



## Sri Sri Nilamadhava of Kantilo

*Geeta Devi*

Kantilo is a big village of the ex-state of Khandapara, situated on the south bank of the river Mahanadi and on the ancient route of Jagannath Sadak, which served as an important link between Cuttack and Sambalpur both on the roadways and waterways.

The very geographical situation for the place makes it a commercial centre for traders. Apart from the trade goods like salt, spices, tobacco, cotton, oil seeds and molasses, Kantilo trades with brass and bell metal utensils which are its own native products.

Several theories have cropped up through ages to justify the place name of Kantilo. The last part of the word, 'Lo' may be a reduced form of the Sanskrit word 'Lava'. 'Lava' refers to low and deep river bed which helps in navigation. Colloqually this is spoken as 'Lo'. We can cite some other place names ending in 'Lo' like Sailo, Sarilo, Jharilo etc.

The other part of the word 'Kanti' refers to old and broken part of the bell metal. Production of bell metal commodities play a key role in the native trade of Kantilo.

Some other suppositions refer to the fact that the nearby hills and mountains of Kantilo are full of thorny bushes (Kanta) and thorny fruits (Kantei Koli). However this supposition seems not very convincing.

'Kanti' is a race name which still exists at Kantilo. They were a trading class (Vaishya Vanika) previously known as 'Sadhavas'. They were entrusted with the duty of collecting taxes from the navigators and traders passing through Kantilo on the river Mahanadi. They were also acting as official in charge of the Ghat. The race name 'Kanti' is derived from their official designation called 'Kanta Adhikari'. 'Kanta' refers to the instrument of measurement. The weighing balance used by these Kanta Adhikaris was known as 'Kanti'.

Molasses, a sugarcane product was usually exported from this 'ghat' to the hinterland. Molasses was measured by 'Banas' (an earthen container). A particular size of Bana was also called 'Kanti'. So both for the measurement of weight and volume 'Kantis' were used and the persons using these measuring rods were subsequently known as 'Kantis'.

The 'Kantis' performed these 'Ghat' duties in peace time only. During war time they acted as second liners of the war group. They were adept in the use of Topas, Kamanas and Dhanusaras. If required, they were used directly in war, else they were to supply 'Rasad' (rations) to the war camps. For all these duties they were enjoying 'jagirs' (land grants) from the rulers of Orissa. This class was not only rich but also very influential in the society.



In the northern bank of the river Mahanadi the Nandas were ruling the Airavata Mandala. Airavata Mandala comprised of the southern part of Dhenkanal, western part of Cuttack and the western end of Nayagarh. (Das p.144). From the annals of Narasinghpur Raj family it is known that they belong to this Airavata Mandala. (Mishra p.240). These Nandas were presumed to be feudatories of the Bhaumakaras. (Panigrahi p.142) That 'Kantilo' was under the Bhanjas who were feudatories of the Bhaumakaras is testified by the recent discovery of copper plate grants of the Bhanjas using the Bhaumakara era from an adjacent village called 'Dhan Changada'.

In the Talmul Plate of Dhruvananda Deva of the Nanda Dynasty (1029 A.D) we see the placename of a village called 'Kantalanda'. Kantalanda is stated as situated on the bank of the river Mahanadi. (Panigrahi p.142)

It seems plausible that by the passage of time this village 'Kantalanda' is reduced to Kantilo in the line of Sailo, Sarilo etc and an influential section of this place (Kanta Adhikaris) use this place name as their race name to focus their superiority and dominance in the society.

Sri Sri Nilamadhava Jew is the presiding deity of this place. According to historian Prof. N.K. Bose in Pal-lahara, the Savaras worship a blue rock in a Sal grove (Shorea Robusta). They call it 'Nil Madhava'. (Mishra p.5) In Kantilo also, we see the presence of 'Savaras' in a place adjacent to it called 'Kalia Palli' who demanded themselves as descendants of Savar Viswa Vasu. According to them Viswa Vasu was worshipping 'Kalia Madhava'. (Mallick p.120)

Taking into consideration the temple architecture, Pt. Binayak Mishra places it in the 9th century A.D. (Mishra p.242). Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahi maintains that the shrine belongs to an earlier date than the temple of the deity. (Panigrahi p.456)

We see the twin temple of Nilamadhava and Siddheswara in Gandharadi, the territory of the Bhanjas. Here also at Kantilo we see two temples close to each other, one for Sri Nilamadhava and the other for Sri Siddheswara in the temple complex of Nilamadhava.

But the iconographic features of Sri Nilamadhava of Kantilo differs from that of the deity of Gandharadi. In Gandharadi the deity holds four Ayudhas in His four hands namely Sankha (conch), Chakra (wheel), Gada (mace) and Padma (lotus). In Kantilo the deity holds only two Ayudhas namely Sankha and Chakra in His upper two hands. The lower hands rests on the heads of His two consorts, Laxmi and Saraswati.

This is no doubt a unique feature of the deity at Kantilo which testifies an earlier origin.

Another such image of Vishnu where His two hands (back) rest on the heads of Laxmi and Saraswati is found from Bihar and now preserved in the National Museum at Kolkata (Chowla - P-147). This iconic feature alongwith the roughness in the making of the body of the idol speak of its anteriority.

On 20th January 2003 some copper plate grants were unearthed from the western side of the village Dhanchangada, which includes Kalia Palli and itself being very close to Kantilo. From the reading of the plates by the epigraphist of the State Museum Miss Bharati Pal, it is known that they were issued by Satrubhanja (I), son of Silabhanja and grandson of Bidyadhara Bhanja from Vanjulabaka, the second capital city of the Bhanjas. Satrubhanja depicts himself as 'Parama Vaisnava'. The Bhauma Sambat used in this plate corroborates to 939 A.D.

Though Satrubhanja depicts himself as Parama Vaisnava he has used the invocatory verses in praise of Lord Siva as usually used by



the Bhanjas. Again, when his father and grand father are Param Maheswaras, his son some times depicted himself as Parama Maheswara and sometimes as Parama Vaisnava. However, whether they were Maheswaras or Vaisnavas, they were good patrons of both Saivism and Vaisnavism.

The other name of Satrubhanja was 'Gandhat'. Present Gandharadi is the reduced from the Gandhatpati, which according to Dr. D.C. Sircar is apparently named after Satrubhanja Gandhat where we see the twin temple of Nilmadhava and Siddheswar (Panigrahi p.105). Thus Satrubhanja who has created the town (Gandharadi) might have constructed there the twin temple. We may also surmise that the temple of Nilmadhava of Kantilo might have been constructed by the same ruler.

However there are two other contenders of the Bhanjas for the construction of the said temple at Kantilo. They are the Bhaumakaras and the Somavamsis.

The first three kings of the Bhaumakara dynasty were Buddhists and the others excepting one queen Tribhuban Mahadevi (I) were all Saivites. The temples, the credit of the construction of which is given to the Bhaumakaras are all dedicated to either Siva or Shakti. These temples are generally placed in the eighth century A.D. In the ninth century A.D., this royal house had experienced instability and decadence. (Panigrahi p.384).

Defeating the Bhaumakaras and their feudatories the Bhanjas, the Somavamsi king Yayati (I) occupied Orissa in about 931 A.D. (Panigrahi - p.86). Naturally they must have taken some more years to consolidate their position in the Odra countries.

Their initial years of occupation were not very peaceful. They were not only getting resistance from the Bhanjas, but also threat of invasion from outside, from the Kalachuries. They made their position firm only at the time of Yayati Kesari (II) who ruled from 1025 A.D. to 1040 A.D., a period too late for the construction of the temple of Sri Nilamadhava of Kantilo.

Sri R.N. Mishra who is a 'Sevak' of Sri Nilamadhava and also an employee of the local college told this author on 9th March 1999 that Khanjaa (ration) in terms of Rice, Dal and Ghee was coming from the Bhanjas for the offerings of the deity which had been ceased since last eight to ten years.

From all these evidences it may be conjectured that the Bhanjas and most probably Satrubhanja I who was a Parama Vaisnava, might have constructed the temple of Nilamadhava.

#### References :

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Geeta Devi is the Principal of Utkalmani Gopabandhu Smruti Mahavidyalaya, Sakhigopal, Puri.