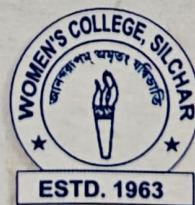


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The Parbatīyā Copper Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva : A Literary Study

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Abstract

To understand the many facets of Assamese ancient history, one must read traditional Sanskrit writings such as the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, and Raghuvamśa as well as epigraphs, coinage, and archeological documents. The Raghuvamśa, Mahābhārata, and the Śamudragupta's Allahabad stone pillar inscription all mention Assam's ancient and medieval name, Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. The Samudragupta stone pillar inscription from Allahabad identified Kāmarūpa as a boundary province. Assam can legitimately take pride in its contributions to the epigraph's wealth. Ancient Assamese epigraphs were primarily found on rock inscriptions, copper plates that were issued by monarchs, engravings on clay or metal seals, and occasionally only plates that were written on the bodies of stone idols. A peasant in the village of Parbatīyā, close to Tezpur, Assam, found the Parbatīyā copper plate of Vanamālavarmadeva, which contained three copper plates and a seal. With a small deviation, this inscription is nearly identical to that found on Tezpur copper plates of Vanamālavarmadeva. The ancestry of Vanamālavarmadeva, the brave monarch of the Śālastambha dynasty, is presented in the inscription along with other items. Parbatīyā copper plate of Vanamālavarmadeva was issued by illustrious Vanamālavarmadeva from the prosperous city of Haḍapeśvara which was surrounded by people of all the Varṇas.

Keywords: *Assamese, Kamrupa, Pragjyotisa, Epigraphs, Parbatīyā, Copper plate, Vanamālavarmadeva*

One is required to study the classical Sanskrit texts like the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Raghuvamśa and epigraphs, coins, archeological records etc. to know the various aspects associated with the ancient history of Assam. Assam was known as Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa in the ancient and medieval period, which is referred to in the Raghuvamśa,¹ Mahābhārata² and Śamudragupta's Allahabad stone pillar inscription³. Kāmarūpa was mentioned as a frontier territory in the Allahabad stone pillar inscription of Samudragupta. Of course, both Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa occur side by side in Raghuvamśa wherein king Raghu

was described to come to Prāgjyotiṣa and then to Kāmarūpa after crossing the river Lauhitya. K.L. Barua states that the region was known as Prāgjyotiṣa in earlier times and Kāmarūpa in later times⁴. The Kālikāpurāṇa states that lord Brahma while staying here created stars in consequence of which the city came to be known as Prāgjyotiṣapura⁵. According to Gait, Prāg means former or eastern and Jyotiṣa means the astrology, so Prāgjyotiṣa is nothing but eastern astrology⁶. The study of Jyotica was carried through two aspects in Kāmarūpa (a) in calculation of Saṁkrānti, movement of Nakṣatras and Grahaṇa (b) Jyotiṣa as a science which indicates fortunes of man. There is the clear evidence of the name of Prāgjyotiṣa in the Bargaon grant of Ratnapāla⁷ too.

Assam can rightly boast of her contributions towards the rich treasure of epigraph. Epigraphs of ancient Assam were found mostly in the form of rock engravings, copper-plates issued by kings, engravings on clay or metal seals and sometimes only plates inscribed on the body of the stone idols. The tradition of writing inscriptions in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa took place mostly under royal patronages in the ancient and medieval period. The main royal dynasties which are said to rule over this region since 4th Century AD are - The Bhauma-Varmana dynasty, the Śālastambha dynasty, Pāla dynasty etc. A good number of Sanskrit inscriptions come to be composed in Kāmarūpa under royal patronages namely, Nidhanpur copper plates of Bhāskaravarmana, Guwakuchi copper plates grant of Indrapāla, Khanāmukh copper plates of Dharmapāla, Tezpur rock inscription of Harjaravarman, Parbatīyā copper plates of Vanamālavarmanadeva, Bargaon copper plate grant of Ratnapāla etc. Balavarmana, Sālabha, Śrīharjara, Vanamālavarmana were the prominent kings of the Śālastambha dynasty which comes to be known as Mleccha dynasty too.

The Parbatīyā copper plate of Vanamālavarmanadeva containing three copper plates along with a seal was discovered by a farmer in the village Parbatīyā near Tezpur, Assam. This inscription is almost common with Tezpur copper plates of Vanamālavarmanadeva with a slight variation. The inscription containing thirty verses is presumed to be composed in the middle of the ninth century A.D. Written in Sanskrit the inscription

contains the metres like Sragdharā, Indravajrā, Vasantatilaka, Rathodhatā, Upajāti etc. The inscription along with other things presents the genealogy of Vanamālavarmadeva, the valorous king of Śālāstambha dynasty. Parbatīyā copper plate of Vanamālavarmadeva was issued by illustrious Vanamālavarmadeva from the prosperous city of Haḍapeśvara which was surrounded by people of all the Varnas, which became the home of virtuous and learned men and which stood on the bank of the river Lauhitya.

There is no dearth of literary elements in the Parbatīyā Copper Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva (PCP). Skillful use of both the Śabdālamkāra and Arthālamkāra is an important feature of the PCP. A reader may be delighted by the use of Anuprāsa (alliteration) in the lines 'parameśvara-paramabhattachārako'⁸ and rājakamaśeṣamasyata śrīrakari ciramekabhartṛkā⁹. The verse 'dharmappravādeṣu'¹⁰ is an example of the Śleṣa. According to Viśvanātha Śleṣa occurs if the words denote different meaning in different contexts.¹¹ Here, the words Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Jīṣṇu suggest that the illustrious king Śrīharjara was uncompromised in battlefield, ferocious and always trying to be victorious. Same verse is the nice case of Ullekhālamkāra wherein it is stated that Śrīharjara was identical with Yudhiṣṭhira in religious discourses and Bhīma to the dreaded enemies and Jīṣṇu in the battlefield. Arathi's queen Jīvadevī was compared with morning twilight since she was the epitome of enough splendor. Again the word 'tejaso' refers both the light (*Jyotiḥ*) and brave son. Hence the verse under consideration is the case of Śleṣānuprānitopamā. The figure of speech Rūpaka (Metaphor) is in use in the verse 'kṣititanyanrpavamaṁ'¹² wherein king Vanamāla was superimposed as bright moon in the sky for dispelling the darkness in the shape of the enemies.

There is the employment of Virodhābhāsalamkāra in the portion '*ekopyanekairiti sadguṇai*' where it is described that Śrīharjara even being one, became as equal as the sons of Kunti by acquiring good qualities. There is the admixture of Rūpaka and Atīśayokti in the verse '*bhuridraptaripu viravahini*'

Here the enemies of Vanamāla are conceived as thunderbolts to the mountains in the shape of the enemy squads of highly defiant heroes. He made the goddess of fortune

(*Lakṣmī*) to remain devoted to one husband i.e. to himself for good by destroying all his enemies with indomitable might.

In the PCP there is the employment of various metres of the Samavṛtta type. Metres like Sragdhārā, Indravajrā, Vasantatilaka, Mandākrāntā, Anuṣṭup, Śārdūlavikrīḍita, Upajāti are used in the thirty verses. The benedictory verse is found to be composed in the metre Sragdhārā. One feels amazed at the poetic skill in the verse 'bhūridṛptaripuvīra' where the metre is Rathoddhatā. Observing the use of different metres it can be said that the composer of the inscription has proficiency in Sanskrit prosody. The flow of the verses is not- disrupted due to the proper employment of the metres. Kṣemendra states that he who uses a few types of metres is a poet of lesser degree¹⁴. Therefore the use of various metres in a literary piece reveals the poetic skill of the poet. It is seen that whenever the short metres like Anuṣṭup, Rathoddhatā and long metres like Sragdhārā, Śārdūlavikrīḍita are employed, the poetic flow never stops. Utmost care is taken in respect of arrangement of words.

Viśvanātha holds that Guṇa (poetic excellence), Alamkāra (figure of speech) and Rīti (style) are the causes of excellence of poetry (utkarsaḥetavaḥ proktā guṇālamkārarītayah). The ability of a poet is revealed through the appropriate use of Guṇas in a literary piece. The Guṇa is said to be mainly of three types, namely, Mādhurya, Ojas and Prasāda. In the PCP it is narrated that Arathi, the successor of king Vajradatta, earned matchless fame for his beneficial deeds. He was prominent among the valorous kings beginning with Sālastambha. Śrīharjara was the worthy son of Arathi and Śrījivada under whose feet the powerful kings were found to bow down their heads. He was like Bhīma in prowess among the enemy kings and Arjuna in the battle field. The enemies scattered everywhere due to the fear of his valour. They had to leave their own occupied areas in spite of having sharp arrows with them. His worthy son Vanamāla was able to assume the lordship of the whole earth by destroying with his sword the host of enemies, who are themselves like thunderbolts to the mountain. All these descriptions generate the Ojaḥ quality, for which the use of long compounded words are very helpful. In this regard Śrīśiṅgabhūpāla opines that Ojaḥ can be found in a

compounded literary piece.¹⁵ Even the prose portion of the PCP contains a lot of compounds with the variety of syllables. Daṇḍin in his *Kāvyādarśa* states that the long compounded words are the essence of prose (ojaḥ samāsabhuyastametad gadyasya jīvitam).

While going through the inscription one comes to know the genealogy of Vanamālavarmadeva, the valorous king of Śālastambha dynasty. Mammaṭa states that the sense of attachment towards gods, preceptor and king which cannot be considered to be the *Rati* for generating the sentiment for the lack of *Vibhāvas*, attains the position of the *Bhāva*¹⁶. There is the depiction of intense love and respect towards the emperors of the dynasty of Vanamāla in the PCP. It may be an ideal case of the *Nṛpaviṣayakarati*.¹⁷

There is Kavisamaya (poetic convention) in the 'saṃpūrṇendoviyati vimalāmaṃśumālāṃ vicitrām' where the fame of the king Vanamāla is depicted as white. It is in close conformity with the established poetic convention¹⁸.

It can be pointed out that the PCP made a spectacular contribution to the Sanskrit literature in the field of epigraph. It has a great value as a piece of literary and cultural product. Thus, the extensive study of this inscription can throw much light on the cultural history of Kāmarūpa.

Endnotes

1. cakampe tīrthalaughitye tasmin prāgyotiṣeśvaraḥ. - Raghu., IV. 81
tamiśaḥ kāmarūpānamāt yākhaṇḍalavikramam. - Ibid., IV. 83.
2. Mahābhārata (Sabhāparvan), XXVII, 17, 18
3. samataṭa-davāk-kāmarūpa-nepāla-kartṛpurādipratyantaṇṇpatibhiḥ...
Samudragupta's Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription, Line 22.
4. Early History of Kāmarūpa, P.1
5. asya madhya sthito brahmā prāṇnakṣatraṃ sasarja ha.
tataḥ prāgyotiṣākhyeyaṃ purī śakrapurīsamā - Kālikāpurāṇa., 38.119
6. A History of Assam, P. 15
7. prāgyotiṣesu durjayākhyapuramadhyuvāsa. - Bargaon Copper Plate of Ratnapāla, P.158

9. Ibid, P.117

10. dharmappravādeṣu yudhiṣṭhiro yo sīmorivarge samareṣu jiṣṇuḥ

ekopyanekairiti saṅgato yo niḥśeṣakannītanayatvametaḥ. – Ibid., V.12

11. śliṣṭaiḥ padairanekārthābhidhāne śleṣa iṣyate.¹¹ – Sāhityadarpaṇa., X.11

12. PCP, V.19

13. bhūridṛptarīpuvīravāhinīśailavajramuruvikramāsinā

yena rājakamaśeṣamasyatā śrīrakāri ciramekabhartṛkā.- Ibid., V.20

14. ekasminneva yairvṛtte kṛto dvitreṣu vā śramah

na nāma viniyogārḥaste daridrā ivotsave.- Suvṛttatilaka, III, 26

15. samāsabahulatvaṅgyat tadoja iti gīyate – Rasāṇavasudhākaraḥ of Śrīsiṃgabhūpāla. I,P.237

16. ratirdevādiviṣayṣ vyabhicārī tathā'njitaḥ.- Kāvya prakāśa, IV.50

17. yatra prādhānyenābhivvyaktā vyabhicāriṇo,
devamunigurunṛpādivisayā ca bhāvā bhāvaśabdavācyāḥ. – SD., P.124

18. mālīnyam vyomni pāpe yaśasi dhavalatā varṇyate hāsakīrtyoḥ. - Ibid., VI.P.101

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