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THE TRIBAL DYNASTIES AND THE BRAHMANAS- ALLIANCE OF LEGITIMACY



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ABSTRACT

The importance of Brahmanas in relation to kingship in ancient and early medieval Odisha was a consequence of a variety of roles that this élite played in these periods. As panegyrists and genealogists, Brahmanas were experts in the formulation of claims to royal legitimacy. As ritual advisors to kings, they were closely associated with the court circle. As occupants of various official posts, they played a part in the administration of the kingdom. And as the prime recipients of royal endowments of tax-free land, they gradually emerged as an important landed class and as influential mediators in the realms of religiosity and social values at the village level.

KEY WORDS: Brahmana, Durgga (rgga) ryya, Raviraya, Ravidattāryya, Bhāmāsva pravara, and Angirasa anupravara.

INTRODUCTION :

The importance of Brahmanas in relation to kingship in ancient and early medieval Odisha was a consequence of a variety of roles that this élite played in these periods. As panegyrists and genealogists, Brahmanas were experts in the formulation of claims to royal legitimacy. As ritual advisors to kings, they were closely associated with the court circle. As occupants of various official posts, they played a part in the administration of the kingdom. And as the prime recipients of royal endowments of tax-free land, they gradually emerged as an important landed class and as influential mediators in the realms of religiosity and social values at the village level. In this section the emphasis will be on the process in which the relation between the tribal chiefs and brahmins was established. To understand the process the following paragraphs will examine their epigraphic records.

The Nala grants: Of the four Nala inscriptions, two record grants of land to Brahmanas and two (these are stone inscriptions) the erection of temples. The donees of the Kesaribeda plates of Arthapati were three Brahmanas Durgga (rgga) ryya, Raviraya and Ravidattāryya of the Kautsa gotra. According to D.C. Sircar, the phrase "Arthapati-bhattārakasya anugrah artham" in line 5 of the inscription possibly suggests that the king made the gift after receiving some sort of help from the Brahmanas.¹ The Rithapur plates of Bhavadattavarman and Arthapati speak of a royal endowment of land to Matradharyya and his eight sons- Daivaryya, Devadattaryya, Kumaradattaryya, adattaryya, Vasudattaryya, Go(Gau)ridanaryya,

Dhruvadattaryya, and Durggatha(datta)ryya. The Brāhmanas belonged to the Parasara gotra. The original gift was made by Bhavattavarman while staying at Prayaga (modern Allahabad), for blessing the matrimonial relationship of the king and his queen. The context of the gift suggests that the Brāhmanas may have been connected with the royal marriage. The names of all the Brahmanas mentioned in the Nala inscriptions end in the suffix Aryya.

The grants of the Bhanjas of Khijali-mandala: Of the eleven inscriptions recording endowments made by the early Bhanja kings of Khinjali-mandala, ten record gifts to Brahmanas, and one Loā Saiva establishment. All the grants to Brahmanas were made in favour of individual Brāhmanas. The donees are usually identified by their name, gotra, pravara, Vedic school, ancestry, native place, and place of residence. While the inscriptions of the early Bhañjas of Khinjali-mandala specify the pravara of the donees, it may be noted that these *pravaas* do not always match the gotras.

Reference to the *anupravara* occurs in only one inscription-the Baudh plates of Ranabhanja of the year 26. Here, the donee, Bhattaputra Sri Damodara, is described as having the Maudgalya gotra, Bhāmāsva pravara, and Angirasa anupravara. So far as places of nativity of those Brahmins are concerned we have data mentioned in the following tables

Table. No.

Copper Plate	Doner- King	Brahmin	Place of Resident	Nativity
Kumurukela plates	Satrubhanja	Brahmacarin Bhtta Manoratha	Gandhatapati	Vangakuti
Sonpur plates	Satrubhanj	Bhattaputra Krsna	Alpa grama	
Singhari plates	Ranabhañja	Bhattaputra Voheh	Gandhatapāti	Bhadra-palai of Magaha(Magadha) desa
Odisha Museum Plate	Ranabhanja	Bhattaputa Pandita Varada	Vaigriaa	Talabhrtaki grāma in Barendaa (Barendra, i.e. Varendra) apdala
Binka Plate	Ranabhañja	Bhattaputra Sri Sridhara	Kamari	Bhata-Nirola
Dasapalla Plate	Ranabhanja	Bhattaputra Sri Padmakara	Buralla	Pecipataka in Varendra Mandala
Baudh Plate (R.Y 26)	Ranabhanja	Bhattaputra Si Damodara		Khaduvāpalli bhatta-grama in Madhyadesa
Undated Baudh Plate	Ranabhanja	Bhattaputra Devadhara	Mahisipadraka	Madhyade
Baudh plates (R.Y 54)	Ranabhanja	Name is not mentioned	Amvasarasara	Apilomuleri
Boudh Plate (R.Y 58)	Ranabhanja	Subhadama	Bhatta Tadala in Odra Visaya	Takari in Sāvatti desa

The data from the copper-plate grants of the early Bhanjas of Khinjali-mandala is, thus, indicative of Brahmanical migrations into Odisha from south-east Bihar (Magadha), Bengal, and other parts of northern India. The evidence suggests that these Brahmanas came into Odisha at some earlier point of time, and were settled in villages (in some cases Brahmapa villages) in Odisha prior to their being endowed with land by the Bhanja kings.

The names of the Brahmanas donees of this group of inscriptions do not bear the common Brahmana name suffixes. The epithets that occur are bhattaputra, bhatta, brahmacarin, and pandita.

The grants of the later Bhaijas of Khinjali-mandala: Thirteen of the fourteen copperplate inscriptions of the later Bhaijas of Khinjali-madala record royal endowments to Brāhmanas. The *anupravara* occurs in eight inscriptions.

The donee of the Gumsur plates of Nettarebhañja was Bhandesvara who had the Vatsa gotra, a three-risi pravara (tri-pravara), and the Vatsa and Bhargava anupravara. The Ganjam plates of Nettarebhañja identifies three of its donees as belonging to the Kausika gotra, the Aghamarsana pravara and Visvāmitravat anupravara, and five others as belonging to the Vatsa gotra and the Bhārgavata, Cyavanavat, Atmana, Aurva, and Jamadagnya anupravaras. Bhatta Rudada (Rudrata) of the Ganjam plates of Nettarebhanja belonged to the Vatsa gotra, the Angirasa pravara and the Bhārgava anupravara. The donee of the Komanda plates of Nettarebhanja was Bhatta Stambhadeva of the Gautama gotra, Autathya (Aucathya) pravara, and Angirasa anupravara. The Penasara plates of Nettarebhanja record a grant made to Bhatta Kesavanuda of the Bhāradvāja gotra, Angirasa pravara, and Barhaspatya anupravara. Bhatta Lumvadeva of the plates of Silabhanja Tribhuvanakalasa is described as having the Kaundinya gotra, the Vāsistha, Maitravaruna, Kaundinyat and Maitra-Vasisthat pravara and the Maitravarunat anupravara. The donee of the Ganjam plates of Vidyadharabhanja was Bhatta Purandara of the Rohita gotra, the Rohita, Astaka, and Vaisvāmītra pravaras, and the Visvāmitravaat, Astakavat and Rohitavat anupravaras. The donee of the plates of Nettarebhanja Tribhuvanakalasa was Bhatta Dauli of the Bhāradvāja gotra, Angirasa pravara, and Barhaspatya anupravara.

Four of the inscriptions specify the native place of the Brahmanas, and three of these give the place of residence. Bhatta Purandara, the donee of the Ganjam plates of Vidyadharabhanja, is said to have come from Mammana in Tadisama visaya attached to Varendhi (Varendri). Bhatta Ajapāila of the Daspalla plates of Satrubhanja Tribhuvanakalasa is described as hailing from a bhatagrāma named Khaduvavalli in Madhyadesa, and as a resident of a place called Santosamadhava. The donee of the Ganjam plates of Satrubhanja was Bhattaputra Bappi, who came from Sriheda in Dakṣiṇāpatha (South India) and was a resident of Odijonga. Bhatta Dauli, the donee of the plates of Nettarebhanja Tribhuvanakalasa, came from Vatalavidima and was a resident of Kolakhali. Thus, there is evidence in this set of inscriptions of at least three of the Brāhmana donees being immigrants into Odisha.

The grants of the Bhanjas of Khijjīngakotta:

Six of the nine Adi-Bhanja copperplate inscriptions record royal endowments to Brāhmanas. The Brahmana donees are in all cases individual Brahmanas. The Brahmanas of the Adi-Bhanja grants are usually identified by their name, gotra, pravara, and the name of their father and/or grandfather.

One of the Adipur plates of Narendrabhanja refers the donee to the Vatsa gotra and the pancareśya Jāmadagnya pravara. The donee of the Kesari plate of Satrubhañja is described as having the Visistha gotra and the Vasistha pravara. The beneficiary of the Khandadeuli plate of Narendrabhanja had the Sandilya gotra and the Sāndilya. The native place of the Brahmana beneficiaries is specified in three of the grants, one of these also giving the place of residence of the donee: Bhattaputra Sitaladeva Sarmman, the donee of the Adipur grant of Narendrabhanja, is said to have come from Tilapudraka. Bhatta Devadevadama, the beneficiary of the other Adipur grant of Narendrabhaija, is described as having come from bhattagrama Alavida in Odra visaya, and as a resident of Ramaparkati grāma in Khijjīngamandala. Bhattaputa Dandapani, the donee of the Kesari plate of Satrubharnja, is described as hailing from Madhya-desā. The suffix Sarmman occurs in a few names, but many of the Brahmana names mentioned in this set of inscriptions have no suffixes. The epithets bhatta or bhattaputra occur in several cases.

The beneficiary of the grant made by Nettarebhanja of the Jurada plates was a Brahmana named Sri Vappanna, son of bhatta Santosa and grandson of bhatta Guhesvara. This donee is described as a pātra, i.e. a minister, apparently of the king. He is described as having the Vassvāmītra gotra and a panca-arśeya pravara. It may be noted that the Visvāmītras have, in fact, a three-risi pravara: Vaisvāmītra, Daivarata, Audala Vappanna is further said to be a student of the Kanva satkhā of the Yajurveda and to have come from Gangavadi (in Karnataka).

The grants of the Bhanjas of Baudh:

Both of the inscriptions of the Bhanjas of Baudh record royal endowments to Brahmanas. Three generations of Brahmana's are eulogized in verse in the Baudh grant of Salonabhanja. This inscription refers to the donee, one upasanin Mahadeva, as a logician (tarkika), as one who knows the Vedanta, as one learned in the Veda, and as a poet. He is said to be the son of Krsna, who is/was learned in the Yajurveda, who knows/knew the nature of the atman, and whose mind is/was fixed on brahman; and the grandson of Goula, a brahmana " from Madhya-desa," learned in the Sruti, Smrti, and Purana, and belonging to the Kasyapa gotra. Mahadeva, thus, belonged to a learned Brahmana family that had migrated to Odisha from Madhya-desa during the time of the donee's grandfather. The donee of the Baudh grant of Kanakabhañja was Harivarhsa, the son of Dhanapati and grandson of Arthapati. The donee is described as virtuous, munificent, learned, and the best among Brāhmanas. Harivarhsa is said to belong to the Parasara gotra and to have a three-risi pravara. He is also described as hailing from Hastigrāma in Madhyadesa.

Both the inscriptions of the Bhañja kings of Kolada record grants of land to the same Brāhmana. The donee of the Antirigam plates of Yasabhanjadeva was Jagadharasarmān, described as well-versed in the duties enjoined in the Sruti and Smrti, as well as in astrology. Jagadharasarmān is said to hail from Vattabhūmi grāma in the midst of Tihara visaya. He is said to be a resident of Pattavada pataka attached to Kontaravadiga visaya. The donee belonged to the Bharadvaja gotra, and had the Barhaspatya, and Bhāradvaja pravara. The references to the Brahmana donee as well as his ancestors as astrologers is noteworthy; they may have been astrologers attached to the court.

The Tunga grants:

Tunga inscriptions record grants of land to Brahmanas. In the latter category are the Talcher plate of Gayadatunga which records a grant to three Brahmanas and the Asiatic Society plate of Gayadatunga, which records an endowment made to twenty-two Brahmanas. The Brahmana beneficiaries of the Tunga endowments are identified by their name, gaura, pravara, and the name of their father and/or grandfather. The native place and/or place of residence is specified in all but one inscription.

The Tunga grants provide information on the native place and place of residence of many of the donees. Bhatta Bhamadeva, the donee of the Talcher plate of Gaydatunga, is described as belonging to a traivedya family (ie. a family learned in the three Vedas) of a place called Sricchatra. The other Talcher plate of Gaydatuiga specifies the native place as well as place of residence of two of its three donees. One of them was Bhattaputra Devasarmān from Mūthāutha bhattagrāma in Varendre-mandala,"a resident of Savira bhattagrama in Odra visaya. The other was Bhattaputra Vasudeva from Savathi (Sravasti), a resident of Yamagarta-mandala. The third donee may also have been a resident of Yamagarta-mandala, as he may have been a son of the second donee. Both donees seem to have been Brahmanas of north Bengal settled in Odisha. The beneficiaries of the Asiatic Society plate of Gayadatunga number twenty-two. Of these, the one who received foremost mention was Bhattaputra Dado, who is said to have come from Ahichhatra (Ahicchatra, in modern Uttar Pradesh) and was a resident of Kuruva bhattgrāma in Odra visaya."". The Kharagaprasada plate of Vinitatuiga records a grant to Bhatta Isana, described as hailing from Podi and as a resident of Kojamala. Podi has been identified with Pundi in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh².

The suffixes of Brahmins names that occur in the Tuñga grants are deva, Sarman, Ojha and Ghosa. The father of two of the donees of the Asiatic Society plate of Gaydatunga has 'diksita' attached to his name.

Epigraphic evidence indicates that royal land grants to Brahmanas were a general feature throughout the early medieval age of India (fourth to mid-twelfth century). The inscriptions provide valuable information on Brahmanas in general and Brahmana beneficiaries of royal endowments in particular. The bases of Brahmanas identification in these inscriptions include gotra, pravara, anupravara, aalcha, carana, native place, and place of residence.

The Nalas, Tungas and Bhanja through their copper plate grants issued land and villages to Brahmana as Brahmodaya. Brahmdēya grants in early medieval Odisha consisted of one or more villages or one or several plots of land in one or more than one village. Throughout the period, the land gifted to Brahmanas

was described as having been granted in perpetuity. A few inscriptions explicitly lay down the hereditary nature of the endowment. The permanent and inalienable nature of the endowment was also indicated by the statement made in some of the inscriptions of all three periods that the grant had been made according to the law governing permanent endowments (aksaya-nivi-dharma), or in the statement that appears from about the eighth century onwards that the land was not to become the subject of another document (a-lekhani-pravesataya).

In most (not all) cases, the endowments were declared exempt from paying taxes to the state, the residents often being exhorted to obey the donees and to render to them the appropriate dues. The Jurada grant of Nettabhaja state that the endowment was granted along with future taxes, i.e. was exempt from all future state taxes. Thus, in most cases, the royal grants to Brahmanas involved a permanent renunciation of the state's revenue claim over the brahmadeya land. The gifted land was to be free from all oppressions or obstructions. The exemption from the obligation of providing conveyance to royal officers on tour in the Kesaribeda plates of the Nala king Arthapati can also be mentioned in this context. Epigraphic evidence indicates in some cases an increase in the control of the Brahmanas beneficiaries over sources of revenue other than those based on land. Tungas grants give the donees control over outposts situated in the village, landing or bathing places, and ferries (sakheta-ghatta-nadi-tara-sthan-adi-gulmaka. Some of the inscriptions of the Bhanjas, and Tungas give the donees rights over the inhabitants of the village such as weavers, cowherds, brewers, and fishermen (sa-tantravaya-gokuta Saundika- adi-praktika). This reflected a significant enlargement of the scope of the rights granted to the Brahmana beneficiaries.

ROYAL ENDOWMENTS TO RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS

A few grants, under the Nalas, Tunga and Bhanja were made to Buddhist and Jaina establishments, temples, and mathas (monasteries).

The Nala grants:

Two of the Nala inscriptions record the erection of temples. The Podagarh stone inscription of the Nala king Skandavarman records the setting up of a sanctuary (pada-mūla) of Visnu. Abundant *dakshina* was distributed on the occasion, and the gift of a 'pura was made for Purusa (the Supreme Being, here evidently Visnu). The proceeds were for the establishment of a sattra (charitable feeding house) for the feeding of Brahmanas (vipras), ascetics (yatis), and the poor and destitute. The location of the land in question is not specified in the inscription, but it probably lay near Podagarh, where the temple was evidently constructed. The inscription stipulates that the gifted land was not to be entered by soldiers (apravesyarm bhajaih), and declares it to be permanently exempt from taxes (sada kara-visarjitam).

The Rajim stone inscription of Vilasatunga records the construction of a temple dedicated to Hari (Visnu). The introductory stanzas of the inscription refer to Visnu's churning of the milk-ocean and to his dwarf incarnation. The king apparently had the temple built for the increase of the religious merit of his deceased son. The inscription is incised on a stone slab built into a wall of the mandapa (hall) of a temple dedicated to Visnu as Rajivalocana (the lotus-eyed one). The inscription seems to be in situ, and the temple it refers to was apparently none other than the Rajivalocana temple, one of the three important temples at Rajim³.

Bhanjas of Khijjali-mandala & Khijjingakotta:

The Patna Museum plates of the time of the early Bhanja king Ranabhanja record an endowment made by Sri Vijya (Vijayā ?), daughter of Ranaka Sri Niyarnama (who has been identified with the Kadamba ruler Niyārppava); Vijya may have been a wife of the Bhañja king Ranabhanja. The beneficiary of the grant was the deity Vijaesara (Vijayesvara), evidently Siva in the Linga form, named after Vijyā. The endowment consisted of Va(Ba)hiravada grama attached to Dakhisina-pali, on the banks of the Mahanadi river. The grant gave the donee the right to any hidden treasures and deposits found on the land (nidhy-upanidhi-sahita)

The Odisha Museum plates of the later Bhanja king Nettabhanja record the grant of part of Gundapataka village to a merchant named Ivadataka of the Kasyapa gotra, belonging to Tribhuvanapura in Varendri (in Bengal). Line 38 of the inscription may refer to an additional grant of land in the same village to the deity Purusottama⁴.

The beneficiaries of at least two of the Baripada stone inscriptions were deities. According to D.C. Sircar's reading of the inscription of Dhruvaraja, the grant in question was made for the bali (offerings to all creatures) and naivedya (food offerings) for a deity whose name is not mentioned in the text, probably because the inscription was exhibited in the shrine of the deity concerned⁵. As the stone bearing the inscription seems to have belonged to the temple of Bhimi or Bhimesvari in the forest adjoining Pedagadhi village, Sircar suggests that the deity to whom Dhruvaraja's grant refers may have been this very goddess⁶. The endowment consisted of Vanalgrama, Arana(pa)pada, and Bharādiḥu constituted into an agrahara.

The stone bearing the inscription of Dhruvaraja also bears two other inscriptions. According to Sircar's reading, one of these inscriptions appears to record a grant of land by Kumāravarmanaraja.⁷ According to Rajaguru's reading, however, this inscription records a grant made by Kumara Dharmaraja alias Durgsrya in favour of the deity Pinakipati" for the fulfillment of his (the donor's) desires⁸.

The third Baripada inscription seems to record a grant made by a Bhañja king (whose name is indistinct)" in favour of the goddess Durga. Rajaguru reads the name of the deity as Lilesabhadra Durga⁹. According to Rajaguru's reading, the gift land lay on the border of Madarda Visaya⁹.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions it appears that the process leading to the emergence of ruling elites at the level of 'localities' accelerated in the post Gupta era in Odishan context. Donations to deities and the association of the donors in some capacity or the other with the state, attract attention, etc in all likelihood, came into its own during the late fifth or sixth century¹⁰. The emergence of the Nalas, Bhanjas and Tunga in the hinterland region of Odisha, will have to be viewed in terms of the continuation of the same trend. However, these localities, far as they are from the coast, help us to appreciate the phased evolution and development of the variegated areas in the region. The patronage extended to the local, autochthonous deity, and to the Brahmanas, as well as other religious establishment are example of patronization.

Patronage centred around locality deities and their shrines or establishments may be understood in the context of the need to create larger community identities by transcending kinship considerations. Autochthonous chiefs without the support of a kshatriya status for legitimacy extended patronage to locality deities. The politics of patronage would legitimize power and help the emergence of a stratum of ruling elites. Consequently, it would accentuate differentiation within communities and lead to the formation of complex relationships of domination and subordination. Land grants to brahmanas and the growth of temples, the two ostensible markers of patronage since the Gupta period, can be appreciated in the context of the formation of sub-regional agrarian bases and the need to legitimize the emerging political structure and society.¹¹ Royalty patronized brahmanas, subscribed to the brahmanical ideology and dispersed their resources as donations to brahmanical institutions, due to their own compulsions. Such patronage ensured the extension and consolidation of authority.¹². Ruling lineages used the mystique of vedic rituals, shastric ideas and puranic symbolism to strengthen their authority. The relationship between the king and the brahmana was crucial to the processes of state formation and socio-economic transformation.

Accompanying this process of sub-regional state formation and the power elite configuration, involving patronage for one and validation for the other, was a process of social change. The royal records convey evidence of donations to temples for repairs, offerings, services and maintenance, but quite strikingly, not one of the early donative charters alludes to their construction by royalty. Patronage of religious establishments, thus, provided a major channel for status enhancement to those who wanted to move up within the hierarchical, apparently static, caste society. The interacting elements in the act of patronage changed through time. However, the nexus that was created between power, religious institutions and the people continued throughout. The transfer of land as gift (dana) introduced complex

agrarian relations and, flowing from it, greater differentiation within society. However, the patronage extended to brahmanas and temples may be understood in the context of the contemporary society which was beginning to experience simultaneous processes of change-agrarian expansion, state formation, evolution of caste society and cultic integration. Both contributed towards the growth and subsequent consolidation of a hierarchically structured, complex socio-political order.

Dynasties of humble origin such as those mentioned above, and most of them across regions in early medieval India had similar origins, had to repeatedly announce their new found status to win acceptability and respect within local society and outside. With the establishment of state society local societies were marked by a disjunction between a small ruling elite, quickly sanskritising itself, and a numerous subject population whom they tried to successfully control. A theory of authority was necessary. It was constructed drawing partly from transregional Brahmanical tradition enshrined in Vedic-shastric-epic-puranic literature, and partly based on local indigenous tradition. By the logic of Bhakti local folk deities came to be transformed into major temple Gods through the largesse of kings and the connivance of brahmanas. Vishnu and Shiva representing pervasiveness suited the requirements of expanding society and polity. Particularly Vishnu because of his association with protection, prosperity and fecundity was a favourite with several early dynasties¹³

In Odisha while the autochthonous deities were raised to a higher level of ritual elaboration and universalised in course of the transformation of tribal chieftains to 'Hindu' kingship, their visual manifestations, priests and rituals were allowed to coexist with superimposed Brahmanical practices¹⁴

From the land grant given to Brahmana it appears that in early medieval Odisha, Brahmanas were invited from different parts of India but mostly from Bengal and it was the brahmins, who legitimated the aspects of local beliefs and religious practices¹⁵

For instance, the Khijjingakota mandala largely comprised the modern districts of Mayurbhanja and Keonjhar in northern Odisha and adjoining territories in Jharkhand, and acquired political visibility under the Adi Bhanjas during the tenth-eleventh centuries. The Asanapat Nataraja image inscription of Satrubhanja, placed in the sixth/seventh century is the earliest piece of proper evidence from the area.¹⁶ It describes him as Vindhyatavinatha or the lord of VindhyatavU clearly indicating the forested nature of the historical geography, much of which still continues in the region. The record moves onto eulogise the achievements and generosity of the royal donor. Satrubhanja is shown to have patronised brahmanas, Buddhists, Jainas and other communities, read the Bharata, Purana, Itihasay Sruti, etc., and built a temple to God. The king's effort to create a level playing ground for the various communities and appear to be responsive to their aspirations, despite the Brahmanical tilt, may suggest the march towards a complex society in an essentially jungle kingdom.¹⁷ Under the Adi Bhanjas of Khijjingakotta continued manifestation of some of the earlier tendencies can be seen in their epigraphical records. They made grants to migrant brahmanas, mostly individual donees. Gramas were donated in all cases, without delimitation of their boundaries. The exemptions transferred to the beneficiaries were noticeably few except in one instance. The Adipur plate of Narendrabhanja, together with the revenue terms (uparikara and uddesa), also mentions the shifting of some occupational groups.¹⁸

Evidence such as this, suggesting low density of settlements, fewer taxes, and transfer of weavers, cowherds and brewers along with the land, nicely corresponds with the evolution of a state in the forest and its associated compulsions. Most of the inscriptions provide a miraculous account of Ganadanda Virabhadra, the mythical founder of the dynasty, bursting out of a peahen's egg in the hermitage of Kotyasrama and being raised by the sage Vasistha. Origin myths were tropes for claims to political power and tell us something about the elements that went into the making of kingship in early medieval times, including the emergence of a comparable political culture, spread of Vedic- epic-Puranic ideas and Brahmanic ideology. The overlap between the autochthonous and the Brahmanic elements can be gleaned in the combination of the miraculous component and the sage Vasistha and his hermitage; each defining the relevance of the other. The Adi Bhanjas were not alone in this matter; the Khinjali Bhanjas, the Nalas and Tunga with

territories within the present state of Odisha, were a part of this tradition. What was common to them was their humble, indigenous origin.

The prasasti sections also incorporate attributes of kingship or the way kingship was conceived by the people in power. Interestingly, the rulers also humbly describe themselves as inhabitants of Khijjingakota. The centrality of the focus being on human qualities, and at best comparisons engaged with characters possessing human qualities and frailties, and not the major Gods or their avatars might have a bearing on the nature and early stage of kingship and state in the sub-region.¹⁹ Like all early medieval donative charters, these too begin with an invocation. The centrality of Siva in the family's belief system is also reflected in the verse which reads that the king's sins were removed through his worship of the feet of Hara, or its variations, including his representation as a bee at the lotus feet of Siva (the two Adipur plates of Narendrabhanja). In one of the Adipur plates, Ganesha (Ora namo avighnesvaraya) precedes Siva in the standard invocation. The Saivite affiliations come through in the seals attached to the copper-plates with their motifs of the bull, trident and crescent moon.²⁰

Notwithstanding the total absence of epigraphic evidence for royal patronage of temples at Khijjingakota, the site stands testimony to the existence of several temples in different stages of preservation, and numerous sculptural relics. The material is partly preserved at the site museum and some of it is also available at the Baripada museum. Some of the temples, such as the Siva temple, Dhavalesvara, Jatesvara, Kichakesvari and Kutaitundi, among others, at present-day Khiching have been dated to the tenth-eleventh centuries, i.e. the time of the Adi Bhanjas²¹. The sculptural remains present a combination of Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina images. The Buddha, Parsvanatha, Rishabhanatha and Tara figure along with Siva, Vishnu, Durga, Mahishamardini, Ganesha, Kartikeya, Uma-Mahesvara, Ardhanarisvara, Narasimha and Vāraha.²² The predominantly Saiva and Sakta presence is unmistakably visible, but the evidence for Vishnu, his popular avatars, and Buddhism and Jainism cannot be brushed aside. It may be mentioned that the lotus and conch are part of the motifs on the seals attached to the copper- plates. Similarly, the Dussehra festival has been referred to in the Ukhunda plates of Prithvibhanja²². The political and cultural capital of the kingdom, like many other such contemporary centres, exudes an ethos of plurality and social inclusiveness, or brings alive a situation of antagonistic tolerance between the believers and followers of multiple religions and sects at a shared site.

Earlier we have already discussed how the indigenous and/or humble origins of many of the ruling dynasties of early Kalinga are quite well illustrated in the legendary accounts of their origins, and their acceptance of autochthonous deities as tutelary deities of their domains. This also makes the more general point that the structure of legitimation was rooted in specific societies.

In the above discussion, one notices, the public face of dynastic patronage was broad-based. The state seems to have been open, flexible and non-intrusive in matters of religion and sectarian beliefs. If political validation accrued from supporting a religion or sect, extending the same to other groups also earned admirers. The situation at Pushkari under the Nalas, Khijjingakota under the Adi Bhanjas, Khinjalimandala under the Khinjali Bhanjas, Yamagarta mandala under the Tungas bears testimony to it. Legitimation strategies sought to appropriate as well as shape popular culture in regions such as those under discussion, which were in the making in the post-Gupta centuries. Rulers were constantly aligning with and tapping ideas and symbols in the process of the trans-localisation of indigenous inheritances and localisation of trans-regional forces, in the course of continuous interactions and change. There was an interesting interface between the local autochthonous and pan-Indian pervasive deities such as Siva and Vishnu. Folk gods like Stambeswari, Kichkesvarai, Maninageswari, and later Jagannatha were transformed into incarnations of Vishnu, and Sakti in the course of their movement towards being tutelary deities and universalised. Brahmanas, temples and monasteries were the channels of communication, and the state's association with them was meant to extend authority. Constitution of authority did not mean homogenisation of beliefs and practices, but organisation and accommodation of variety and difference. The apparently immutable and timeless Dharmasastras too endorsed it. Sanskrit entered each of these sub-

regions with the emergence of the early local states under the Nala, Bhanja and Tunga and many more in different parts of Odisha.²³

In social sphere, the hinterland Odisha under the above mentioned tribal dynasties, as in the other regions of peninsular India, experienced the evolution of a two-tiered varna structure comprising brahmanas and non-brahmanas. The Brahmanical mode of social integration operated through the varna ideology, and autochthonous groups were incorporated into the caste framework without interfering with their internal structures, customs and beliefs, by assigning them a status in keeping with their socio-cultural attainments. The region attracted large numbers of immigrant brahmanas during the early medieval centuries as recipient of land grants. They disseminated knowledge of agriculture, helped agrarian expansion, invented genealogical links for the ruling lineages and spread Vedic-Sastric-epic-Puranic ideas across sub-regions.²⁴

Many rulers of these dynasties in the hinterland region during the eighth-ninth centuries made public pronouncements of their commitment to the varna order of society, Sastras and the idea of Krita Yuga. Inscriptions from their territories reveal the presence of the tantuvaya (weaver), saundtka (distiller/perfume-maker), gokuta (cowherd), vaidya (physician), sutradhara (mason), tatthakara (brazier) and kavi (poet). The average rural inhabitant is mentioned as praktika or at times as janapadan, while men of substance were known as pramukha-nivasin. Khijjingakotta mandala simultaneously provides evidence for the existence of purasresthi (trader/banker), lekhaka (scribe) and khanitaka (engraver), in addition to the now familiar tantuvaya, gokuta, saundika and praktika. Admittedly, inscriptions do not represent society in its entirety, largely because they are context-specific. However, it is obvious from the information discussed above are some aspects of society found in epigraphic records.²⁵

Generally, the early medieval Odisha experienced a process of caste-tribe continuum and not a displacement of the tribes from their homeland, and that formed the basis for the formation of the early states²⁶. The rise of Saktism or the mother goddess cults, Tantricism and the Buddhist Tara amply bear on the then contemporary reality. Tradition and practice indicate the tribal origins of Lingaraj at Bhubaneswara and Jagannatha at Puri. These temples have two categories of priests, the brahmana and the tribal. The Badus at Lingaraj and Daitas at Jagannath are of autochthonous origin, and yet come into close contact with the deities whose personal attendants they are. This manifests the capacity of the socio-political order to incorporate and integrate. In fact, the peasantry, differentiation of castes with reference to the dominant schema of society, agrarian expansion and the formation of states were simultaneous processes in operation. State formation at various levels helped in the shaping of the caste structure.

To conclude, if the confluence of cultures, and tolerance of and respect for difference are at the core of composite culture, then early Odisha seems to have had shared in it, with its changing forms, across several indicators. The creation of a level playing field for all attitudes of the state in matters of religion, despite its visible tilt towards the Brahmanical ideology, and the gradual transformation of folk deities to Puranic gods can be explained with reference to the process of state formation in local societies within the frame-work of the said ideology. State formation and socio-economic change were simultaneous, inter-related developments. The emergence of a society based on incorporative ideologies derived from various elements had much to do with the acculturation of the autochthonous people, extension of the frontiers of peasant society, and the broadening and consolidation of state authority.

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