

Lauhitya in Early Inscriptions of Kamarupa

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The river Lauhitya, later also known as Bharmaputra, is found mentioned in the inscriptions of the kings of ancient Kamarupa. These notices of the river are both specific and implicit. The earliest implicit reference to the river is found in the Tezpur rock inscription, of king Harjjaravarman of G. E. 510 (C. A.D. 830¹). The river is not mentioned in the inscription by its name. The record is found on a rock, overlooking the northern bank of the river, to the West of modern Tezpur town, and records an order prohibiting the plying of boats in a specified area of the river. This context makes it amply clear that the river intended in the record is Lauhitya. The prohibited expanse of water extended, in all probability, on both sides of the rock, up and down the river, on the bank near the inscription. On the other side it extended up to the bank bordering Abar (now Adi) hills. There are certain other references that do not mention the river but refer to its banks—Uttara and Dakshinakula.²

The expression *punyai nade* or the holy river, on the banks of which a city, was built by Sthiravarman, and the 'lord of rivers' (*sarit-patih*) perhaps refer to Lauhitya.³ Thereafter, the inscriptions of Vanamalavarman, the son and successor of Harijjaravarman begin with an invocation to the river Lauhitya, to protect all. The invocation shows that the river was already deified by this time. This is further confirmed a little later, in one of the grants where the river is mentioned as *Lauhitya-bhattarakena* or Lord Lauhitya.⁴ There after, the river is not spoken of as a God or Lord. The verses of invocation, however, found in the inscription of King Balavarman III⁵ and Ratnapala⁶ suggest its holy nature. Its pure waters are invoked to wash sin.⁷ Idea of the purity of its waters is further elaborated in a grant of king Ratnapala. Now the Lauhitya Sindhu is invoked to protect the whole world by destroying all the sins⁸. It is also said that the whiteness of its water is a matter of conjecture among the people who wonder and speculate it to be flowing moonlight, a flow of melted crystals or the power of Sankara (*subha-samkari*) destroying the sins⁹.

Commenting on this verse M. M. Sharma says "from the time of Vanamala up to the time of Indrapala, homage paid to the river Lauhitya, has been a special feature of all the grants issued by Kamarupa kings. Because of the whiteness of the waters of Lauhitya there is the confusion with moonlight assuming a physical form with melting crystals, and also with the powers of Siva capable of, destroying sin, Sin (*papa*) is believed to be black. Hence the divine power capable of destroying sin should obviously be white." ¹⁰ What Sharma has missed in this regard is that the whiteness of the waters of the river is indicated also in the expression *punyai nade* in the Dubi grant. Ratnapala's grant therefore, only develops the idea already current, comparing its whiteness with moonlight, melting crystals and the power of Siva. The comparison of its waters with the rays of the moon is already there in the inscriptions of Vanamala. The comparison with melting crystals and *subha samkari* is the contribution of Ratnapala's court poet.

Association of Parasurama, the semi divine hero, with Lauhitya, is perhaps a later feature. Two inscriptions of the Pala king Indrapala refer to this association. Herein also the sin washing capacity of the river is mentioned. Additionally it also states that the river received the name Lauhitya due to its washing the thick blood from the Parasu of Rama, which had killed many a king. ¹¹ The reference may be taken to suggest that the association of the river with Parasurama actually started sometime before but could be used in inscriptions only during this reign.

Actually the same verse of the two grants of Indrapala explains the name of the river. ¹² This is the first and only recorded instance that attempts to explain the name Lauhitya due to the washing of Parasuramas' blood stained battle axe. These grants have yet another reference to the son of Jamadagni. Referring to Princess Durlabha, the wife of prince Purandarapala, it is said that she hailed from the royal house of Prajyarajya, which was conquered by the son of Jamadagni. ¹³ This epigraphic notice suggests that by this time a local tradition had developed associating a peripheral state of Kamarupa having been conquered by Parasurama. This Kingdom supposedly conquered by Parasurama is mentioned as Prajyarajya. No kingdom of this name is mentioned in any other source including inscriptions. Therefore, it seems possible to assume that Prajya is perhaps a scribal error for Prachya. If this supposition is correct then this eastern kingdom, Prachyarajya, has to be located to the east of Kamarupa. This does not help much. Besides Lauhitya, the only other area associated with the Brahmana

hero, is Parasurama Kunda. Parasurama kunda is not mentioned in early inscriptions. It is possible however, to assume that the region known as Prachya or Prajyarajya during the reign of the Palas of Kamarupa perhaps implied the region in which later his name came to be associated with the reservoir - Parasuramakunda.

The Gachtal inscription of King Gopalavarman also refers to the sin washing quality of the white waters ¹⁴ of this eastern ocean, ¹⁵ but without any reference to Parasurama or Brahma. ¹⁶ The association of the river with Brahma is a later feature.

It appears that the river came to be accorded a divine status sometime in the early medieval period due to its importance in the life of the people of the region. It was this importance that led to its deification. It seems, however, that the personification of the river Lauhitya was as yet incomplete and had to be formulated only later.

Notes & References

1. Tezpur rock inscription, M. M. Sharma, *IAA*, pp. 82 ff.
2. Cf. Parbatiya grant, line 48, Nowgong grant, line 33 etc.
3. Dubi grant, V. 49 and V. 43, respectively.
4. Tezpur grant, V. I. Parbatiya grant, V. I.
5. Tezpur grant, line 18.
6. Uttarabarbil grant V. 2, Nowgong grant V. 2.
7. Baragaon grant V. 2.
8. Uttarabarbil grant V. 2, Nowgong grant V. 2, its pure waters are again referred to in V. 25 of both these records.
9. Baragaon grant V. 2, Suwalkuchi grant V. 2.
10. M. M. Sharma, *IAA*, p. 167.
11. Gauhati grant V. 3, Guwakuchi grant V. 3.
12. Vanamala's inscriptions also try to explain the name Lauhitya in another way. Their statement that its waters were red on account of the flowers from the garden of heaven falling from the heads (coiffures) of the divine girls engaged in water sport in the river, is an attempt to explain the red waters of the river.
13. Gauhati grant V. 13, Guwakuchi grant V. 13.
14. Gachtal grant V. 3.
15. *Ibid*, V. 8.
16. The suggestion that the Tezpur grant (V. 28) of king Vanamalavarman refers to "the worship of *Abja* (Brahma)" (Cf. P. C. Choudhury, *HCPA*, Gauhati, 1966, p. 428), is not acceptable. The word *abja* here refers to lotus and not to Brahma who is born of lotus.