

PARONOMASIA IN ‘AJAYATASA’: REVISITING AN EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE FROM KANAGANAHALLI

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ABSTRACT

A one line epigraph from a panel of the Mahā Stūpa in Kanaganahalli records bequeathing the megalopolis of Ujjain to ‘Ajayatasā’ by King Puḷumāvi. A careful scrutiny of the contents of this peculiar epigraph when corroborated with the data we already possess pertaining to the Western Kshatrapas and the Sātavāhanas, will reveal that while the identification of King Puḷumāvi with Vāsishṭhīputra Puḷumāvi seems axiomatic, the connotation and denotation of ‘Ajayatasā’ can only be understood if the use of a rhetorical device in this word is accepted. The present paper seeks to accentuate the employment of a double entendre in the word ‘Ajayatasā’ which will make our comprehension of the epigraph under consideration and of the two aforementioned dynasties more intelligible.

Keywords: Kanaganahalli, Ujjain, Ajayatasā, Puḷumāvi, Western Kshatrapas, Sātavāhanas, double entendre

The plethora of sculptural illustrations on the Mahā Stūpa of Kanaganahalli includes a rather peculiar scene. A panel depicts two kings with their retinues, one of whom is pouring holy water from the water pitcher into the outstretched right hand of the other, symbolising a change of ownership.^[1] The label epigraph accompanying the sculptural ensemble reads : *Rāya Puḷumāvi Ajayatasā Ujeni deti*^[2] (King Puḷumāvi is handing over Ujjayini to Ajayata). King Puḷumāvi, according to the Memoir, appears to have arrived at Ujjain and bequeathed the territory of Ujjain to Ajayata (indefeatable).^[3] While King Puḷumāvi is correctly identified with Vāsishṭhīputra Puḷumāvi, the son and successor of the illustrious Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi,^[4] the interpretation of the sculptural ensemble and the inscription is seemingly unsatisfactory. The convolution pivots around the word ‘Ajayatasā’. As mentioned in the Memoir, there is no known king contemporaneous to Vāsishṭhīputra Puḷumāvi named Ajayata.^[5] Ajayatasā cannot be taken to mean undefeatable (as given in the memoir)^[7] or unconquered for the glorification by the Sātavāhanas of any monarch other than their own is impossible. OV Hinüber stating that the second king’s name is not mentioned, translates the word Ajayata as ‘non-victorious’.^[6] The omission of the king’s name is untenable for then the inscription loses some of its relevance for while the subject’s name is mentioned along with the object, the recipient’s (indirect object) name would also have been stated. Hinüber is, though, correct in taking the negative nuance of the term ‘Ajayatasā’. The word ‘Ajayatasā’ cannot have a positive connotation, for the glorification of the arch nemeses of the Sātavāhanas in their own territory is inconceivable. Hinüber identifies the recipient king in the sculptural depiction as Chasṭana.^[8] Hinüber’s discernment of the recipient king’s lineage is also on point. The receiver belonged to the Kārdamaka bloodline but could not have been Chasṭana. Had the composer of the inscription meant Chasṭana, he would have used his name in some form. Hinüber believes that Puḷumāvi’s opponent’s name is not

mentioned because it would have increased the opponent's fame.^[9] If the motive was the impediment of adulation of the opponent then the inscription and the sculptural panel would have been altogether omitted from the Sātavāhana stupa. The fact that the Sātavāhanas lost some of their territories in the north to the Kārdamakas must have been common knowledge throughout the Sātavāhana Kingdom. Puḷumāvi's subjects would have also known that the monarch who has overpowered their king is Chasṭana. So mentioning his name would have neither increased nor decreased Chasṭana's fame in the Sātavāhana territory. Infact, the purpose of the inscription is to accentuate Puḷumāvi's generosity, so the mention of Chasṭana's name would not have affected that motive. We can also reject Hinüber's view that Puḷumāvi was an almost defeated king who had surrendered Ujjain to ensure peace in his territory and had tried ex post to convert defeat if not into victory, but at least into an act of generosity towards his enemy by stating that he hands over Ujjain to the Non-victorious.^[10] Either Puḷumāvi was victorious after a long struggle with the Kārdamakas or there was a near stalemate in the battle with Puḷumāvi having a slight upper hand. If Puḷumāvi was an almost defeated king who was surrendering a part of his territory to preserve his independence, then by presenting his defeat in the garb of generosity would have exposed his hypocrisy to his subjects who as Hinüber points out must have been aware of his misfortunes. Thus, Puḷumāvi who after his father's death could have lost Avanti in the earlier part of his reign, must have been successful in regaining control over the region. It is rather axiomatic that for Puḷumāvi to donate Ujjain, it had to be under his possession. Puḷumāvi, following a more pragmatic approach, must have realised that though Ujjain is a prestigious urban complex but permanent control over it proves taxing leading to continuous skirmishes with the Kārdamakas. So, Puḷumāvi exchanged tranquility on his northern frontier for Ujjain and shifted his concentration to conquering and consolidating territories in the south of his dominion. The magnanimity of this victorious king who gave away a piece of his territory to ensure peace for his northern subjects was recorded at the well visible upper drum of the Adhālaka Mahācetiya for people to admire. Furthermore, the memoir's claim that the 'highly decked' recipient monarch 'assertively receives the gift from Puḷumāvi' and in contrast Puḷumāvi is moderately ornamented making the donation in humility and expressions of submission.^[11] Firstly, the depiction of 'assertiveness' or 'supremacy' of any other king while simultaneously showing King Puḷumāvi with an 'expression of submission' wouldn't find place in the Sātavāhana dominion. Secondly, the quantification of ornamentation in this illustration cannot be taken as a measure of political standing. It is noteworthy that Puḷumāvi is shown wearing an ekāvalī.^[12] *Harshacharita* reveals that King Harsha was given an ekāvalī, the antidote of all sufferings for all beings by the Buddhist saint Divākaramitra, which had somehow come into his hands through the succession of pupils presumably from Nāgārjuna or his pupils.^[13] According to a legend, Nāgārjuna had been taken to the realm of the serpent king, where he was given ekāvalī and upon returning to the human world, he offered it to the king of Sātavāhana who was "the lord of three oceans".^[14] Divākaramitra put this 'gem' on Harsha's shoulders, thus indicating that he will be an 'emperor'.^[15] Ekāvalī, worn by kings, seems to have an imperial significance.

Regarding the identification of the king at the receiving end of Puḷumāvi's generosity, we propose that the inscription uses double entendre (Ślesha) here. In the garb of the term 'Ajayatasā' the name of the recipient king 'Jaya' has been mentioned, while as an adjective the whole word can be taken to describe the recipient king as being 'non-victorious' to accentuate the fact that Ujjain was exchanging hands not due to a Kārdamaka victory but as a result of Sātavāhana pragmatism. Wordplay is fairly common in ancient epigraphs. An ingenious suggestion had been made by Jagannath Agrawal who pointed out the use of double entendre in the undated Pehowa inscription where the word *parabala* can be translated as a common noun meaning 'the military force of the enemy', it can be equally well interpreted as a proper noun, referring to the Rāshtrakūṭa feudatory ruling at Malwa.^[16] If we accept that the composer of the inscription has coded the name 'Jaya' in the word 'Ajayatasā' then the identification of the recipient king with

Jayadāman remains to be the solitary possibility. The omission of any sort of title for the recipient lends credibility to the fact that he wasn't Chashtana (the ruling monarch of the Kārdamakas) but Jayadāman who, albeit the de facto king during Chashtana's later years, did not officially hold the position of a crowned head. Once this identification is accepted, the sequential narrative of the few decades before the composition of this inscription can be reconstructed.

Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi was the King of Ākarāvanti (Mālwā) among other territories as in discernible from the epigraph of his mother belonging to his son's reign.^[17] It is safe to presume that Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi held these territories at the time of his death and his son inherited all the provinces from his father. The contemporaneity of Puḷumāvi and Chashtana is a well established fact and so is the Kārdamaka control over Ujjain.^[18] Chashtana who was a mere Kshatrapa in 89 AD,^[19] his elevation to the status of a Mahākshatrapa must have occurred after the Kārdamakas conquered the Sātavāhana territories in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Ākarāvanti from Puḷumāvi. Jayadāman's appointment to the office of Kshatrapa would have followed Chashtana's elevation to the position of Mahākshatrapa. There was probably a prolonged struggle between Puḷumāvi and Chashtana.^[20] During the last years of Chashtana's reign when he must have been extremely old after a lengthy rule he would have been just a nominal monarch. Jayadāman, with his seat in Ujjain, must have held the reins of the administration and led the attack on the Sātavāhanas. It is possible that Puḷumāvi succeeded in gaining an upper hand by temporarily occupying Ujjain but opted for a more practical decision. Knowing that Ākarāvanti proved difficult to hold and for years was the bone of contention between the two powers he agreed for a treaty where he exchanged peace on his northern frontier for Ujjain. It is possible that at the same time a matrimonial alliance was secured with the marriage of Puḷumāvi's younger brother, the Sātavāhana crown prince, to Kārdamaka's crown prince's granddaughter.^[21] The giving away of Ujjain by Puḷumāvi must have established harmony between the two powers and secured the northern border allowing Puḷumāvi to conquer and consolidate territories in the south of his dominion. This must have happened during the last few years of Chashtana's reign when Jayadāman was the Kshatrapa as opposed to his son Rudradāman and his grand-daughter was eligible for marriage.^[22] We place the bequeathing of Ujjain in c. 125-129 AD.

Notes and References

1. K.P. Poonacha, *Excavations at Kanaganahalli (ASI Memoir No.106)*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 2011, Plate CXII A, p. 418. Also see *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol VIII, p. 48, n.2 for the parallel examples where the pouring of water on the outstretched right hand of the recipient denotes that a donation is being made.
2. *Ibid.*, Ins. No. A. 99, p. 463
3. *Ibid.*, p. 303
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. O.V. Hinüber, 'Buddhist Texts and Buddhist Images: New Evidence from Kanaganahalli (Karnataka/ India)' in *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism*, Vol XIX, Soka University, Tokyo, 2016, p. 15
7. K.P. Poonacha, *op.cit.*, p. 303
8. O.V. Hinüber, *op.cit.*, p. 16
9. *Ibid.*, p. 17
10. *Ibid.*, p. 16

11. K.P. Poonacha, *op.cit.*, p. 304
12. *Ibid.*, p. 304
13. S. Ichimura, *Buddhist Critical Spirituality*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001, p. 64
14. *Ibid.*
15. A.K. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, Vol. 4, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994 (reprint), p. 23.
16. J. Agrawal, *Researches in Indian Epigraphy and Numismatics*, Sundeep Prakashan,, Delhi, p. 115
17. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VIII, p. 61
18. A.M. Shastri, *The Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas: A Historical Framework*, Dattsons, Nagpur, 1998, p. 71
19. V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1981, Part II, pp. 115-116
20. The conquests of territories like Surāshtra, Kukura and Anūpa would have preceded that of Ākarāvanti. These territories are mentioned in the Nasik Cave Inscription of Queen Balasirī as being part of Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi's empire (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VIII, p. 61). They find mention again in the Junagarh inscription of Rudradāman as being under the Kārdamaka king (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VIII, p. 47). These territories must have been annexed while Chasṭana was ruling. After the Kārdamakas had succeeded in conquering Ujjain, it is possible that Jayadāman (the crown prince), was placed in charge of the territory of Ākarāvanti. In later military engagements with Vāsishthīputra Puḷumāvi, Ujjain could have exchanged hands multiple times. Ultimately, Vāsishthīputra Puḷumāvi, tired of employing his forces in the northern frontiers, donated Ujjain to Jayadāman and diverted his focus towards the southern dominions.
21. Vāsishthīputra Sātakarṇi was a son-in-law of Rudradaman. (vide A.M. Shastri, *op.cit.*, p. 72)
22. The Andhau Inscription of year 52 (130 AD) mentions Chasṭana and, associated with him, his grandson Rudradāman. (V.V. Mirashi, *op.cit.*, pp. 116-119) Jayadāman must have died before 130 AD.