Chapter-II

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND
The Somavamsi rule from C:930 A.D to 1110 A.D forms an important chapter in the political and cultural history of Orissa. This period not only marks the political unification of different units of Orissa but also a period of cultural glow. The Somavamsi rulers, though patronized Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism never persecuted other religious cults. There was no religious conflict between different sects. Rather where was an atmosphere of religious toleration and this they inherited from their predecessors.

The present state of Orissa in the past was known in different names, such as Kaliṅga, Utkala, Odra, Tosāli, Kosala and Koṅgoda. Besides these important territorial divisional there were also smaller geographical units like Trikaliṅga, Svetata, Khijjiṅga Maṇḍala, Khijnjali Maṇḍala, Kodalaka Maṇḍala etc. The names and territorial extension of all these units underwent changes in different period. The ancient most kingdom was Kalinga, which finds mention in the Mahābhārata ¹. Mahābhārata informs us that river Gaṅgas marks the northern boundary of the kingdom of Kaliṅga and Pliny says² that river Godāvari was its southern limit. When Asoka conquered Kaliṅga in 261 BC, it had maintained its territorial extent in tact and had two administrative units³. Kharavela in first century B.C. further extended its territorial limits⁴. But in course of time the Kingdom was reduced in territorial extent due to rise of other Kingdoms and when the early Gaṅgas come to power in 5th/6th century A.D. the kingdom had been reduced in size and was confined to the region from Rishikulyā river in the north to Visākhāpātanam district in south Subsequently it lost its significance.

Next important geographical unit was Utkal. The existence of Utkala is known to us from Mahāvagga of Vinaya Pitaka⁶ which mentions
that Tapasu and Bhallika, two merchant brother of Utkal, were the, first disciples of Buddha. Raghuvamsa of Kālidāsa informs us that king Raghu entered the Utkal country after crossing the river Kapisā (Kasua in the Medinaapur district of W.B.). According to the description Utkala seems to have comprised of the territory from Kasai river in the north to Mahānadi in the south during the fourth century A.D..

The earliest epigraphic reference to Odra is found in the Soro Plates of Somadatta. Hiuen Tsang’s account informs us that, the country Odra lay to the south west of Karnasuvarṇa and north of Kangoda. Cunningham observes that Odra country extended up to Gondwānā in the West, the sea in the East, Ganjam in the south and Singhbhum in the north. But during the rule of the Bhaumakaras it was confined to coastal districts of Orissa.

The Allahabad Inscription furnishes the earliest epigraphic reference to the Kosala countries. This was conquered by Samudragupta during his Daksinapatha invasion. Hiuen Tsang visited Kosala in 639 A.D. It covered of modern districts of Bilāspur and Rāipur in Chhatisgarh together with the districts of Sundargarh, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Sonpur and Balangir in Orissa. Sripura, identified with Sirpur in Rāipur district was it’s capital. It was annexed to Utkal during the Somavamsi rule.

The territory of Trikaliṅga was very much significant for our period i.e. the Somavarmśi. Since all the kings of this dynasty assumed the title of “Trikaliṅgādhipati”, as recorded in their characters, it is necessary that we ascertain its location and extent during the pre-Somavāṃśī period. Reference to Trikaliṅga is found from the Jirjingi Copper Plate grant of Indravarman-Ⅰ of Eastern Gaṅga dynasty, Other references to Trikaliṅga is found from the charters of eastern Chālukya rulers, Kālachuris and
Somavamsis king. It comprised of roughly Kanka, and Bastar district of Chhatisgarh, Kalahandi, Nuapada the hilly portion of Ganjam and Koraput, Nawrangpur, Rayagad and Malkangiri districts of Orissa along with Jharkhand and Gondwana of the Mughal period. Khijjinga Mandala comprised of Mayurbhanja and a part of Keonjhar districts with its capital at Khijjinga Kotta (Khiching). Khifijali Mandala was located in Boud-Sonpur region districts. Kodalaka Mandala roughly covered the modern Dhenkanal district. Kodalaka had been divided into Airavatta Mandala and Yamagartta Mandala in the second half of the ninth century A.D. Thus, the history of Orissa passed through many ups and downs in the pre-Somavamsi period.

Orissa was the meeting place of the Aryan culture of the North and the Dravidian culture of the South. The major Indian religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism and other religious faiths like Gankpataya, Surya etc. flourished in this land of Orissa under the patronage of the royal dynasties.

The recorded history of Orissa begins with the conquest of Kalinga by Asoka in 261 B.C. Asoka embraced Buddhism, left ‘Digvijaya’ announced the policy of ‘Dharma Vijaya’ and he dedicated his life, time, energy and resources for the spread and growth of Buddhism not only all over his vast empire but also over many foreign countries like China, Tibet, Srilanka and many other countries. Even though Asoka embraced Buddhism, he never persecuted other faiths and he treated all his subjects equally as he declared. “People are my children and I am father to them. Just as I desire that they be unite with all welfare and happiness of this world and of the next precisely do I desire it for all men.” Under his benevolent rule, an atmosphere of healthy and harmonious relationship among various religious faiths prevailed.
With the fall of Asoka the history of Kaliṅga wrept into darkness till the rise of Khāravela of Cheta dynasty who ruled in the first century B.C.\textsuperscript{30}. The Hāṭigumpha inscription\textsuperscript{45} of Khāravela assigned to the first century B.C. shows the catholic attitude of Khāravela to other religious sects. The epigraph describes Mahārāja Khāravela as “the worshipper of all gods and goddesses (Savapasandpūjaka) as well as “the builder of temples for all gods and goddesses” (Savadevajātana samkāra kāraka).

From the death of Kharavela till the rise of the Mātharas in Kaliṅga in 4\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D., the history of Orissa once again was thrown into darkness. There in no historical evidence to restructure the history of Orissa of that period. There are references to individual kings but no continuous history of the period is available till the South Indian campaign of Samudragupta in the 4\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta\textsuperscript{32} indicates that Samudragupta had conquered 12 South Indian Kingdoms and liberated them after their submission. Out of these twelve kings at least five belonged to Orissa. These conquered territories were greatly influenced by the Gupta religion and culture. The Āllāhābād Pillar Inscription did not mention the names of Kingdoms like Kalinga or Utkala which lead us to believe that Orissa had lost her political unity and had been split into several small kingdoms. Through the South Indian campaign of Samudra Gupta had very little political consequences. Over Orissa, yet the Gupta culture had a tremendous impact on Orissa.

The Mātharas established their rule over the area which roughly extended from the river Mahānadi in the north to the river Godāvari in the south\textsuperscript{33}. The early Māthara rulers described themselves as


\textsuperscript{45} This inscription was found in the Hāṭigumpha Caves near Ranchi in the district of East Godāvari in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

\textsuperscript{32} This inscription was found in Allahabad and contains an account of the exploits of Samudragupta.

\textsuperscript{33} This statement is based on the information provided by historians and archaeologists who have studied the records of the period.
"Paramadaivata" "Paramabhattāraka" and "Pitrupadabhakta" in their royal charters. But Chandra Varman and Nandaprabhanjanavarman used the title "Paramabhāgavata" in their records. On the other land Ningondi grants of Prabhanjanavarman of this family styled himself as "Bhagavatasvāmi Nārāyanapadānudhyata", Anantavarman calls himself "Paramamaheśvara" in his Sirpuram plates. Thus the royal charters prove that Mātharas were patronising both Vaisnavism and Śaivism. Further from Ceylonese records it is known that they also extended their patronage to Buddhism.

The Eastern Gaṅgas, who were ruling over Trikaliṅga toward the close of 5th century A.D., occupied the coastal region of Kaliṅga by Gaṅga era 79 (C.577 A.D.) Kaliṅga nāgar identified with modern Mukhaliṅgam in Srikakulam district of Andhrapradesh, was their capital city. Gokameśvara Śiva on the summit of Mahendragiri was their tutelary deity. But it is interesting to note that while Hastivarman of this royal family described himself as "Paramamaheśvara" he granted a village in favour of God Nārāyana, who is described as "who lies on the seven seas, who is sung in seven hymns and who is the sole lord of the seven Worlds", in his Narasimhapalli Plates. This royal charter regards both Śiva & Viṣṇu as the lord of worlds. While Śiva is described as "Sakalabhuvana nirmanārika sutradhara" Viṣṇu is represented as "Saptalokaikanātha". Thus Eastern Gaṅgas though worshippers of Śiva had equal regard for Vaiṣṇavism also.

Further a branch of the Gaṅga family ruled over Śvetaka since eighth century A.D. From the Indian Museum Plates of queen Elā it is known that during the rule of Indra Varma in Śvetaka the queen Elā donated a portion of land to the God Sri Lokamadhava (Viṣṇu) Another portion of the same land was donated in favour of the God Bhattāraka.
Svayambhūkesvara (Śiva). The rest was given to eleven Brāhmaṇas. The charter indicates that under the patronage of Gaṅgas, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism had equal growth in Kalinga.

After the early Gaṅgas another important political dynasty that appeared in the political sky of Orissa was the Śailodbhava dynasty. They ruled over Kangoda-Maṇḍala from 550AD to 736 A.D. The Śailodbhavas were worshippers of Śiva. In his Khurda Plate Mādhavarāja-II describe himself as a devout worshipper of Lord Maheśvara’s feet. The same record informs us that “Lord Mādhava with discus in hands” was worshipped by the people of the region. Four members of the ruling family, Sainybhita I alias Mādhavarāja-I, Ayasobhita I alias Mādhavarāja, Sainyabhita alias Mādhavarāja II, and Mādhava used the name Mādhava. Besides synonyms of Lord Viṣṇu like Srinivāsa Madhashūdana, Hari and Nārāyana are often used in their Copper Plate grants. These references indicate that the Śailodbhava rulers patronized both Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. Another interesting reference about Sailodbhava is that Dharmarāja of this family styled himself as “Sahasraśmi Pādabhakta” (worshipper of feet of the Sun) in his Sumapḍala Plates. Further the Ganjam Plates of Mādhavarāja-II also records the grant of the village Chhavalakṣya to Chharampadeva of Bharadvāja gotra on the auspicious day of Solar eclipse.

The Śailodbhavas were also patrons of Jainism. Hiuen Tsang’s Account reveals that during his visit there were about one hundred Deva temples and ten thousand unbelievers of different sects in Koṅgada. The Jains may be included among the group of unbelievers. Because the Bānpur Plates of Dharmarājā-II mentions that Bhagavati Sri Rājīni Sri Kalyāṇa Devi, queen of Dharmarājā-II granted land in Thorana Visaya to the Jaina Saints Darhadāchārya Naśichandra and the disciple Pravṛddha.
Chandra. It is to be noted here that this Charter contains the symbol of crescent Moon, couchant bull and expanded lotus. The grantor of the charter Kalyānadevi bears the title “Bhagavati”. These observations reveal the eclectic religious outlook of the Śailodbhava rulers.

Bhanjas ruled over different parts of Orissa and they were divided into several branches. They played a very significant role in the development of Orissa’s religious life. Ādi Bhaṇjas ruled from their political headquarters at Khinjijingakota which is identified with modern Khiching in the district of Mayurbhanja. All rulers of this family were Śaivites. Another branch of Bhaṇjas ruling over Khinjali Maṇḍala (modern Boudh Bhaṇjanagar) area also invoked Śiva in their Copper Plate Inscriptions. Interestingly Satrubhaṇja of this branch who declared himself “Paramavaiśāpava” also used Śivas prasasti in his Copper Plate Charters. Similarly Ranabhaṇja of this family in his Pātña Museum Plates bears the title “Paramavaisnava” but on the other hand gives the grant in favour of God Vijayaśara, evidently a Śiva liṅga. Similarly Satrubhaṇja alias Tribhubanakalas of this family describes himself as “Paramavaiśāpava” in his Daspalla Copper Plates and Ganjam Plates. But he used the ‘prasasti’ in praise of Śiva Natarāja in both the Charters. Another ruler Netta Bhaṇja II alias Tribhubankalas III though a ‘Paramvaiśāpava’ invoked Śiva Natarāja in his Charters. Hence, this shows that Bhanjas were liberal in their religious attitudes and under their patronage Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were getting opportunity for parallel growth.

The immediate predecessors of the Somavamsis in Coastal Orissa were the Bhaumakaras. They reigned for about two centuries that is from first half of the eighth century A.D. to first of the 10th century A.D. Dr. U.K. Subudhi is of the opinion that the Bhaumakaras hailed from Assam and were Vaiṣṇavities in their cradle land. But when they settled down in
north Orissa with their headquarters at Guheśvarapātaka, they came under the influence of Buddhism. Hence the early rulers like Ksemankaradeva, Śivakaradeva-I, Subhakaradeva I and Śivakaradeva-II bore the Buddhist epithets ‘Paramapāsaka’, ‘Paramatathāgata’, ‘Paramasaukata’ and ‘Saugatāśraya’ respectively. But records of this dynasty also indicate that they were also patronising other sects and religions. The Neulpur Copper Plate grant refers that Subhakaradeva I donated two villages to as many as two hundred Brāhmīns of various Gotras. His queen Madhavi Devi was a devotee of Śiva as is known from Hameśvara temple Inscription at Jajpur. The popularity of the Śaktī Cult during this period is proved from the Bhau ma queen Tribhuban Mahādevi when she compared herself with Kātyayani at the time of her accession to the throne at Guheśvarapātaka. Further during this period Śaktism first made its appearance in Bhubanesvara. The Vaital temple is the first Śāktī shrine which shows in its sculptures a strange amalgamation of Śaktī Śaivism and Mahāyana Buddhism. The Agamas, which popularized Tāntricism, were very popular during this period. The Hindol Plates mentions that Subhakaradeva was proficient in the Agamas. Further it is also interesting to note that the Vaiśnavite queen Tribhubana Mahādevi I in her Dhenkanāl Plates paid tributes to Lord Śiva by declaring that her gift should continue to be honoured as long as the heavenly stream (the Ganges) flows on the head of the enemy of cupied i.e. Śiva. Another queen Tribhuvana Mahādevi II alias Prithivi Mahādevi while donating two villages in favour of the temple of Nanneśvara Śiva declares herself as ‘Paramavaīśpāvī’ in her Boud Plates. Thus from the above analysis it is proved that the Bhuma rulers, who were the immediate predecessors of Somavaṁśīs patronized the harmonious growth of Vaiśpāvīś, Śaivīś, Śaktī, Tāntricism as well as Buddhism.
Thus, the study of religious condition of Orissa in pre-Somavamśi period i.e. from Ashokan period to the Bhaumakara period shows that different dynasties ruled over Orissa in different geographical units. Various religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Šaktiworship, Šaivism, Vaisnavism etc. flourished under their royal patronage. Thus, throughout history Orissa enjoyed religious toleration and rulers followed policy of eclecticism. With this religious background, the Somavamśi came to power and were deeply influenced by this tolerant atmosphere.
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