the three dominant deities of Orissa, Purushottama at Puri, Lingaraj Siva at Bhubaneswar and Durga or Viraja at Jajpur

It was only under the king Anangabhima III that the god Purushottama at Puri became the official state deity of the Ganga empire. In the Bhubaneswar Inscription⁹ 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 a valuable donation to the God Vishnu-Allalanatha at Kanchipuram. The inscription¹⁰ record the gift of the village named Udaiyakamam in Antarudra Vishaya by Somaladevi, for offering and worship to the god Allalanatha while she was at Abhinava Varanasi Kataka. The inscription is dated in the 19th regnal year of Anangabhima. He is described 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 had consecrated a temple for Purushottama in his newly founded capital Abhinava Varanasi-Kataka¹¹ 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 as his deputy. According to the temple chronicle¹², king Anangabhima had even 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 as a son and deputy of Purushottama, the Lord of the Universe. In one of his inscriptions¹³ at Kapilas he stated that the king succeeded in subduing by the power of his arms 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, to whom Anangabhima dedicated his empire. Further it describes him as *Parama Mahesvara*, *Durga Putra* and *Purushottama 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 inscriptions¹⁴ in the Siva temple at Draksharama.

The Kapilas Inscription compares Narasimha I with the great Boar (Vishnu in his Varaha incarnation) that raised the *Vedas* and world from the ocean. He was the first king of Orissa who used the title *Gajapati* or the Lord of the Elephants. This title became the most popular royal title in Orissa under the later Gangas and especially under the Suryavamsis.

The next important ruler of imperial Ganga dynasty who considered himself as the

mere deputy of Lord Purushottama, was Bhanudeva II. In his Puri Inscription¹⁵ 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 the matter of ruling the Ganga dominion. The epithet' *Visvambhara-bhara-vahana-mahaniya*' which is applied to god Purushottama in our record point to his identification with Vishnu who is believed to carry the burden of the earth in the form of the tortoise. He describes Lord Purushottama as the Lord of the Ganga dominion. Further for the first time in one of his inscriptions at Srikurmam¹⁶ the god of Puri is called Jagannatha.

Reference:

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3. *OHRJ*-Vol-VI-P.299
4. *The Cult of Jagannatha and the Religious Tradition of Orissa* -P.24
5. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol-XXVIII-P.235ff
6. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol-XXIX-P.15
7. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol-XXVIII-P.235ff
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9. *JASB*, Vol- XVII-P.21
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13. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol-IV, No.1329.
14. *S.I.I.*, Vol- XVII-P.195.
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