

Abstract of the Paper for the 14th World Sanskrit Conference

Changing Dynasties, Enduring Genealogy:

A Critical Study on the Political Legitimation in Early Medieval Kamarupa

Jae-Eun Shin

In the epigraphic records of three dynasties of Kamarupa from the 7th to the 12th century (the Bhauma-Varmans, the Mlecchas and the Palas), it is claimed that they are descendants of Naraka, the son born in the union of the Earth and Vishnu in his Varaha incarnation, though the origin and ethnic identity of each ruling family are still obscure. The mighty warrior Bhagadatta of the *Mahabharata* is said to be the son of Naraka and Vajradatta is mentioned to be either the son or brother of Bhagadatta in number of inscriptions. Based on the epigraphic evidences and Puranic records, scholars have tried to reconstruct the 'successive and continuous line' of genealogy of ancient royal family of Kamarupa. Emphasis was often laid on the lengthy and glorious history of Kamarupa in ancient times, especially the Bhauma-Varman period, to which some historians traces ethnic and cultural root of pre-Ahom Assam. Those issues are so deeply related to the making of regional tradition and identity of the area that the argument becomes a little ticklish, especially for outsiders.

In this paper, I would like to move away from the chronological reconstruction of genealogy of Kamarupa. Rather, I will deconstruct successive line of genealogy and discuss the historical process of the making of genealogy through which unrelated figures of epics and early Puranas were arbitrarily linked and different descriptions of events were forged and re-interpreted in the form of a new narrative. The political purpose of fabrication of royal genealogy should be understood in the context of larger historical/societal process operative during early medieval period. These processes were expansion of state society through the local state formation especially in the peripheral areas, the formation of castes system, and the cult appropriation and integration. Moreover, the continuity of fabricated genealogy throughout three dynasties of Kamarupa demonstrates how the narrative with considerable fluidity came to be a fixed tradition for political legitimation. The making of genealogy and its functional dimension will be delineated by tracing different clusters of myths presented in the *Mahabharata* and the *Harivamsha*, the prashasti portion of Kamarupa inscriptions, and the Naraka legend in the *Kalika Purana*.