



Fig.1 : Nīradhi, the son of Mahāmata, Khajuraho Jain temple, 996-997 CE, sandstone, Khajuraho Museum, Acc. No. 3425  
Approx. W. 54 cm, H. 88.4 cm including the pedestal

## Re-considering an Image Inscription (of Samvat 1053) from Khajuraho

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**T**emples of Khajuraho, erected between c. 950 and 1050 CE, are famous for the magnificent *nāgara* style of architecture embellished with images including erotic sculptures. The Brahmanical and Jaina shrines of the region were constructed by the Chandella rulers. The foundation inscriptions and inscribed text on the image-pedestals regarding the patronage and artisans, temple construction and its management as also political and cultural activities, have been interpreted by the scholars from time to time. Invariably, the misreading of such important epigraphical source material led some of the historians towards erroneous assumptions. The present paper highlights such an inscription that may be a pathway for the verification of other similar source materials and historical facts.

The inscribed commemorative image of one Nīradhi (Fig.1), the son of the donor Mahāmata, is presently displayed in the gallery of the Archaeological Museum of Khajuraho. This image was found amidst the debris near the Jaina temple at Khajuraho in the first decade of the present century. Both the hands, tip of the nose and toe of the right leg of the figure are broken. The sculptor depicted him seated partially cross-legged on a circular cushion, having curly hairs, beard and moustache with both ends raised upwards, wearing a necklace of small bells, circular ear-rings and anklets. He is shown wrapped sparingly in an *uttarīya* or scarf and wearing an un-stitched lower-garment.

The inscription on the pedestal is somehow in good condition, except for a few letters of last two lines in the middle and right portions, as might be seen in the detail (Fig.2). It is written in seven lines covering the space of 34.5 centimetres in

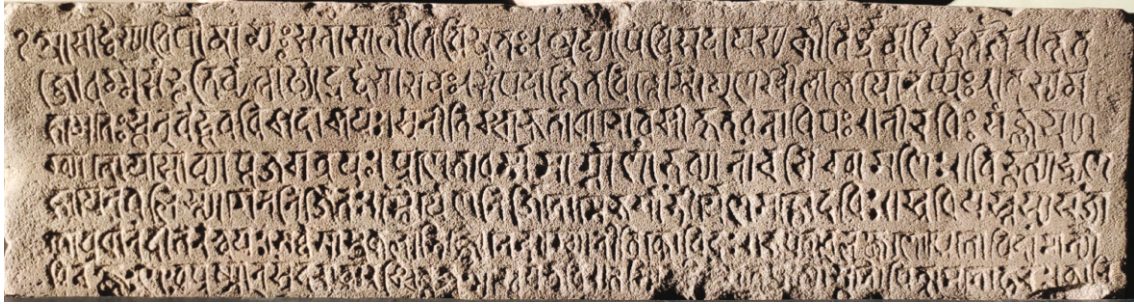


Fig.2 : Image Pedestal Inscription, detail of Fig.1

length and 9.5 centimetres in breadth, excepting the last line which measures 52 centimetres long, extending over to the next part of the pedestal. The average size of the letters is 1.3 centimetres. This inscription was published for the first time in 2014 by Jai Prakash, an Epigraphist of the Epigraphy Branch, Archaeological Survey of India, in *Studies in Indian Epigraphy*<sup>1</sup>. During my personal observation of the original inscription carved on the image-pedestal and verification from the photographs taken by me, the reading of the inscription by Jai Prakash varies at various places. Due to this reason, it is necessary to bring out the exact reading of the inscribed text for the clarification of the historical fact and identification of this portrait sculpture.

The Sanskrit inscription is written in Nāgarī characters of the late tenth century. The palaeographic peculiarities may be seen in the forms of *r* that is represented by a vertical stroke with a horizontal bar attached to its middle on the left; the formation of the alphabets *a*, *ā*, *t*, *d*, *n*, *m*, *y* and *l* shows the developed Nāgarī features; while the loop of *ch* is triangular; and the consonant *ṇ* is presented with the top-stroke. Other letters are in the transitional forms and a few of these show more than one type of formation that can be seen in the letters like *g*, *bh*, *s* and *ś*. The Sanskrit language of the inscription is metrically composed in *anuṣṭubha* metre that consists of eight verses but they are not numbered. For the orthography, a few points are noticeable, such as, the sign for *v* is employed to denote *b* as in *vabhūva* (line 3), *vali* (line 5); though the consonant following *r* is doubled as in *dharmma* (lines 2, 4), *mārggāṇām* (line 4) and *sarvva* (line 6), but not similarly used in other examples, such as it remains single in *kīrti* (line 1) and *nirjita* (line 5); the sign for

dental sibilant is also employed to denote the palatal sibilant like in *visadā* (line 1), *visruta* (line 1), *yaso* (line 4) and *sāstra* (line 6).

The inscription begins with the symbol for *om*. Jai Prakash stated that it begins with a symbol for *siddham* followed by the name of the king Dhaṅga (r. c. 950-999 CE), who may be identified with well-known Chandella king on the basis of the provenance and date of the inscription. However, the name of king Dhaṅga's family and descendants, royal epithets and other details are not recorded. Jai Prakash further opined that verses 3 and 4 state that to the king was born a son who was known by the name Nīradhi<sup>2</sup>. But in close observation of the inscription, its fourth letter to which Jai Prakash<sup>3</sup> reads Dhāṅga and corrected it to Dhaṅga, is appeared to be a single letter covered by a single top line representing a conjecture that could be identified as *syām*, which may be verified from the above photograph. Thus, the revised reading of the first word of the inscription as *siddhaisyām* left no scope for occurrence of the name of the king Dhaṅga in the said portion of the inscription. If the name of the king Dhaṅga is not mentioned in the inscription, the theory proposed by Jai Prakash<sup>4</sup> that “the significance of the inscription lies in the fact that for the first time the name of another son of Dhaṅga named Nīradhi come to the light” has no meaning. Even, the authority of the Museum Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India did not accept his theory, that's why the label of the Archaeological Museum of Khajuraho refers the image as of “the temple donor” and not as of any prince or king.

Most probably, the record mentions the virtue, piety and eminence of Mahāmata whose spotless fame roams on the earth. He supports religion, providing opportunity to all. He was a pacificator and replete with prosperity. He has an enterprising son, Nīradhi, possessor of clear idea, good policy and wealth. The meaning of his name ‘*nīradhi*’ or ocean is interestingly referred in the fifth verse of the inscription, which records for him as *gāmbhīryeṇa mahodadhiḥ*. It is said that the fame of Nīradhi was pervaded in the three worlds and he was producer of religious ways. In the inscription, Nīradhi was equated with Bāli in sacrifice, with ocean in profundity and as stable as the abode of the god. In precise, he is said to



Fig.3 : Inscribed dating, detail of Fig.1

have religious merits, good qualities, high learning and proficient in ethics. The inscription further mentions the merit of the donor's family and says that Nīradhi was handsome, endowed with auspicious marks, honoured by learned, and was a wise man on the earth. The last verse tells that after the untimely death of Nīradhi, his imposing image was caused to be made by his father with a desire to see him.

The date of the inscription has been erroneously read by Jai Prakash as [Vikrama] Saṁvat 1013 and he considered that it would correspond to 956-957 CE<sup>5</sup>. However, third sign of the numeral is obvious, which represents the numerical figure 5, and that is entirely different from the first sign used for the numeral 1, which may be seen in the following photograph (Fig.3). Thus, the correct reading of the date of the inscription is Saṁvat 1053 which corresponds to 996-997 CE. On the basis of this correction, the portrait of Nīradhi is forty years late to the date proposed earlier.

In sum, the inscription under discussion does not belong to the category of the royal inscriptions that records the names and achievements of the ruling Chandella king Dhaṅga. As mentioned by the earlier scholar, the hypothesis of another son of Dhaṅga, *i.e.* Nīradhi, whose name is not known from any other sources, appears unsubstantiated. The contents of the inscription further clarify that it was a memorial inscription and records the feeling of Mahāmata, a loving father who wanted to preserve the memory of Nīradhi, his deceased son in the form of a portrait-sculpture for the future.

## TEXT

1. *Om<sup>6</sup>āsiddhaisyān<sup>7</sup>dhipomānyaḥ satām-sālīti<sup>8</sup>visru(śru)taḥ/adyāpi visa(śa)dā  
yasya kīrtirbhramati bhūtale//[1] ttata<sup>9</sup>-*
2. *jñō<sup>10</sup>dharmmasambhṛitiroṣittāmḍhyodrardasā<sup>11</sup>savaḥ/saṃpadājjitavitto<sup>12</sup>sogūṇa-  
śī<sup>13</sup>lālayonaghaḥ//[2] tasya ma-*
3. *hāmateḥ sūnurvabhūva viśadāśayaḥ/sunītiśchārutādhārovaśīkṛita  
dhanādhipaḥ//[3] nīradhiḥ saṃjñayāta<sup>14</sup>*
4. *khyāto yaso(śo)vyāpta jagatrayaḥ/ prañetā dharmmamārggāṇām bhavyānām cha  
śikhāmaṇiḥ//[4] vibhūtyābhrūṇa-*
5. *hāyena va(ba)listyāgena nirjitaḥ/sthairyeṇa nirjito merur<sup>15</sup>gāmbhīryeṇa  
mahodadhiḥ//[5] sradhiyastasya saṃjñā<sup>16</sup>-*
6. *to<sup>17</sup>vra<sup>18</sup>dhānaṃ dītanamnvayaḥ<sup>19</sup>/sarvva-sā(śā)stra<sup>20</sup>-kalābhijñonenāggo-  
nīti<sup>21</sup>kovidah//[6] rupaṭāt<sup>22</sup>lakṣaṇopeto vidām mānyām<sup>23</sup>*
7. *vitakṣaḥ(kṣa)ṇaḥ<sup>24</sup>vapuṣmān suṃdarākāraśchitta janmākhayaṃ<sup>25</sup>bhuvi//[7]  
tasmin divaṃgate prītyāstamau pitrā manoharaḥ kāritaṃ dṛiṣṭakāmena tasya  
rupaṃmanīṣiṇā//[8] saṃ 1053<sup>26</sup>*

### Summary of the Inscribed Text and the Concluding Remark

In the first and second verses, the virtue, piety and eminence of Mahāmata are recorded whose spotless fame roams on the earth, supports religion, provide religious opportunity to all, who is pacificator and replete with prosperity. The next verse (3) states the values of Mahāmata's highly accomplished son Nīradhi, who was possessor of clear idea, good policy and wealth. Verse 4 says that he was known by the name Nīradhi, a producer of religious ways and whose fame spread in all the three worlds. The meaning of his name 'nīradhi' or ocean is interestingly referred to in the fifth verse of the inscription, describing him as solemn like sea. Verses 5 and 6 compare his quality with epic persons. Nīradhi resembled Bāli in sacrifice, was equated with ocean in profundity and was stable as the abode of the god. In other words, he is said to have religious merits, good qualities, high learning and proficient in ethics. The merits of the donor's family also remain

mentioned. Next verse (7) says that Nīradhi was handsome, endowed with auspicious marks, honoured by learned, and happened to be a wise man on the earth. The last verse (8) tells that after the untimely death of Nīradhi, his stately image was caused to be made by his father with a desire to see him.

This re-consideration of the image-inscription refutes the hypothesis of a second son of the Chandella ruler Dhaṅga. The actual date of the inscription is also forty years later than what has been suggested earlier. Erroneous propositions based on improper reading of the most reliable evidence of our past do often lead to wrong assertions. The inscription under discussion is important for the study of the context of a certain commemorative portrait sculpture commissioned by a wealthy donor, none other than his loving father. A proper decipherment of many similar epigraphical source materials would certainly bring to light an entire range of historical facts and illuminating passages of social chronicle.

#### References:

1. Jai Prakash, 2014, 'Khajuraho Stone Inscription of Dhaṅga: Vikrama 1013', *Studies in Indian Epigraphy* 40, pp.78-83. The Epigraphical Society of India, Mysore.
2. *Ibid.*, p.80.
3. *Ibid.*, p.81, line 1.
4. *Ibid.*, p.80.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Expressed by symbol. Jai Prakash reads *siddham*.
7. Jai Prakash reads *āsītvai Dhām(Dham)ga(gā)*.
8. Jai Prakash reads *Mālīdhi(ti)*.
9. Jai Prakash reads *tū(tu) dhva*.
10. Jai Prakash reads *jjo(jo)*.
11. Jai Prakash reads *dyaudrarddsā(dardā)*.
12. Jai Prakash reads *jitavito*.
13. Jai Prakash reads *khi(lī)*.

14. Jai Prakash reads *sañjñāya ....*
15. Jai Prakash reads *meka(loko)*.
16. Jai Prakash reads *saj(jj)ā-*.
17. Jai Prakash reads *khyā(khyaḥ)*.
18. Jai Prakash reads *pra*.
19. Jai Prakash reads *dāt(tu)ranvayaḥ*.
20. Jai Prakash reads *sarvvaṃsu*.
21. Jai Prakash reads *kalābhīrjñānena(ābhijñāḥ) paravyānīti*.
22. Jai Prakash reads *rūpavān*.
23. Jai Prakash reads *mānyo*.
24. Jai Prakash reads *vichakṣaṇaḥ*.
25. Jai Prakash reads *sthitajanmā vayanī*.
26. Jai Prakash reads the date 1013.

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