



समाप्तः॥ ३ ॥ नभा  
अन्नमाना ॥ इमा  
यश्चानश्चान्नादृशः प्रत्यक्षात्  
सालीमनुयायिधामाया विदुः  
वाह्यश्चान्दधेदानीन्तन्तु  
यश्चरुमाध्यायाश्च विम

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# ART & REVIEW

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বাংলার পুরাতত্ত্ব গবেষণাকেন্দ্র  
কলকাতা পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ভারত

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# Purāṇic Religions of Pāla Period : An Inscriptinal Analysis Shawttiki Ojha\*

## Introduction :

Bengal and Bihar are the integral part of cultural history of India. Historically the land of Bengal and Bihar has had its own distinct religious identity. The region-specific geographical location, geological settings and climate conditions are important sources to understand the political, economic, religious especially cultural history of ancient Bengal. Bengal curved out a distinct geographical location for itself in the eastern frontier of the Indian Subcontinent as early as possible. As Niharranjan ray puts it, '...at one extreme are the very high mountains at the other the sea; and on both sides the hard hilly country; within all the land is plain'.<sup>1</sup> In ancient times, many dynasties ruled in Bengal such as Mauryas, Guptas and many local rulers also enriched that place. One of the most important dynasties which ruled in early-medieval Bengal among them is 'Pāla' dynasty. From the second half of 8<sup>th</sup> century CE to the first half of 12<sup>th</sup> century CE they ruled over Bengal especially in northern Bengal. Pāla ruler Dharmapāla directly ruled the present day Bihar also. In this article I want to highlight the spread of purāṇic religions of Pāla period by the help of their many inscriptions. We have more than seventy-five inscriptions of Pāla kings which tell about their kingdom and also mention their cultural history. From many inscriptions and literary sources we come to know that the Pāla kings were greatly attached with Buddhism. Their maximum copper-plate charters describe them as '*Paramasaugata*' which is a Buddhist title. Sometimes in copper-plate charters we find '*Dharmachakra*' symbol of Buddhism. But beside this the Pāla kings were also interested to spread the purāṇic religions like Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaktism. Actually they were the realistic kings that wanted to maintain a religious harmony in their territory. For this reason the purāṇic gods and goddesses, tales of epics and *purānas*, descriptions of Hindu holy places or *tīrthas* etc are mentioned in their inscriptions. Also the contemporary literary text especially '*Rāmacarita*' of Saṅdhyaśākhā Nandī clearly supports this view of popularity of purāṇic religions in Pāla period at Bengal.

## Inscriptinal Descriptions :

At first we are focusing one of the famous copper plates of Pāla kings are Khālimpura copper plate assigned to king Dharmapāla (ca. 770-810 CE).<sup>2</sup> The first ruler named Gopāla of this dynasty mainly was the patron of Mahāyāna Buddhism. But Khālimpura copper plate belonged to the next king Dharmapāla mentions about the development of Vaiṣṇavism at that time. It was issued in his thirty-two regnal year. This copper plate is found from the village of Khālimpura near Gaur in the Māldā district of Bhāgalapura division. This inscription tells that the devout worshipper *Sugata* (Buddha), *Parameśvara*, *Paramabhaṭṭā raka*, *Mahārājā dhirāja* Dharmapāla at the request of his *Mahāsāmanta* Nārāyaṇavarmana which was communicated to him by the *Dūtaka* Yuvarāja Tribhūvanapāla, granted four villages to a temple of a god Naṅṅa-Nārāyaṇa founded by *Mahāsāmantū dhipati* Nārāyaṇavarmana at Śubhasthalī. The grant as already stated was made for a temple of the god Naṅṅa-Nārāyaṇa or more fully to the holy lord installed there associated with the *Laṭa* brāhmaṇas and other attendants who wait upon him.<sup>3</sup> But the identification of Naṅṅa-Nārāyaṇa is debatable here. According to Sukumar

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