

# Aspect of Religion and Religious Institutions in the Land Charters of Early Medieval Chamba

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper is an attempt to see how religious institutions and different aspects of religion are reflected in the land charters most of which are issued by authority of differential nature. Apart from looking for the reference to God and religious institutions and the context in which they are refer to, the paper also seeks to analyze the kind of bearing it had on the existing authority structure. One would also tried to see if these land charters also became an instrument of legitimization of power. The nature of social patronage extended to them will also be analyzed.*

## 1. Introduction

The present study seeks to understand the different aspects of religion and religious institutions in early medieval Chamba. The sources used for the construction of the arguments are the land charters and the image inscriptions. The category of inscriptions used are both votive and donative. We have six land charters and thirteen image inscriptions reported from Chamba.

The foundation of Brahmapura was laid by Maru who belong to varman dynasty and made it the capital of the new state. This event believed to have taken place about the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>1</sup> Among the eighteen Rajas from Maru to Sahilla, who are said to have ruled at Brahmour (Brahmapura), only Meru-varman is definitely proved by his inscription to be a historical person. In Meru-varman's inscription the historical progenitor of his race is mentioned under the name Musuna.<sup>2</sup>

One of the earliest inscription that we have of Varman dynasty belongs to the period of Meru-varman datable to 700 A.D. The geographical context of the inscription relates to Brahmour<sup>3</sup> which was also the centre of authority before the shifting of the capital to Chamba. The statues on which the inscriptions were engraved were got created by the orders of Meruvarman<sup>4</sup>. These inscription are engraved on three deities namely, Lakshana Devi, Ganesh and Nandi. Lakshana Image Inscription<sup>5</sup> which speaks about the making of fully image of Lakshana and the geneology of the king. The royalty namely: Aditya varman, Balavarman and Divakaravarman cronologically belongs to the house of Musuna. Ganesh Image Inscription<sup>6</sup> which also tells the geneology of the king. Apart from this there are several Image inscriptions which are engraved on the images of the various Goddesses namely: Bhagvati (Devi Ashtabhujji)<sup>7</sup>, Sakti<sup>8</sup>, Bhagvati<sup>9</sup> are indicative of the fact that royalty was trying to link itself with the local deities and often tried to integrate them in the larger brahmanical pantheon.

The question arises here that Why the kings gave land grants to the brahmins and other religious institutes only. The

answer is that the one measure way of legitimization was extending patronage to the brahmins who were considered to be the legitimizer of authority in monarchical state and therefore we have general instances being given lands and then one of the earliest example is the Brahmour and Sungal Copper-plate Inscription.

Brahmour copper-plate inscription of Yugakaravarman (plate XVI)<sup>10</sup>. The donee of the Yugakara's grant was the God Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, whose image had been erected by queen Tribhuvana-rekha, perhaps the consort of the donor. The land was enjoyed by the son of Harihala Rankilla.

Yugakaravarman granted the land belonging to the village of Vidavika of Brahmapura district of his domain to, in the month of Vaisakha, the dark fortnight, the lunar day 10. -2 *bhu* of kohli land of the Khani hospice in the *purva* belonging to the village of Vidavika belonging to the Brahmapura district of his domain. Out of these a field, Sabdabhagga by name, which was enjoyed by the son of Harihalla Rankilla, is given in exchange. Also in the village of Grima one *pitaka* of rice is given from the *vapya* land of kutika which was (previously) enjoyed by the sons of Rahanka collectively and belongs to the Akutanagavika. Further in the vicinity of the Khani hospice is the Yamalika kitchen-garden; out of the *vapya* land there, two in figures 2, *pitakas* (are given). (These) together with that of Kutika (make) three *pi*. And further, half the kitchen-garden.

Similarly, the Sungal copper-plate inscription of Vidagdha (plate XVII)<sup>11</sup>. The king granted the land said to be situated near the village of Sumangala to Brahman (Nandu, son of Deedu, whose grandfather had come from Kurukshetra, the famous place of pilgrimage near Thanesar), the brahmin student of the house of Kasyapa, issued on the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Magha on the occasion of the hibernal solstice (Makara-Samkranti). In the village of Sumangla (there) is one *bhu* of land, Seri by name, of which the boundaries are these: on the east side the rent free land (*agrahara*) of (the village) of Patala, on the south side the limit is known as "the great slope", on the west side the limit

known as prahabhaga .One *bhu* (of land) thus bounded, together with the houses and kitchen gardens situated thereon. Further in that same village (there) is another half *bhu* (of land) Lavala by name, of which the boundaries are: on the east side the precipice, on the south side the large rock, on the west side the rivulet (Majvalika by name, on the north side the limit of the path to the pasture ground of Puskari. Half a *bhu* thus bounded together with above described *bhu* (to wit) one and a half *bhu* as far as its limits, grass grazing and pasture-ground, together with fruit trees and with the water courses and channels, with approaches, ingress and egress with fallow land cultivated land, with (the fines for) ten offences.

The Spurious sai copper plate inscription of Vidagdha varman (plate XVIII)<sup>12</sup>. The king Vidagdharman grants a village, Sya by name, limited by its boundaries, to the brahman Kalasi-sarman of the house of Atri in the month of Magha. A village Sya, limited by its boundaries, on the east side the boundary is as far as the rock; on the south side the boundary is as far as the hoe-marked rock behind (the village of) Salo; on the west side the boundary is as far as the cattle tract of Sumangla (i.e. Sungal); on the north side the boundary is as far as the Muredi Khad the boundary as far as (the hamlet) Balyare Kasyarota.

Further, Kulait copper-plate inscription was issued by Soma varman (plate XXIV)<sup>13</sup>. Somavarman granted the land at Kulika-gostha, which belongs to the Trighatta(ka) district of his domain to the brahman of the house of kasyapa, on the occasion of a solar eclipse. 1 *bhu* in Kulika-gostha, which belongs to the Trighatta(ka) district of his domain and was occupied by Rangu(ka)'s son Ranaditya and belonged to the latter's son Udma- in figure one *bhu* occupied by Rangu(ka)'s son – as far as its limits with grass, grazing, and pasture-ground with fallow land large and small, with fruit trees and water, with ingress and egress, together with gardens resting places.

The next is Chamba copper-plate inscription of Somavarman and Asata (plate XXV)<sup>14</sup>. The copper-plate belongs to the temple of Hari Rai and Campavati, both in Chamba city. Somavarman granted the land within the domain under his sway in the Panthila district and in the Tavaska district at Bhadravarma to the Lord Hari (Visnu) and to Siva on the third day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaisakha. In the Panthila district, there are four *bhumi* of land belonging to Kuloti, enjoyed by the queen, the illustrious Rardha of divine descent, and at Mungala two *bhumi* belonging to the cook Surambhata, and at Vata there are two *bhumi* belonging to the Chonneraka-gosthika, and in the Tavasaka district at Bhadravarman there was one *bhu* held by Vijjaula of Bhadravah, and at Sarahula there was one *bhu* held by Bhatta Vasanta, and at Dhalyaka two *bhumi* in Lartuka which belong to the watchman the son of Deena, and in the same village two *bhu* in Jaudhaka. belonging to the second watchman, the son of Ramanjaya, and in the Parakamata district at Mangala in Dhaulika two *bhumasaka* belonging to the son of Lutthuka and two *bhumasaka* belonging to the son of Humartaka both together making one *bhu*. In figures: of Kuloti 4 *bhu*, at Mungala 1 *bhu*, at Vata 2 *bhu*, at Bhadravarman 1 *bhu*, at Sarahula 1 *bhu*, at Dhalyaka 4 *bhu*, at Mangala 1 *bhu*, thus 15 *bhu*, thus on

the previously established terms of occupancy, as far as their limits, grass, grazing and pasture-ground, with fallow land large and small with ingress and egress, with fruit trees and water, together with houses, kitchen-gardens, orchards, and resting places; also from the storehouse of Bhadravarma annually one *khari* of grain. Out of these (lands) the two *bhumasaka* of the son of Lutthuka on the road to Mangala in Parakamata are bestowed as an *agrahara* on the Lord Visnu.

The last is the Thundu copper-plate inscription of Asata (plate xxvi)<sup>15</sup>. The grant belongs to a brahman (kasyapa gotra) of the name of Jasu who lives in the village of Thundu at the head of the Hol valley in the Hol-Gundhyal pargana. The land was donated in the month of Sravana, the bright fortnight, the lunar day 15. In the Bhattara district there is one *bhu* of land belonging Dalima which has been enjoyed by Udhara, the son of Canna, and six *bhumi-masaka* of Vanjilika, together in figures 1 *bhu* 6 *ma*. (This land), on the terms of its previous occupancy, as far as its limits, grass grazing and pasture-ground with fallow-land large and small, with fruit-trees and water, with ingress and egress, with houses, kitchen gardens and resting places together with all that is attached to it, has been granted as an *agrahara* to the Brahman Maca.

Apart from patronising Brahmans, an interesting part of the inscriptions is the geneology which appears in the charters.

Brahmour copper-plate inscription of Yugakaravarman (plate XVI)<sup>16</sup>. The geneology begins, "From (his) residence at glorious Canpaka the very devout worshipper of the deities he who reverently remembers (lit. is meditating at the feet of)<sup>17</sup>, the twice-born (the brahmans) and the spiritual perceptors; (him) the supreme prince, the king of kings, the supreme lord<sup>18</sup>, the illustrious and divine Sahila, and who was born from the womb of the supreme princess and queen the illustrious and divine Neena: he the tree of whose glory is increased by damming back the great wave of pride (arising from) the uprooting of the host of manifold foes; --he, the supreme prince, the king of kings, the supreme lord, the illustrious and divine Yugakaravarman, the prosperous one. By this detail description of the geneology, he (the king) is trying to create a social memory of his legitimate lineage to royalty."

Similarly, Sungal copper-plate inscription of Vidagdharman (plate XVII)<sup>19</sup>. In the beginning of the inscription, the donor Vidagdha is mentioned as a scion of the solar race and of the house of Mosana; worshipper of the Great Lord (Shiva) and as the son of Yugakaravarman and Bhogamati.

Spurious Sai copper plate inscription of Vidagdha varman (plate XVIII)<sup>20</sup>. The inscription begins with a homage to Siva, the ultimate cause of causes, whose eyes are blazing red and lustre-flaming-adorned with ear-rings, wrapped in serpent-garlands, Brahm', Indra, Visnu's patron. Then the geneology portion explains the illustrious prince, whose frame is adorned with the full number of all virtues; who resembles the fire of a forest conflagration (in his behaviour) towards supplicants and poor<sup>21</sup>; the protector of all the castes, the orders of religious life, and of the law; the illustrious supreme prince, the king of kings, the illustrious and divine Vidagdharman.

Further, Kulait copper-plate inscription was issued by Soma varman (plate XXIV)<sup>22</sup>. The inscription begins with a reverence to Siva along with other Gods like Indra, Krsna, Durga and Hara. The genealogy portion opens with the praise lavished on Somavarman, who is an ornament of the spotless house of the illustrious Sahilla of divine descent—that great jewel adorning the race of Musana. It speaks of a successful war waged by Sahilavarman against the Kira troops of the Lord of Dugar (Durgara) and their allies the Saumatikas, of his alliance with the ruler of Kangra (Trigarta) and his suzerainty over the principality of Kulu (Kuluta). It mentions a pilgrimage performed by Sahilla to Kuruksetra on the occasion of a solar eclipse and his great liberality on that occasion. Apparently his gift of “a multitude of elephants” which afforded him the honorific title of “Elephant-rain” had the desired effect of securing offspring for his house, through the favour of its mythical progenitor, the sun-god Bhaskara.

Chamba copper-plate inscription of Somavarman and Asata (plate XXV)<sup>23</sup>. The inscription opens with the worship of deities, like Brahma, Krsna, Durga, Hara, Siva and Ganesa. The genealogy portion says that Somavarman belongs to the spotless house of the illustrious Sahilla, of divine descent—that

great jewel adorning the race of Musana. And again discuss the victories of Sahilavarman with his mighty praise.

The last is the Thundu copper-plate inscription of Asata (plate xxvi)<sup>24</sup>. The inscription begins with the praise of Gods—Bhavani (Durga), Siva and Ganesha. The genealogy opens with the praise of the king also discuss his divine descendants who belongs to the race of Musana.

There were two purposes of the description of the genealogy of the charters to begin with this is a mechanism through which the genealogy is being announced and made acceptable. The other thing is the declaration and the public announcement of the king's association with divine figure. Once they (the kings) acquire the power, then they tried to legitimize their authority by associating themselves with Gods. Because the extension of the territory and after that its consolidation require a constant device. And it is this which make them to create different kind of statues and images. This was the first stage of legitimisation and the second stage is represented by the issuance of land charters were used not only as a document of property transfer but also a means of historicizing their legitimate claim to royalty.

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