

Political Explorations and Administrative Policies of the Gajapati Dynasty in Medieval Orissa

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Abstract

This article is an apprehensive endeavor to investigate and analyze the endurance of the Gajapati kingdom which prospered and expanded in Orissa during the 15th and 16th centuries. The strategies used by the kings to persist in power keeping aside all the other contemporary kingdoms was truly an incredible process which will be shown throughout the entire paper. The study will also reveal how their political activities resulted in arranging a substantial socio-cultural and political formulation in the entire Eastern region of the Indian subcontinent.

Keywords: Gajapati, Orissa, Kingdom, Power, Political.

Throughout the historical past, there has been a general pattern of waves of immigration to various areas of the available prosperous region. Similarly Orissa encountered a significant era of splendor and prominence during the 15th century under the famous Gajapati dynasty. The upsurge and development of this famous kingdom in the geographical area of Orissa as well as their interrelations with bordering forces, resulted in the introduction of a solid political organization in not only Orissa but also all over Eastern India developing various regional traits. Thus in this article, the political consolidation and survival procedures of the Gajapati dynasty subjugating numerous hindrances as well as their administrative approaches would be analysed articulately.

Orissa after much upheavals in historical formation and amalgamation, got its capital as Bhubaneswar in 1956 A.D. But the land of Orissa was ruled by several individual dynasties from the very early times. Orissa was also called by different names in different historical times.¹ The region of Kalinga in Orissa was conquered by the great Mauryan emperor Asoka in 361 B.C and later the region was followed by the dominance of the Chedi and the Satavahana empires. Actually by the time of Mahavir and Buddha, the Kalinga-Utkal region on the east coast of India had acquired recognition and fame.² From the eighth to tenth century A.D., the Bhaumakara dynasty ruled over Utkal.³ However, the history and rise of the medieval kingdom of Orissa begins with King Anantavarman Chodaganga, the renowned king of the Ganga dynasty.

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But the later Eastern Ganga's downfall and demise led to the establishment of a new one naming as Gajapati dynasty. The Gajapati is a title used by the kings in Odisha as a royal honour and status, and as a dynastic privilege and practice.⁴ Orissa achieved its apex of magnificence during their century of rule, despite the fact that they could only governed for a century. This dynasty maintained an ambitious empire strategy, stretching Orissa's territorial borders from the Ganga mostly in north to the Pennar within south.

Process of Expansion and Warfare

To make their kingdom secure and unassailable from the neighbouring forces, the Gajapati kings had to follow a policy of contest and armed struggle. The first Gajapati ruler Kapilendradeva (1434-1468 A.D.), or Kapilesvara, was among Orissa's foremost benevolent monarchs who expanded the political dominions of the territories and increased the grandeur of the dynasty. His grandfather also entitled as Kapilesvara, had originally been a nayaka and nripa, according to the grant of Raghudeva, Kapilendradeva's nephew in 1456.⁵ Kapilendra's grandfather was a chief of the nayakas (a subordinate of the armed services). Jagesvara, his son, was also a renowned warrior. Balaram, Kapilesvara, Parsurama, and Rama were the children of Jagesvara. In 1434 A.D., Kapilendradeva, the originator of the empire seized power and established the Kapilavda era.⁶

Initially the ruler Kapilendradeva started his career by becoming the commander of the Nayakas. He was not a lineal descendant of the Gangas but claimed to belong to the Suryavansha dynasty.⁷ He then planned a strategy in the realm to get the wanted power and authority. Since Bhanudeva, the then ruler of Orissa was away from town, Kapilendradeva used a stealthy coup to seize the kingdom of Orissa. Unhappy troops and ministers under Bhanudeva thus assisted him and the common people embraced Kapilendra as their new monarch, especially those who had been oppressed during the final decades of the Ganga legislation. But after ascending the throne, Kapilendradeva encountered a variety of difficulties. Both domestic and foreign threats existed regarding his rights to the throne. On one hand, the Reddi rulers of Rajahmundry were planning to expand their holdings to the north, on the other side, the Muslim rulers of Bengal also challenged Orissa. Again some regional chiefs refused to recognize the authority of Kapilendradeva at home. Apparently there also rose an uprising by the loyal followers of the Ganga dynasty. However Kapilendradeva's legitimacy to the throne was based on a claim that he became the ruler by an adesa (order) of Lord Jagannath.⁸

The Bengal Sultan's expedition was then prevented by Kapilendradeva's secretary, Gopinath Mahapatra.⁹ Gopinath Mahapatra was a very able minister who decisively deposed and expelled Sultan Ahmad Shah. Kapilendradeva also to avoid the internal destructions, vanquished the rebel officials such as the Gangas of Khimidi, the Silavamsis of Nandapur, the Matsyas of Oddadi, and the Vishnuvardhana Chakravartins of Panchadharala in the year 1443.¹⁰ Kapilendradeva thus began to solidify the power of the Gajapatis after suppressing his local and external opponents, and afterwards began an invasion of the south.

Kapilendradeva initially shifted his focus to the south, to deal with the stubborn Reddis of Rajahmundry. He had previously taken possession of the land up to Korukonda, in the Vishakhapatnam district. Virabhadra was the legal monarch of the Rajahmundry kingdom during the period. At that time when the Orissan soldiers were engaged in battle with the Reddis and Vijayanagar forces, Mahmud Shah, the Sharqi Sultan of Jaunpur, launched an invasion on Orissa. As a result, Kapilendradeva was forced to return to check on the Muslim onslaught. The Orissan forces were defeated by Mallapa Odeyar as a result of this.¹¹ Next, Hamviradeva, son of Kapilendradeva, comfortably beat the Reddis. In 1448, Rajahmundry had already been annexed to the Orissan empire, and Raghudeva Narendra Mahapatra had been made the governor of the province.

According to Prataprudradeva's Anantavarman plates, Hamvira raided Vijayanagara's headquarters and demanded homage from its own monarch.¹² The Gajapatis also dominated the entire Kondavidu kingdom, Addanki, and Vinukonda by 1454. Kapilesvara, Hamvira's son and Kapilendradeva's grandson, had also created a series of temples. He also gave endowments to the Brahmins and the local people to make their dynasty powerful. Kapilendradeva had also chosen Tamma as the ruler of the Udaygiri rajya after capturing a fraction of it. During that period, the Telengana army had attempted to expand. They also wanted to be free from the oppressing Sultans. The Orissa army's successful campaigns in the south boosted the morale of the Telengana people. Thus the Telengana army joined arms with the Orissan army.

In the Bahamani period, Nizam Shah, Humayun Shah's minor son, seized power after his father's death in 1461. Nizam Shah had only been eight years old at the stage. Kapilendradeva took advantage of this occasion to conquer the Bahamani state once again. Telengana's landlords and the Velama chief backed him up. Sultan Hussian Sharqi of Jaunpur entered Orissa from the north whereas the Orissan military remained occupied in the south, preparing for the downfall

of the Bahamany kingdom.¹³ To protect the land, Kapilendradeva summoned his troops from the south. Later also Kapilendradeva resumed his war against the Bahamany realm bringing tranquility in Orissa. He took on the titles like Gajapati Gaudesvara-Navakoti-Karnata-Kalavargesvara.

According to the claim of one story, Lord Jagannatha popped up to him and chose Purusottamadeva (1468-1497 A.D.) to be the king of Orissa. Presumably his story was invented afterwards to provide religious support for the choosing of Purusottama as Orissa's successor. In 1456-66 A.D., Kapilendradeva proclaimed his youngest son Purusottama for the ruler on the shores of the Krishna River.¹⁴ On the death of Kapilendra Deb, the succession of Purushottama Deb was marred by a war of succession and dispute.¹⁵ Purusottamadeva bolstered his authority by winning the confidence of the ordinary populace. He eliminated the Brahmin choukidari levy and revived the land grants. To reclaim the kingdom of Orissa, he enlisted the help of the Bahamani Sultan Muhammad Shah. He was an ardent devotee of Sri Jagannathdev, and because of their devotion his descendants came to be known as the descendants of the Purushottam dynasty.¹⁶

In 1472 A.D., the Sultan ordered Nizam-ul-Mulk Hassan Bahry to proceed into Orissa and vanquish Purusottamadeva.¹⁷ Purusottamadeva was deposed, and Hamvira was crowned as Orissa's new monarch. Hamviradeva, on the other hand, never could stay on the crown of Orissa for much time. Purusottama quickly identified his troops and attacked Hamvira with the support of certain feudatory leaders. Purusottamadeva beat Hamvira in June 1476 A.D. when at one situation he was left alone.¹⁸ Prataprudradeva(1497-1538A.D.)was also a very efficient ruler of the Gajapatis. He inherited a vast kingdom from Ganges river in the north to Nellore(on the banks of the Pennar in Andhra Pradesh) in the south.¹⁹ He was also forced to make one treaty with Golkunda by which Godavari was termed as the boundary line between Orissa and Golkunda kingdom. A religious and cultural upheaval took place during the reign of Prataprudradeva. However his successors Klauadeva and Kakaruadeva were killed by Govinda Vidyadhara who sat on the throne of Orissa in 1542 A.D. and established the Bhoj Dynasty.²⁰

Administration of Gajapati kingdom

According to a review of available source materials, the Gajapati system of governance was, to a certain degree, an extension of the old system of governance. It actually existed during the

moment of the Later Eastern Gangas, the Reddis, and the Rayas, of whose region the Suryavamsis dominated their relationships with the Mughal administration was doubtless militarily a subordinate one, yet the emperor could not replace the Gajapatis, nor could he interfere in their functioning.²¹

Enlargement of the kingdom's boundaries: Throughout the reign of Kapilendra, the Suryavamsi dominion reached its pinnacle, ranging anywhere along shoreline from either the Hooghly in the north to the Pennar in the south. The eastern limit was just the Bay of Bengal. The western line of demarcation lengthened into what is now Andhra Pradesh's Telengana piece of land. The Gajapatis were unable to effectively capture the area beyond the Pennar River within their realm. The monarch was the chief of government and had total authority, although, such as Gangas, they believed that Lord Jagannatha was the rightful ruler of Orissa and that they were only his representatives.²² Lord Jagannatha was regarded as the absolute master by Kapilendra, Purusottamadeva, and Prataprudradeva. The kingship was perennial in the lineage, although the king occasionally chose a son other than the eldest as his successor, breaking the primogeniture law. Purusottamadeva had been named heir to the crown of Orissa by Kapilendra, putting his eldest son Hamviradeva's claim to the throne on hold. Maharajadhiraja, Paramesvara, Gajapati, Gaudesvara, and Navakoti were among the king's titles.²³ A number of officials are identified in the Gajapati kings' land grants. They were recognized as Patras, Mahapatras, and Behera-Mahapatras, with Patras serving as ministers and Mahapatras representing as higher-ranking ministries and Samdhivigrahika was the minister in control of external matters.

Provincial Administration: The monarchy was subdivided into dandapatas or rajyas, or provinces. Rajyas were the name for the southern provinces. These provinces were broken even more into Visayas, or districts. A district was sharply divided into khandas, or sub-divisions. The grama, or village, was the smallest institutional arrangement of Gajapati government. Governors named as Pariksha oversaw the provinces. Regional governors were usually princes of royal lineage.

Feudatories and Defensive structure: Kapilendra's successors could not defend such an enormous realm and Orissa soon lost most of its territories in the south to the Vijayanagar and the Bahamani sultanate. The Gajapatis used to have a multitude of feudatories who were loyal to the central government. The Gajapati rulers could not always believe their feudatories. Getting

the benefit of the central ministry's incompetence, they frequently attempted to express their freedom. They even rose in resistance during the era of Kapilendradeva. The Gajapatis received not just homage but also military support from the feudatories. Among the most significant divisions of the government was the military. The army's leader and superior commanding officer was the monarch. Infantry, cavalry, and elephants made up the troops. The elephants corps was really the Gajapati army's strongest asset. This is evidenced by the name Gajapati (Lord of the Elephants).²⁴

Excessive Rise of the Feudatories

The emergence of the feudal lords furthermore attributed to the Orissan region's demise. The Gangas and Gajapatis resulted in creation of strong tenants in Orissa by adding numerous land grants to authorities and officials. Such property owners were not at all grateful to the centralised power. They always searched for the scope to assert their autonomy. Getting the benefit of Muslim and Vijayanagara empire wars of aggression, the feudal lords frequently rebelled against Gajapati ruling elites. Within a week of his annexation, Kapilendradeva, the first Suryavamsi Gajapati king, advised these landlords in the title of Lord Jagannatha to avoid creating conflicts with them and this process was continued even later. Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a marked expansion in the number of feudatory states in Orissa.²⁵

To complicate the ill fortune, Orissa was commonly attended by natural catastrophes such as mass starvation, dry spells, and river flooding, when foreign invaders were threatening Orissa. During the rule of Kapilendradeva, Orissa experienced two terrible famines. The repeated occurrence of natural calamities and famines had a significant impact on the state and its economy, especially when Orissa was under attack from foreign enemies.²⁶ Thus, the common natural disasters had a detrimental effect on the Orissan monarchy's economic structure and society contributing to its demise. Thus we can indeed say that no specific cause, but these all lasting effects attributed to the fall of the Orissan empire in A.D. 1568. Some of them include various politics, the nature and activities of duplicitous authorities and commanders, insufficient predecessors, the state's financial deterioration, the position of feudators, and natural catastrophes. After the occupation of Orissa in 1803, the British made Puri as their Head quarters.²⁷ Despite the emergence and decline of many dynasties, peace and stability prevailed for the vast bulk of history in Orissa.

Observations

Thus the Gajapati kingdom's political accomplishments will always end up making them a noteworthy episode in historical past. These kings of Orissa proceeded their army campaigns through spontaneous military operations and frequent expeditions from the early stages in order to keep their sovereign rights. To safeguard their empire from any sort of external invasion, they also rebuilt the forts and canons. As a necessary consequence, a sturdy and healthy connection got established between the monarch and his subjects, assisting in the tangible formation of the kingdoms. Nevertheless, the inherent issues in administering, institutional vulnerabilities did lead to the monarchy's demise. It got weak during the first half of the 16th century and conquered by other dynasties. The East India Company completely managed to conquer the later territories of Orissa in the late 18th century.

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