

MEDIEVAL ODISHA

Purusottamadeva (1467 - 1497 CE)

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 7, 2017 • Updated June 6, 2024 • 11 min read



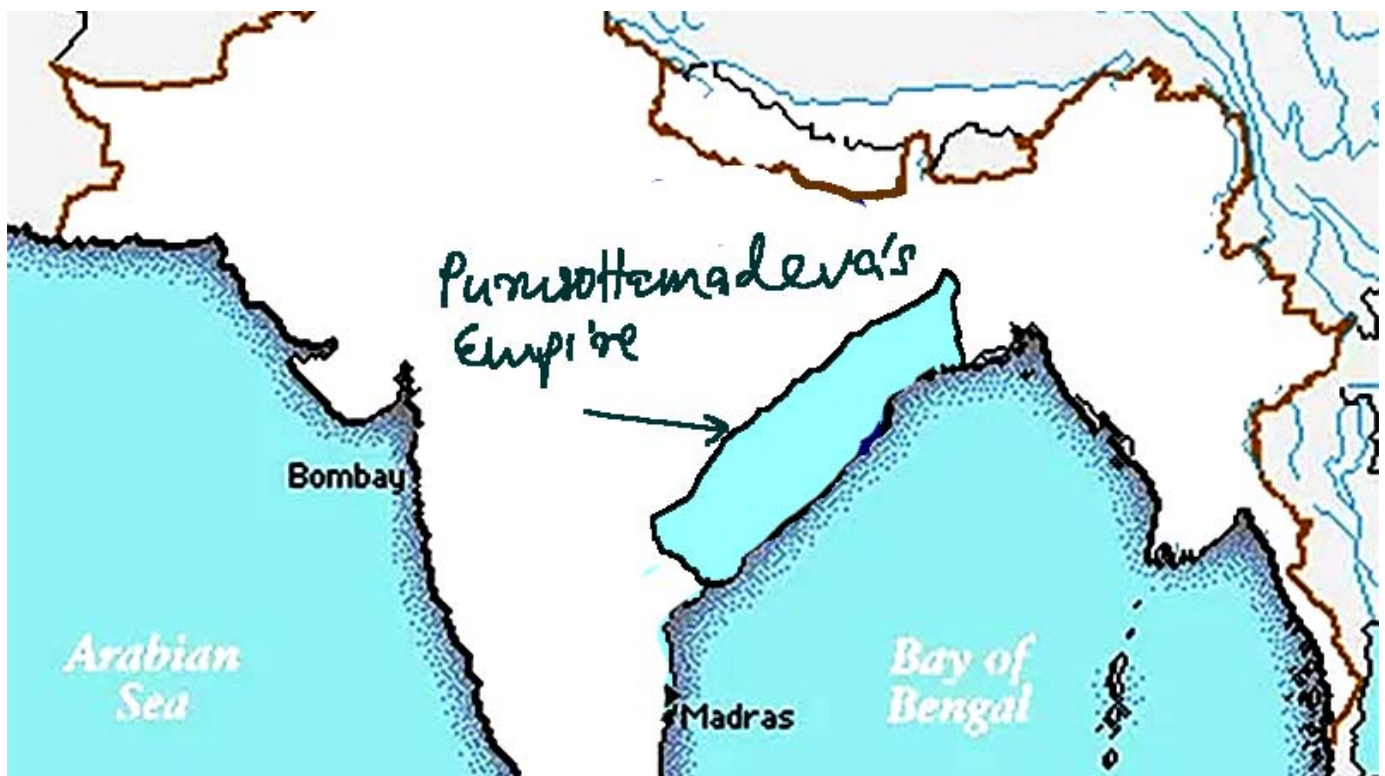
Purusottamadeva was a one-of-a-kind personality among Odisha's Suryavamsi Gajapati kings. His success, in all of its manifestations, was multi-faceted, unique, and effective. As Kapilendradeva had noted, his assumption of power in 1467 CE. by the 'Will of God Jagannath' precipitated a fratricidal war with his older brother Hamvira. Throughout Kapilendradeva's reign, his eldest son Hamvira accompanied him on nearly all of his expeditions and brought him laurel. Kapilendradeva rejected his claim to the throne, possibly due to the influence of Purusottama's mother, who was a Phula-Vivahi wife (a position between queens and concubines) of Kapilendradeva. Given that Hamvira's legitimate claim to the throne of Odisha had been pushed to the sidelines, he proceeded to

settle his score with Purusottamadeva.

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According to Ferishta's accounts, Hamvira attacked the Gajapati kingdom in the south in collaboration with the Bahamani king Muhammad Shah III. Muhammad Shah had dispatched Malika Hussain Bheiry to assist Hamvira in her campaign. Hamvira took control of Kondapalli and then marched on Cuttack, where he defeated Purusottamadeva. Hamvira was installed as the Gajapati on Odisha's throne. Taking Ferishta's accounts into account, as well as the Saravati Vilasa's version, Subramanyam supports this fact, as no inscription of Purusottamadeva is found in any part of Odisha between 1472 and 1476 CE. He continues by stating that Hamvira exiled his brother Purusottama to the forest and seized the throne. When he was unable to obtain assistance from the Bahamani Sultan in connection with the outbreak of a great famine in the Bahamani kingdom, he was forced to make a deal with his younger brother Purusottama. Profs. R. D. Banerjee and K.C. Panigrahi take a contrary position to Dr. Subramanyam and reject the Muslim accounts of Ferishta. Prof. Panigrahi asserts that there is no evidence of Hamvira's rule in Odisha between 1472 and 1476 CE. Furthermore, if Hamvira had already enthroned himself as Odisha's Gajapati king, what was the point of seeking assistance from Bahamani Sultan to maintain his position after driving Purusottamadeva into the forest?



Prof. Banerjee and Prof. Panigrahi's positions, on the other hand, cannot be accepted on three grounds. To begin, why is there no evidence to support Hamvira's rule? Perhaps this is because, upon reclaiming the throne, Purusottamadeva, through his sincere efforts, obliterated all evidences pertaining to Hamvira's reign period. Second, because the people of Odisha placed a high premium on God Jagannath, they took care not to mention Hamvira, who had a legitimate claim to Odisha as Purusottama was declared Gajapati by Lord Jagannath's will. Thirdly, when Hamvira realised he would lose the support of the people of Odisha as a result of their fear of God Jagannath, he decided to make a deal with his brother. Of course, he did so after being defeated by Purusottama, who also permitted Hamvira to rule over Khimindi as a vassal. Perhaps Purusottama never intended to reflect either his discomfort at the hands of Hamvira or the latter's defeat at his hands, as both facts were corroborated. The name of Hamvira does not appear in Raghudeva Narendra's genealogical list of the Suryavamsis included in the copper plate grant. Perhaps, beginning with Purusottamadeva, a sincere and deliberate attempt was made to omit the name of Hamvira from Kapilendradeva's pedigree as the founder of the Suryavamsi Gajapati rule in Odisha.

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Conquests and Campaigns

Kondavidu and Rajahmundry are reclaimed

Saluva Narasimha had occupied a large portion of Odishan territory, extending his sway as far north as Masulipatam, sometime before 1476 CE, by taking advantage of the civil war between Purusottamadeva and Hamvira. Meanwhile, Rajahmundry and Kondapalli had been conquered by Sultan Muhammad Shah III of Bahamani. Purusottamadeva marched towards Rajahmundry with the fort of Kondavidu already in the Sultan of Bahamani's possession.

According to Ferishta's accounts, Purusottama was forced to sue for peace after the Sultan was unable to reclaim the fort and offered the Sultan 25 elephants as a token of friendship. Following the expulsion of the Odishan army from Rajahmundry and Kondavidu, the Sultan of Bahamani appointed Muslim governors there when he desired to exact revenge on Saluva Narasimha, who stood silently by as Purusottama marched to meet him. When Muhammad Shah III was encamping at Malur following the suppression of a revolt at Kondavidu, he received a forged letter from Nizam-UI-Mulk Hassan Bahry stating that Mahmud Gawan, his trusted general and well-wisher of Bahamani Sultan, had requested the assistance of Purusottamadeva against him. He became enraged and issued an order to execute Mahmud Gawan, which was immediately carried out. Following his death, the plot was discovered, and the Sultan died in 1482 CE, leaving the empire in chaos and confusion. Mahmud Shah's accession to the throne of the Bahamani kingdom at the age of twelve provided an opportunity for Purusottama to reclaim the lost territories in the south. Purusottama exploited the Mal-administration of Bahamani and easily conquered Rajahmundry and Kondavidu in early 1484 CE.

Recovery of Udayagiri-rajya

Purusottama sought to annex Udayagiri-rajya, which was in the possession of Odisha under Kapilendradeva and had been occupied by Saluva Narasimha during the civil war between Hamvira and Purusottama, in which the latter was entangled. Purusottama marched to Udayagiri with his army and defeated and imprisoned Saluva Narasimha, who bought his

freedom by surrendering Udayagiri and offering his daughter to Purusottama, who is associated with the 'Kanchi-Kaveri legend'. Though no precise date or year for Udayagiri's occupation is known, it is known with a reasonable degree of certainty. It is possible to assert that the task was accomplished sometime between 1489 and 1490 CE. The Sanskrit epic Prabodhachandrodaya mentions that Purusottamadeva received assistance from Vira Vasava or Basavabhupati during the conquest of Udayagiri. Additionally, the Sarasvati Vilasam recounts how Saluva Narasimha was captured alive during the battle and bought peace by surrendering Udayagiri-rajya to Purusottarnadeva. Purusottamadeva is never seen on the battlefield following the conquest of Udayagiri. He attempted to establish peace within his kingdom through religious and constructive works. He spent his time conversing with eminent scholars. Purusottamadeva attained enlightenment in 1497 CE.

Purusottamadeva's Estimation

To put Purusottamadeva into perspective, he was a great diplomat. He immediately abolished the Chaukidari tax, which had previously been imposed on Brahmins. As evidenced by his Jagannath temple inscription, he also renewed previous grants to them. He used his father Kapilendradeva's favour, God Jagannath's divine blessings, and the Brahmins' sympathy to legitimise his position on the Suryavamsi throne. Purusottama, like his father Kapilendradeva, was an opportunist. By exploiting the Bahamani Kingdom's weakness, he attacked and reclaimed the Rajahmundry region and Kondavidu fort. He also rescued Saluva Narasimha's Udayagiri-rajya.

Odisha's boundary did not expand during his reign. He was not the first-rate hero that his father Kapilendradeva was. Purusottama was a liberal administrator. His reign was tranquil, which fostered the growth of Odia literature. Neither the north nor the south attacked the Odishan Empire during his reign. This, without a doubt, brought happiness to his subjects, who breathed in a new air of tranquillity and peace. Though there was initial strife following his accession due to Hamvira's revolt, Purusottama quickly diplomatically resolved the issue and restored order within his empire. Purusottamadeva was an avid reader. He was an eminent scholar of Sanskrit. He is credited with the two Sanskrit lexicons Haravali and

Trikandasesam. Prof. P. Mukherjee informs us that the lexicographer Vandaghatiya Sarvananda cited these lexicons in his Tika Sarvasva. Purusottama is said to have composed abhmava Gitagovinda and Namamalika. Additionally, Fakir Chaini's Chaininka Chakada Pustaka, Arjuna Dasa's Kalpalata and Ramavibhaha, and Damodara's Rasakoili Chautisa were notable works in Odia during his reign period.

Purusottamadeva, like his father, was a builder. Purusottamadeva, according to legend, built the Sundara Madhava temple in Purusottamapur, Ganjam district. Tamma Raya, one of his vassals, installed an image of Gopala Krishna at Udayagiri during his reign period, which Krishnadevaraya had taken to Vijayanagara following his conquest of Udayagiri-rajya. Purusottamadeva was a devout individual. Apart from granting grants to Brahmins, he also arranged for the addition of new provisions to the Jagannath temple. He made gifts for the Siva deity's personal enjoyment and stage entertainments at Potavara. He gave away a village's revenue to defray the cost of offerings to the Simmachalam temple. Purusottamadeva, then, was a noble ruler. During his reign, the Gajapati empire experienced peace and stability.

Purusottama-Padmavati Episode

The Padmavati episode, also known as the Kanchi-Kaveri legend, continues to be a romantic episode among the Odia people to this day. Purusottama desired to marry Padmavati, the daughter of Kanchi's ruler Saluva Narasimha. Although Saluva Narasimha had consented to the marriage, his visit to Puri and observation of Purusottama's Chherapahanra (sweeping away dirt in front of the Gods' cars with a golden broom during the car festival) prompted the former to deny his daughter's marriage proposal to the latter. Purusottamadeva was enraged by this and led an expedition to Kanchi, but was defeated by Saluva Narasimha. This brought the king to his knees at the feet of God Jagannath, who instructed him in a dream to march towards Kanchi for the second time, with success guaranteed to kiss the feet of Purusottama. Purusottamadeva marched south, brimming with enthusiasm.

He had to come to a halt on the bank of Chilka lake at the prayer of Manika, a milkmaid, while continuing his galloping march. She related how two young soldiers of the king, one with a dark complexion and the other with a fair complexion, ate all the curd from her pot. When she demanded payment, they presented her with a ring stating that the Gajapati of Odisha, who was about to arrive on that route, would make the payment on their behalf. King Purusottama examined the ring and immediately recognised it as belonging to God Jagannath. His eyes were filled with joy as he founded a village near the lake named Manikapatana after the milkmaid's name. As is evident, Kanchi's king was defeated, and Purusottama dragged Padmavati to Odisha. He directed his minister to marry the princess to a Chandala (lower-born) in order to appease his wrath. The astute king's minister awaited an appropriate opportunity. Padmavati garlanded Purusottamadeva on the minister's instruction during the car festival, while the king was performing the work of a Chandala, i.e. Chhera pahanra. The king was powerless to refuse Padmavati as his queen.

Numerous scholars have accepted this legend as historical fact. However, a small number of scholars reject the legend as well. Almost all scholars recognise Saluva Narasimha as Kanchi's ruler. Of course, Chandragiri served as the political capital of Saluva and remained under the Vijayanagara empire. There was no place called Kanchi where Saluva Narasimha exercised his authority. According to Prof. K. C. Panigrahi, Chandragiri was a sacred site. It was so well-known for cultural activities that it was given the name Kanchi after the Pallava capital. Prof. Panigrahi argues that, just as Kapiendradeva conquered Bidar, Bahamani's capital, and renamed himself 'Kalavargesvara,' Chandragiri would have taken the place of Kanchi.

Prof. Panigrahi, while acknowledging the Padmavati episode's historicity, cites *Sarasvati vilasam*, in which Prataparaudra's mother is referred to as Rupamvika. He adds that the name of Saluva Narasimha's daughter may have been Rupamvika, which was changed to Padmini or Padmavati following the Odisha and other parts of the country tradition of changing the bride's name after marriage by groom's family members. Again, emphasis can be placed on the institution of Chherapahanra. According to some scholars, Purusottamadeva instituted it to demonstrate his boundless devotion to Jagannath's throne.

He took advantage of the situation created by his father Kapiendradeva. Purusottama desired to legalise Kapilendra's choice of Purusottama to the throne of Odisha by demonstrating his greater devotion to God Jagannath, who already held a unique position in the minds and hearts of the people of Odisha. However, this list should be taken with a grain of salt. It is a fact that Purusottama framed this storey via the temple's priests. The encounter between God Jagannath and Balarama and Manika, the milkmaid with a pot, is depicted in the Jagamohana of the God Jagannath temple. That scene could have been used by the Brahmins to rally the pilgrims behind Purusottama, who held the Brahmins in high regard. On the other hand, it is possible that Purusottama did not create the institution of Chherapahanra. It is possible that his father Kapiendradeva instituted it. As a usurper to the Gangas' throne, Kapilendra may have initiated this tradition of Chherapahanra in order to obliterate the bitter memory of the Odishan people in light of the Ganga theory of kingship, which placed the king in subordination to God Jagannath. Purusottamadeva fully capitalised on this tradition, which had perhaps been overlooked during the reign of Kapilendradeva. It was later popularised by Odia poets and writers.

Prof. K. C. Panigrahi, in his highly controversial Odia book *Sarala Sahitya Aitihasya Chitra*, connects the Kanchi-Kaveri legend to the Odia Mahabharata's Surekha-harana episode, which is fantastic and superfluous. Here, a straightforward question may be posed. When did the Sarala Mahabharata begin its composition? It is most emphatically during the reign of Kapilendradeva. So how is this Kanchi-Kaveri legend connected to the Surekha harana episode composed by poet Saraladasa during the reign of Kapilendradeva? Could the poet foresee Purusottamadeva's future activities from a distant past? Considering all of these facts, an objective observer can conclude that the romantic Padmavati episode is not historical fact. Purusottamadeva had framed it through the Puri temple priests (or Brahmins) in order to legitimise his position following his father Kapilendradeva's rejection of his eldest son Hamvira's claims. While the episode undoubtedly placed Purusottama in a subordinate position to the God and Brahmins, it was an impending necessity on the king's part to secure his position on the throne of the Gajapati Kings of Odisha.

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