Note on the Nārāyana-bali of Cave-3 Inscription, Śaka 500

The cave-3 inscription, Badami, dated Śaka 500, refers to the installation of Mahāvīshnu in the cave-temple under the leadership of Mangalēśa, brother of the reigning king Kīrtivarman I of the Chālukya dynasty. The same inscription also mentions the provisions made for the Nārāyana-bali (Nārāyana-balyupahārāratham), for feeding sixteen Brāhmaṇas every day in the satra and for feeding the parivṛājakaś.

In recent times a controversy has been raised by some scholars regarding the interpretation of the term Nārāyana-bali as used in the inscription.

Various Dharmasāstras give the description of Nārāyana-bali as funerary rite. The Nārāyana-bali rite, according to these, should be performed to those persons who die of suicide, those killed by cows, and to those who become patita. It is also prescribed for a deceased ascetic on the twelfth day after his death. The Vaiśnava Smārtasūtra says that it should be performed to those who committed suicide or were slain, and for ascetics and that it may be performed also for those guilty of mahāpātakas after twelve years from their death. Thus it is very clear that the Dharmasāstras regard Nārāyana-bali as essentially a funerary rite.
Jaiswal referring to the record states that the Narayana-bali of the cave-3 inscription was performed for the ascetics (parivrājakas). Since the epigraph is clear in stating that only feeding arrangement was made for ascetics out of whatever income is left of the revenues of the village donated, this interpretation has to be discarded as untenable. Again the DharmaŚāstras are specific in stating that even in the case of ascetics Narayana-bali had to be performed only after their death.

While editing the Cave-3 record, B.R. Gopal has raised the following question: "Could it be possible that the king (Kīrtivarman*) committed one or several of the five great sins"?

A. Sundara, considering the answer to the above question as negative, has put forth his own views on the subject which may be summarised as follows:

1. Narayana-bali is also performed by married couples or their relatives in order to ward off the possible pitri-kshobha and beget a child if they do not get one within a reasonable period of their life.

2. Kīrtivarman did not have a child until after 578 A.D.

3. Till that period he was engaged in rigorous religious vows in order that he may get a child.

4. Mahagāsa was deeply attached to Kīrtivarman, and on account of the above he describes him as dēva-dvija-guru-pūjitāya.
v. Out of love for his brother and for the above reason he performed \textit{Nārāyana-bali} rite to ward off \textit{pitrikkshobha} on behalf of his brother.

Unfortunately, Sundara does not quote the authority which enjoins that \textit{Nārāyana-bali} could be performed for begetting a child by warding off the \textit{pitrikkshobha}. Nārāyana without doubt, is referred to in religious works as the god of the \textit{pitris}. And as such the \textit{Nārāyana-bali} as a funerary rite also points to the same fact. In the Vishnuite works there is a separate rite called \textit{Vishnubali} which is performed for the purpose of begetting a child. The two rites are totally different from each other. Therefore, unless it is held that the \textit{Nārāyana-bali} and the \textit{Vishnubali} are the same the first evidence of Sundara loses ground.

That Kīrtivarman I did not have a male progeny until after 578 A.D. appears to be a fact. And since it was also a fact that he was getting aged, it is also possible that he was worried and may have been engaged in performing religious vows.

The fourth argument of Sundara, based on the above evidence is however misleading. The \textit{dēva-dvija-guru-pūjitāya} is a usual phrase used not only of Kīrtivarman I, but also some earlier kings of pre-Chālukya and other kings of the Chālukya dynasty. The Ganga king Vishnugopa, for instance is described as being such in an inscription. The term, in the Chālukyan context itself, is used of Maṅgalēśa in one of his own inscri-
option. With such evidence on hand, it does not appear to be proper to attach any specific importance for the phrase deva-
dvija-guru-pūjitā as used in the Cave-3 record.

The fifth argument of Sundara will hold some ground only when the first evidence is proved right. Mahgalesa has been picturised as a best example of dedication to one's own brother. The fact that he wished to give away all the merit that might accrue to him on account of the making of that Vishnu temple considerably supports such a view. But it appears to deliberately neglect the future course of history which is crystal clear.

Before accepting this view, however, one has to consider the following:

i. Why Kṛtivarman did not himself perform the Nārāyana-
bali?

ii. Whether Kṛtivarman was in Badami at the time of the performance of the great rite and of the installation of the image in the magnificent temple at the capital.

The first question has been raised here in view of the presumption that Kṛtivarman was vigorously pursuing the religious vows. If so was he averse to performing Nārāyana-bali? Would he, as king, neglect the advice of his royal purhīts his own betterment? If Mahgalesa knew it could be performed, why did not he pursue his brother himself, being so much ever-flowing with love, to perform the rite?
The second question is raised because, even presuming that Mangalēśa performed the Narāyana-bali on behalf of the king, the concerned person for the benefit of whom the rite is being performed should be naturally expected to be present to witness the rite. As a man attached so much to his brother, Mangalēśa would certainly have arranged this.

Secondly, the installation of the image of Mahāvishṇu in the magnificent Cave temple at the capital was a great event for the Chālukya royal house. To witness the ceremony, one would definitely expect the king to be present there.

Unfortunately, the evidence goes contrary to this. On the same day as the Cave-3 date, Kirtivarman was in the region around Kollapur (Maharashtra) making a grant of lands as indicated by his Godachi plates.¹⁰

In view of the above evidence, it becomes difficult to accept the interpretation of Sundara. It also makes it necessary to look at the inscription in the proper perspective.

The relevant portion of the record states that on the occasion of the installation of the icon of Vishṇu, the village named Leñjīśvara was given away for Narāyana-bali and for feeding sixteen Brāhmaṇas daily in the satra; and whatever exceeded was to be used for feeding the perivṛājaksas. (Vishnoh pratimā pratishtāpanābhuyadye nimittam Leñjīśvaranāma-grāman-Narāyana-balyupahārārthanā shōgasha saṃkhyēbhyaśa Brāhmaṇēbhyaśa cha sattra-
nibandha pratidinamanuvishāna-krītvā sēsham cha parivṛājaka bhōjyandattavān).

If we take that Narayana-bali mentioned in the record was the same as the rite mentioned in the Dharmasastras it will imply that the grant made was to be used only for the feeding of the Brāhmaṇas in the sattra attached to the temple, and for the parivṛājakas (if possible); because the Narayana-bali rite could be performed only once and not throughout the year. This will mean that no provision was made for the daily worship, etc., of the deity of the temple. This is unreasonable. On the other hand, if we take the meaning of the term Narayana-bali as daily offerings for god Narayana; it will give no scope for such interpretation at all. The meaning of the portion of the record will be clear: The village was granted for meeting the expenses of the daily offerings for god Narayana.

Considering the above points, it seems reasonable, therefore, to state that the term Narayana-bali has been used in the epigraph simply in its literal sense, i.e. 'offering for god Narayana.'

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. IA. Vol.III, pp.305-306
3. Jaiswal S., Origin and Development of Vaisnavism, p. 48
7. EC, Vol. IX, (old), Db.67
8. IA, Vol.II, p.161

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