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# Claiming Sovereignty on the Edge of the Imperial Kingdom: the Pālas of Kāmarūpa and the Candras of Vaṅga

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## 1. Introduction

The Pāla dynasty was one of the strongest polities of early medieval India, holding sway over northern and western Bengal and eastern Bihar and making occasional expeditions to neighbouring regions and beyond, for about three hundred and fifty years between the second half of the eighth and the end of the eleventh centuries. However, despite its dominant position, the existence of constant Pāla control over the eastern region is very difficult to justify, because the level of Pāla military supremacy and political influence was different in terms of time and space; and accordingly, the Pālas' relationship with other powers of the region has undergone substantial changes. Among several transitional phases of Pāla history, the beginning of the tenth century was of particular interest because of both internal and external events. While within the domain of the family, the Pāla royal succession shifted from the main line of rulers to a collateral line, in the adjoining areas of the Pāla territory, two new dynasties, the Pālas of Kāmarūpa and the Candras of Vaṅga, grew at the expense of the Pāla dominance. The relations between these fast-rising powers and the imperial Pāla kingdom were complicated given their geographical proximity. Not only did both conflict with the imperial Pāla dynasty, but they also took advantage of the latter's fame by appropriating its political idiom and vocabulary. This, however, does not mean that the two neighbouring dynasties contending against Pāla authority were each other's allies, nor does it imply that they had congenial relations. In reality, the two powers clashed with each other as each of them fought against the imperial Pālas.

The dominant scholarly concern of the past several decades was to unravel this tangled history with an accurate assessment of the political and military

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events reflected in the epigraphical records of the three dynasties.<sup>1</sup> This positivist historiography, despite its internal differences, seems so preoccupied with reconstructing a sequence of events in chronological terms that it pays almost no attention to a time discrepancy between the occurrence of an event and that event being recorded. And also, it seldom addresses the question why a reference to self or others in previous political events and warfare assumed its importance at a particular moment in the dynastic history. This lack of interest in time is symptomatic of a wider problem, which might be glossed as an underestimation of the contextual articulation of self and others in epigraphic records. In considering these issues, I focus on how the details of historical incidents described in royal eulogies relate to their changing political and religious contexts and how mutual perception and self-representation are expressed through these details including the time of articulation, point of accentuation, and choice of terms and expressions. The primary sources utilised here consist of twenty-seven copperplate charters, of which nine were issued by the rulers of the Kāmarūpa Pālas, eleven by those of the Candras and seven by those of the imperial Pālas of Bengal, all belonging to a period between the beginning of the tenth and the mid-eleventh centuries. By examining these records with a specific attention to time and comparing them in spatial terms, we can get some idea of how the two lesser dynasties having uneven power relations with the imperial Pālas recognised this strongest polity of eastern India and, conversely, how they viewed themselves and others in a transitional period of history.

## 2. Self-representation in the changing political contexts

After the failed attempt to establish their control over Kannauj, the focal point of the tripartite struggle in the late eighth to the early ninth century,<sup>2</sup> political activities of the Pālas were redirected to eastern India. Their military expedi-

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- 1 For general historical writings on the Kāmarūpa Pālas and the Candras of Vaṅga which include this complicated history of conflicts and disputes, see Dani (1960, 36–44); Chowdhury (1967, 154–89); Sircar (2007, 140–71); Islam (2018, 551–690). For some examples of historiography more focused on their relationship itself, see Chowdhury (1978, 33–39); Choudhury (1988, 105–46); Ghosh (2010–11, 110–18).
  - 2 The tripartite struggle means the fight for control over Kannauj (Kānyakubja) between three major early medieval powers, namely, the Pālas of Bengal, the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of the Deccan. For details, see Furui's contribution in this volume, pp. 57ff.

tions, which were carried out in the northeastern and southwestern directions from north Bengal, reached victorious outcomes and therefore the geographical limit of Pāla dominion extended to Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, and Utkala in the first half of the ninth century.<sup>3</sup> However, over the next one hundred years, the situation changed considerably in two aspects, namely, a significant decline in Pāla military activities and increasing attempts to tighten control over Pāla subordinate rulers and rural society. The former is attested by the Pāla *praśastis* of the period which contain fulsome praise for the rulers' valour and fame, while making no mention of any specific military campaigns. We are not yet sure whether such military stagnancy was directly related to the shifting of Pāla royal succession from the main line of rulers to a collateral line, i.e. to the family of Vākpāla, a brother of the second king Dharmapāla, in the late ninth century. An in-depth discussion of how such a political change affected the Pāla military power, which depended heavily on their subordinate rulers' service, is beyond the scope of this paper. What is clear is that the political sphere of Nārāyaṇapāla (r. c. 878–932), the first king of the collateral line, was only limited to south Bihar and north Bengal,<sup>4</sup> and his three successors, Rājyapāla II (r. c. 932–969), Gopāla III (r. c. 969–975), and Vīgrahapāla II (r. c. 975–987), made no attempt to expand the zone of Pāla political control beyond the dynasty's core territory. The reigns of these three rulers were therefore deemed “a period of inaction and stagnation” (Chowdhury 2018, 750). They rather sought to consolidate and

3 Devapāla's (r. c. 812–847) victory against the kings of Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, and Utkala has been emphasised repeatedly in the records of his successors. There are three examples. The *Jaḡajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla, year 7* (r. c. 847–862) speaks (v. 10) of Devapāla's dominion over Kāmarūpa obtained by the play of eyebrow and his acceptance of tribute from the inaccessible land of the Himālaya. Here the inaccessible land of the Himālaya probably refers to Nepāla in view of the *Mirzapur plate of Śūrapāla I, year 3* (v. 12), which mentions Devapāla as the conqueror of the lord of Nepāla (*nepāla-nātha-vijayi*). The *Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, year 17* (v. 6) mentions that when his grandfather Jayapāla, by the order of Devapāla, set forth with the desire to conquer all around, the king of Utkala gave up his own city and the king of Prāḡjyotiṣa (i.e. Kāmarūpa) surrendered to Jayapāla. However, in the same period, the Pālas did not or could not expand their political control to the eastern part of Bengal: Vaṅga, Samataṭa, and Harikela.

4 This point is clear from the findspots of Nārāyaṇapāla's inscriptions and the inscriptions mentioning his name. The *Gaya temple inscription* of his 7th year and the image inscription of his 9th year in the Indian Museum are believed to have been found in Bihar. See Sircar (1963–64, 225); Banerji (1915, 62 Pl. 31). The *Bhagalpur plate* of his 17th year, which was issued from Mudgagiri (Munger), proves that he was the master of Maḡadha (Patna and Gaya Districts) including Aṅga (Munger and Bhagalpur Districts), according to Chowdhury (2018, 749). The *Badal pillar inscription* discovered in Dinajpur proves his suzerainty over the northern part of Bengal.

enhance royal power within their dominion with new measures which include (1) a decrease of royal grants to the religious institutions founded by subordinate rulers and the increased implantation of Brāhmaṇas as agents of royal authority through grants, and (2) an imposition of land measurement and assessment of production in currency units for tightening control over rural society. The implementation of such measures had begun during the reign of Gopāla II (r. c. 874–878) and continued for over two hundred years and more, albeit not necessarily in a constant way (Furui 2017, 356, 349–52).

The Pālas' inward-oriented politics may have led to a change in the geo-political configuration of tenth-century eastern India, which was partly responsible for the emergence of the Pālas of Kāmarūpa ruling the lower Brahmaputra valley in the western part of present Assam and the Candras of Vaṅga ruling the Bengal Delta and the eastern fringe of Bengal including Samataṭa and Śrihaṭṭa in present Bangladesh. The former was established with the rule of Brahmapāla (r. c. 900–920) and the latter with that of Trailokyacandra (r. c. 905–925). Both were contemporary with Nārāyaṇapāla (r. c. 878–932), the first king of the collateral line of the imperial Pāla rulers. Though Brahmapāla and Trailokyacandra achieved power through different political processes, the resemblance between the two kings is noteworthy. They both rose from a subordinate position to an independent, or semi-independent, status;<sup>5</sup> consolidated their control of core areas with military strength and so laid the foundation of their families; and, eventually, paved the way for their sons' ascendancy. Certain similarities continued with the next rulers of the two dynasties: Ratnapāla (r. c. 920–960), son of Brahmapāla, and Śricandra (r. c. 925–975), son of Trailokyacandra. Having

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5 The ancestors of Trailokyacandra were probably landowners of Rohitagiri, i.e. Rāṅgāmāṭi in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, under the kings of Harikela of the Chittagong region and its adjacent areas. He rose from a subordinate position to the kingship of Candradvīpa, also known as Vaṅgāleśa. The name Vaṅgāla, denoting the coastal regions of southeastern Bengal, gradually extended its meaning over wide areas of eastern Bengal with the expansion of Candra dominion towards the north, that is to say, the localities represented by the modern districts of Faridpur and Dacca. Trailokyacandra ultimately took possession of the citadel of Vikramapura. For the origin and early development of the Candra family, see Sircar (1959–60b, 135–36); Chowdhury (1967, 159–61). Similarly, Brahmapāla rose from a subordinate ruler of his overlord (the last king of the Mleccha dynasty) to the ruler of Kāmarūpa, but nothing is yet known about his ancestors. The name Kāmarūpa denotes the area lying on both the upper and lower banks of the Brahmaputra and also the surrounding hilly area. The Karatoya river of north Bengal remained as the western boundary of Kāmarūpa by the sixteenth century.

assumed the imperial titles *parameśvara-paramabhaṭṭāraka-mahārājādhirāja*,<sup>6</sup> both second-generation kings established a new capital within their respective domains, i.e. Durjayā in Kāmarūpa and Vikramapura in Vaṅga, due to the strategic importance of each location in the control of river traffic. Besides, both kings took an aggressive policy to expand their sphere of influence far beyond their respective political centres.<sup>7</sup> The rulers of the three dynasties are listed with their approximate reign periods in Table 1.

Bengal Pāla	Kāmarūpa Pāla	Candra
Nārāyaṇapāla (878–932)	Brahmapāla (900–920)	Trailokyacandra (905–925)
Rājyapāla II (932–969)	Ratnapāla (920–960)	Śricandra (925–975)
Gopāla III (969–975)	Indrapāla (960–990)	
Vigrahapāla II (975–987)		Kalyāṇacandra (975–1000)
Mahīpāla I (987–1035)	Gopāla (990–1015)	
	Harṣapāla (1015–1035)	Laḍahacandra (1000–1020)
		Govindacandra (1020–1045)
Nayapāla (1036–1051)	Dharmapāla (1035–1060)	

Table 1. The Bengal Pāla, Kāmarūpa Pāla, and Candra dynasties in the 10th–11th centuries

In this context, the claim that their predecessors were “chosen by the people” took on a special significance. This reference was obviously an intertextual echo

6 The *Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla*, ll. 51–52; the *Paschimbhag plate of Śricandra*, year 5, ll. 26–27.

7 For the political development of the Pālas of Kāmarūpa during the reign of Brahmapāla and Ratnapāla, see Sircar (2007, 140–47). For that of the Candras of Vaṅga during the reign of Trailokyacandra and Śricandra, see Chowdhury (1967, 154–79); Islam (2018, 616–25).

of the foundation myth of the Pālas of Bengal, which had already been mentioned in two of their earliest charters, namely, the *Indian Museum plate* and the *Khalimpur plate*, both issued by Dharmapāla (r. c. 780–812) in his regnal years 26 and 32, respectively. The two records trace the Pālas' descent from Dayitaviṣṇu, the progenitor of the lineage, and his successor Vapyāṭa, and then narrate the installation of Gopāla, son of Vapyāṭa, as a king elected by the people. They both read, “His son was the crest-jewel of the heads of kings, the glorious Gopāla, whom the people (*prakṛtibhir*) made take the hand of Fortune, to put an end to the rule of fishes.”<sup>8</sup> However, neither of them gives any details of the situation which was designated such an anarchical world or the people who took part in the installation of Gopāla as the first Pāla king. Considering the complete absence of this statement in the *Nalanda plate of Dharmapāla*, which predated the other two charters aforementioned, it is highly probable that Gopāla was not born into any distinguished royal family and the Pāla foundation myth was set up in the latter part of Dharmapāla's reign. As Sanyal (2014, 174) argues, this myth only became relevant “when he had to draw on legitimacy of his paramount status from his predecessor as he was aspiring to figure in the larger power-axis of northern India.”

About a century later, the eulogists of the Kāmarūpa Pālas drew upon this political rhetoric of the Bengal Pālas for asserting the dynasty's supposed historical facts. The best example of this is the *praśasti* for Brahmapāla in the copperplate charters issued by his son Ratnapāla. Having mentioned Śālastambha — the founder of the previous dynasty of the region — as the supreme lord of barbarians (*mlecchādhinātha*), who had taken the throne of Kāmarūpa in a state of confusion,<sup>9</sup> this *praśasti* explains how Brahmapāla, the predecessor of Ratnapāla, gained the royal seat.

When the twenty-first king of the line [of Śālastambha], named Tyāgasimha, retired to heaven without an heir, his people, thinking that “a Bhauma should be our lord once again,” made Brahmapāla, capable of shouldering

8 The *Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla*, v. 4; the *Indian Museum plate of Dharmapāla*, year 26, v. 4: *mātsya-nyāyam apohituṃ prakṛtibhir lakṣmyāḥ karaṇ grāhitaḥ śrī-gopāla iti kṣitīśa-śirasām cūḍā-maṇis tat-sutaḥ*. Here the rule of fishes (*mātsya-nyāya*) means political disorder or anarchical condition of the society. For further details of this concept in the political context of early medieval eastern India, see Pal (2008, 21–36).

9 *Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla*, v. 9; *Śaratbāri plate of Ratnapāla*, year 12, v. 9.

and protecting the earth, [their] king, because he was a kinsman [of the Bhaumas].<sup>10</sup>

Here Bhauma means one belonging to the *bhaumānvaya* or the lineage of Bhūmi's son Naraka who was deemed the mythical progenitor of the first dynasty of Kāmarūpa known as the Varmans in the fifth to seventh centuries. But it is difficult to believe that Brahmapāla was actually a descendant of one of the members of the previous Varman family, because, in that case, his claim would have been expected to be more specific, as Sircar (2007, 141) points out.<sup>11</sup> Rather, this *praśasti* was intended to give Brahmapāla credit for being eligible to be a new king, and the eligibility condition was drawn from his supposed connection with the first ruling family of the region. Intriguingly, the people who made him a new sovereign are represented as 'his people' (*tat-prakṛtayo*), that is to say, the local elites and administrative officials of Tyāgasimha, the last ruler of the second dynasty called the Mlecchas. This, along with the detailed reference to the Mleccha genealogy, does raise the possibility that Brahmapāla was one of the subordinates owing allegiance to the Mleccha ruler, but succeeded in taking possession of the throne after the demise of his overlord. Ratnapāla, who commissioned this *praśasti*, sought to borrow legitimacy from his father Brahmapāla by casting him as the ruler raised by the people, as Gopāla was deemed the people's chosen leader in the records of Dharmapāla. With self-conscious adaptation of the family name 'Pāla' from the Pālas of Bengal,<sup>12</sup> Ratnapāla seems to have connected himself to a tradition that extended beyond the purely regional one. This concern was expressed in the poetical description of distant places and people, such as Śaka, Gurjjara (Gurjara-Pratihāra), Gauḍa, Kerala, Vāhika (Bāhika of Punjab), Tāyika (Tājika, i.e. Arabs) and the Deccan, whose rulers had heard about the invincible city Durjayā of Kāmarūpa and feared its king Ratna-

10 Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla, v. 10; Śaratbāri plate of Ratnapāla, v. 10: *nirvaṅśam nṛpam ekaviṅśatitamam śrī-tyāgasimhābhidhan| teṣām vikṣya divam gatam punar aho bhaumo hi no yujyate| svāmīti pravacintya tat-prakṛtayo bhū-bhāra-rakṣā-kṣamam sāgandhyāt paricakrire narapati-śrī-brahmapālam hi yaṁ||*

11 Here the implication of the term *sāgandhya* is that Brahmapāla was not really a Bhauma, but he "smacked of one" and was thus acceptable in absence of the real thing. I would like to thank Dániel Balogh for pointing out the importance of this term.

12 This developed further with new epithets in the following period. For instance, Harṣapāla (r. c. 1015–35) and Dharmapāla (1035–60) were described as "the light of the Pāla family" (*pāla-kula-pradīpa*) and "the sun to the lotus of the Pāla lineage" (*pālānvayāmbuja-ravi*). See the *Puspabhadra plate of Dharmapāla*, vv. 5, 8.



pāla.<sup>13</sup> That was obviously an exaggeration, yet it offered a new vision of trans-regional political space.<sup>14</sup>

Like the rulers of both the Pālas of Bengal and Kāmarūpa, Śrīcandra, the contemporaneous Candra king, also used similar political idioms (with the word *prakṛti*) for representing his predecessor. The *praśasti* for Suvarṇacandra (r. c. 876–904), the grandfather of Śrīcandra, reads, “It [gold] was not purified in fire, not put on a balance, but connected with heaviness by nature.”<sup>15</sup> The subtextual meaning embedded in this suggestive statement is that Suvarṇacandra was neither born into the Agnikula (one of the distinguished Kṣatriya lineages) nor performed *tulāpuruṣa* (the ritual weighing of a king against gold and its distribution among Brāhmaṇas), but was imbued with dignity by the *prakṛti* (people). It is a subtle way of saying that Suvarṇacandra, the son of the Candra progenitor Pūrṇacandra, was not a member of any dignified royal family but earned the support of the people. This statement is, however, conspicuously absent from the new format of *praśasti* that was produced three years after the *Paschimbhag plate of Śrīcandra*, year 5. The first example of the new format is the *Dhulla plate of Śrīcandra*, issued around 933. Based on a distinct Buddhist narrative associated with their lineage name Candra, the moon, the new *praśasti* recounts a different family history for Śrīcandra. His grandfather Suvarṇacandra is thus recast as the son of Pūrṇacandra, the ruler of Rohitagiri, belonging to the majestic lineage of the moon, and as a Buddhist born into the family of the moon which devotedly carries in its curve the Buddha’s hare birth story (*buddhasya ... śaśaka-jātakam*)<sup>16</sup> in the form of a mark. This change indicates that the narrative framing of the Candras as a devout Buddhist family was made retrospectively, that is<sup>17</sup> eight years after Śrīcandra’s accession to the throne. By connecting his

13 The *Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla*, ll. 34–36.

14 For more details of how a new idea of kingship developed by the Bengal Pālas found an echo among the Kāmarūpa Pāla rulers, see Shin (2022a, 601–3).

15 The *Paschimbhag plate of Śrīcandra*, v. 3, and the *Kedarpur plate of Śrīcandra*, v. 3: *nāgnau viśuddho na tulādhirūḍhaḥ kintu prakṛtyaiva yuto garimṇā*.

16 The *Śaśajātaka* (Cowell 1897, 34–37) was one of the representative stories exemplifying *dānapāramitā* (the Buddhist Perfection of Generosity), and was thus often depicted in Buddhist art and architecture since the third-fourth centuries CE. However, its presence in a royal eulogy was rare and its association with a royal lineage was rather unusual. The Candras’ conscious identity-making based on this *Jātaka* story should therefore be understood in the historical context of the time of Śrīcandra when they first claimed their lineage. For more details, see Shin (2022b, 1–8).

17 See the *Dhulla plate of Śrīcandra*, vv. 2–3. This format continued till the end of Śrīcandra’s reign, as seen in the *Rampal plate of Śrīcandra*, vv. 2–3; the *Bogra plate of Śrīcandra*, vv. 2–3;

lineage name Candra to the moon with the hare mark of the *Jātaka* story, Śrīcandra could locate this rising political power within the ambit of the Buddhist world of eastern India. Otherwise, he might have faced difficulty in legitimising his rule due to the low status of his grandfather, even though the latter appears to have gained the support of the people.

The conscious adaptation of the Bengal Pālas' political idiom by both these fast-rising rulers, Ratnapāla and Śrīcandra, to the eulogy of their predecessors ran in parallel with their challenge to the former's imperial authority. However, valuable information about this challenge is not supplied by their own records but by those of their successors. The *Gachtal plate of Gopāla* (r. c. 990–1015), a great-grandson of Ratnapāla, refers to the victory of Ratnapāla precisely against Gauḍarāja Rājyapāla, that is to say, Rājyapāla II (r. c. 932–969).

When he (Ratnapāla) with his two arms defeated Rājyapāla — the Gauḍa king churlish on account of (the strength of) his arms — in (several) battles, he transformed, so to speak, the Mandākinī (Gaṅgā, known to have clear water) into the daughter of Kalinda (Yamunā, known for its dark water), thickening its water with moonlike spots of ichor from his lordly elephants.<sup>18</sup>

Its vivid description of the Gaṅgā whose colour was changed by the ichor of Ratnapāla's elephants may suggest the advance of his troops into the heart of the Bengal Pāla territory. The absence of Kāmarūpa/Prāgjyotiṣa from the list of groups and regions that submitted to Rājyapāla II implies Ratnapāla's success in a feat against the imperial Pālas of Bengal, who had subdued the king of Prāgjyotiṣa about one hundred years earlier.<sup>19</sup>

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the *Bangladesh National Museum plate of Śrīcandra*, vv. 2–3; the *Madanapur plate of Śrīcandra*, vv. 2–3.

18 The *Gachtal plate of Gopāla*, v. 15, ll. 28–29: *dor-darppa-durllāḍitam ājiṣu gauḍa-rājam yo rājyapālam avajitya bhujā-dvayena| manye gajendra-mada-candraka-sāndra-toyām mandākinīm api kalinda-sutāñ cakāra||*

19 According to the *Bhaturiya stone inscription of Yaśodāsa* from the time of Rājyapāla II (v. 8), when Yaśodāsa was occupying the post of the *tantrādhikārin*, his master Rājyapāla II's command was obeyed by the Mlecchas, Aṅgas, Kaliṅgas, Vaṅgas, Oḍras, Pāṇdyas, Karṇāṭas, Lāṭas, Suhmas, Gurjaras, Kṛitas, and Cīnas. Though employing an utterly conventional expression, it gives a glimpse of groups of people who served Rājyapāla II and his sphere of influence. Kāmarūpa/Prāgjyotiṣa is conspicuous by its absence in the list. The subjugation of Kāmarūpa/Prāgjyotiṣa is mentioned only as the achievement of his great-great-grandfather Jayapāla, a cousin of Devapāla (r. c. 812–847), in the *Bharat Kala Bhavan plate of Rājyapāla*, year 2, v. 6, which merely repeats the *Bhaḡalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla*, v. 6, q.v. footnote 3. This indicates that the Pālas had lost their grip on the northeastern frontier by the mid-tenth century.

Likewise, Śrīcandra's success against the Bengal Pālas is also described in the records of his son and grandson, Kalyāṇacandra (r. c. 975–1000) and Laḍahacandra (r. c. 1000–1020). The *Dacca plate* of the former mentions that Śrīcandra installed Gopāla, i.e. Gopāla III (r. c. 969–975), as a king, and a plate of the latter speaks vaguely of Śrīcandra's victory against a Gauḍa king.<sup>20</sup> However, due to the conspicuous lack of any historico-referential information in the *Jajilpara plate of Gopāla III* from his 6th year, which is the only known copperplate charter of Gopāla III to date, it is difficult to assess Śrīcandra's political impact on the Bengal Pālas accurately. The tenth verse of this record describing the victorious campaign of Gopāla III in the four cardinal directions (Misra and Majumdar 1951, 142) is nothing but the conventional *digvijaya* over the *cakravarti-kṣetra*, because it is also applied to Vīgrahapāla II (r. c. 975–987) and Mahīpāla I (r. c. 987–1035).<sup>21</sup> What is assumed is that during the second half of the tenth century, Pāla control over northern and western Bengal was increasingly contested by the rise of the Kāmbojas and the attack of the Candellas (Chowdhury 2018, 754–55). Śrīcandra seems to have intervened militarily in the political turmoil hitting the Pālas, and to have restored Gopāla III to the throne, probably in the last phase of his reign. The strongest contenders for the Pāla kingship at that time were probably the Kāmbojas, whose ruler even assumed the title *gauḍapati* or Lord of Gauḍa.<sup>22</sup> This being the case, the Gauḍa king who is stated to have

20 The details of two copper plates of Kalyāṇacandra have yet to be published. Dani (1960, 41) and Sircar (1967–68, 299) give only a partial quotation from the *Dacca plate of Kalyāṇacandra*, according to which Śrīcandra was soft in removing the fears of other kings (or of a ruler named Pṛthvīpāla) and harsh in destroying Govarṇa, and he initiated rejoicing by installing Gopāla on the throne (*mahotsava-gurur gopāla-saṁropanē*). For the reference to Śrīcandra's victory over a Gauḍa king whose name is not mentioned, see *Laḍahacandra's first grant, year 6, v. 5*.

21 It reads, "Whose war elephants, like clouds, having drunk clear water in the eastern country, which abounds with water, after that having roamed according to their own wills in the sandal forests of the valley of the Malaya [country], [and] having caused a coolness in the Maru lands by throwing dense sprays [of water emitted from their trunks], enjoyed the slopes of the Himālaya." See the *Bangarh plate of Mahīpāla I, year 9, v. 11*.

22 The *Dinajpur pillar inscription*, dated to the second half of the tenth century (also known as the Bangarh pillar inscription), records the erection of a temple of Śiva by a lord of Gauḍa belonging to the Kāmboja line (*kāmvōjānvaya-jena gauḍa-patinā*). Chowdhury (2018, 813) conjectures on the basis of the Irda and Kalanda plates that Rājyapāla and his two sons, Nārāyaṇapāla and Nayapāla, who ruled over the southern portion of west Bengal in succession during the tenth century, belonged to the Kāmboja family. These plates call this Rājyapāla *kāmbōja-varṇa-tilaka*. In the stagnant period of Pāla history, they could spread their influence in northern and western Bengal, while Pāla dominion was possibly limited

been defeated by Śricandra in *Laḍahacandra's first grant* may have been a Kāmbōja ruler, even though we have only limited evidence on Kāmbōja presence in the heart of the Pāla territory of north Bengal.

However, the question that should be asked here is not whether this political scenario is true, but why the reference to military or political success of the two neighbouring rulers — Ratnapāla and Śricandra — against the imperial Pālas took on its particular significance between the late tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries, that is to say, during the reign of Mahīpāla I (r. c. 987–1035) of Bengal. Another pertinent question is how the aspirations of the Kāmarūpa and Candra rulers changed at that time. To answer these, it is important to remember that, in his four grants, Mahīpāla I is credited with having obtained his father's kingdom or the kingship of his paternal kingdom, which had been snatched away by unentitled people.<sup>23</sup> The enemies who dispossessed Mahīpāla I of his paternal kingdom are identified with the Kāmbōjas, and the area which he retrieved is considered to be Varendra or northern Bengal (Sircar 1951–52, 3; Chowdhury 2018, 760). The first appearance of this verse in the *Belwa plate*, dated to the second regnal year of Mahīpāla I,<sup>24</sup> attests to his success against his enemies in the very early part of his reign, and its repeated occurrence in several other land grants, such as the *Amgachi plate of Vighrahapāla III* (r. c. 1050–1076) and the *Manahali plate of Madanapāla* (r. c. 1144/45–1165), shows the importance of his achievement. Mahīpāla I reestablished Pāla authority over northern Bengal and some part of western Bengal, and held sway over southern Bihar. Towards the close of his reign, he succeeded in ensuring Pāla control over northern Bihar. The absence of any serious trouble from outside, except for Rājendra Cola's invasion in 1021, helped him to consolidate Pāla power in eastern India (Chowdhury 2018, 766).

Such were the political circumstances confronting both the Kāmarūpa Pāla and the Candra rulers between the late tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries. Unlike Ratnapāla and Śricandra, who had taken advantage of the political turmoil and military stagnancy of the Bengal Pālas to expand their

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to Aṅga and Magadha. It was against this backdrop that the Kāmbōja rulers adopted names identical to those of the Bengal Pāla kings and one of their consorts. They modelled their genealogy on the Pāla one. This is another example of the political adoption of the Pāla idioms by neighbouring lesser powers in eastern India.

23 *anadhikṛta-viluptaṁ rājyam āsādyā pitryam*, in the *Belwa plate of Mahīpāla I, year 2*, v. 11; the *Rangpur plate of Mahīpāla I, year 5*, v. 12; the *Dinajpur plate of Mahīpāla I, year 9*, v. 12; the *Biyala plate of Mahīpāla I*, v. 11.

24 As to the date of the *Belwa plate*, I adopt the modified date of year 2 suggested by Furui (2011a, 242 n. 4), based on his reading from a digital photograph.

activities far beyond their respective core regions in the first half of the tenth century, the descendants of both the rulers saw the Pālas recovering from their political instability. It was, therefore, not wholly a coincidence that a heroic vision of their dynasties' past was cherished by both the Kāmarūpa Pāla and Candra rulers during the long-term stable reign of Mahīpāla I, when they could not make actual military expeditions into the Bengal region. In this vision of the past, the success of Ratnapāla and Śricandra against the Bengal Pālas was represented as a political event that was worthy of being remembered with historical accuracy. The plates of Gopāla and Kalyāṇacandra, both referring to specific Bengal Pāla sovereigns by name, demonstrate a keen awareness of their forefathers' opponents.<sup>25</sup> Though this specificity gives way to the vague expression of "a Gauḍa king" in the grants issued by Laḍahacandra (r. c. 1000–1020) and Govindacandra (r. c. 1020–1045) in the last phase of the Candra dynasty, their forefather's victory against the imperial Pālas remained a political event to be cherished and valued. Such historical retrospection certainly involved political overtones in the reign of Mahīpāla I who reconsolidated the Pālas' hold on power in eastern India.

In sum, the array of Kāmarūpa Pāla and Candra epigraphic records bears witness to the self-images of kingship those rulers sought to project under changing political circumstances. At a time of their ascendancy, the first half of the tenth century, the Kāmarūpa Pāla and Candra rulers drew upon the political idiom of the Bengal Pālas to compensate for their obscure origin and establish their image as successors of kings chosen by the people. However, when the Pālas of Bengal reassumed their sway over much of eastern India from the late tenth century, they rather emphasised the facticity of past military action or political intervention over some previous Pāla kings of Bengal. As a point of reference, the Pālas were used continuously in making the consummate self-images of their contenders, and in doing so, the Pāla sphere of influence in representational practices actually expanded when this strongest polity of eastern India became an empire in decline.

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25 For the *Gachtal plate of Gopāla* mentioning Ratnapāla's victory against Rājyapāla (i.e. Rājyapāla II), see footnote 18. For the *Dacca plate of Kalyāṇacandra* referring to Śricandra's restoration of Gopāla (i.e. Gopāla III), see footnote 20.

### 3. Presentation of others in a changing religious landscape

The two neighbouring powers contending against Pāla authority were unlikely to ally themselves to each other, due to the Candras' several attempts to take over Kāmarūpa.<sup>26</sup> The first one was made by Śrīcandra, who led further military expeditions into the northeastern corner of the subcontinent, following his father Trailokyacandra's subjugation of Samataṭa. The *Paschimbhag plate of Śrīcandra, year 5*, the earliest known charter of this king, gives an account of his military campaign against Kāmarūpa.

His soldiers at the (time of the) conquest of Kāmarūpa, it is said, lingered in the woody regions of the Lohitya river darkened by black aloe trees, with its flocks of pigeons taking wing, monkeys roaming about bowers of plantain trees yellow with ripening fruit, and the eaves (of the forest) frequented by yaks falling asleep in the lethargy of their rumination. "This is Citraśilā, the Painted Rock, bedecked in a delightful efflorescence of rock tar! This is the river Puṣpabhadrā whose banks rustle with the fair leaves of palmyra trees!" — such [verses] were recited eagerly and at length by the scholars of his army in a lesson at the time of the conquest of the Northern Region, after attending to the deities of the locality on the Snow Mountain.<sup>27</sup>

This interesting account seems to contain an admixture of actual observation and literary convention: the former is evident in the specific names of a rock and a river found in Kāmarūpa, whereas the latter is noticeable in the stereotypical description of Kāmarūpa's flora and fauna and its location of being assigned to the Northern Region (*uttarāpatha*), just as in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*, which refers to this place as the last country to be subdued by Raghu's northern expedition.<sup>28</sup> While showing great concern for the space, both experienced and

26 Kāmarūpa was much coveted by the rulers of Gauḍa and Vaṅga because of its resources, including the areca nuts, betel leaves, aloe wood, silk cotton trees, and gold from the alluvial deposits of the Brahmaputra, and its location on the important horse trade route. For more details, see Ghosh (2010–11, 116–17).

27 The *Paschimbhag plate of Śrīcandra, year 5*, vv. 12–13: *yat-sainyaiḥ kila kāmarūpa-vijaye rohat-kapotī-ghanā nirvviṣṭāḥ phala-pāka-piṅga-kadalī-kuñja-bhramad-vānarāḥ | romanthālasa-vaddhanidra-camarī-samsevita-prāntarā lohityasya vana-sthālī-parisarāḥ kālāguru-śyāmalāḥ || saiṣā citraśilā manorama-śilā-puṣpa-pratānācitā tālī-sacchada-marmmaraiḥ parisaraiḥ sā puṣpa-bhadrā nadi | ity utkaṅṭhulam uttarāpatha-jaye yat-sainika-śrotriyair adhyāye paṭhitās ciraṁ himagirau dṛṣṭvā sthālī-devatāḥ ||*.

28 *Raghuvamśa* 4. 81–84. The northern region called *udīcyā* or *uttarāpatha* comprises the region between the eastern Punjab and the Oxus in the northwest as well as the entire Himālayan region.

imagined, this earliest Candra record of Kāmarūpa pays less attention to the historical event itself. What is noticeable is the Candra soldiers' eagerness to conquer Kāmarūpa, as seen in verse 13 of the record. The mention of the Puṣpabhadra river, which has been identified with a small stream to the north of the Brahmaputra near Guwahati (M. M. Sharma 1978, 255), suggests that the Candra military expedition penetrated the area around Durjayā, Kāmarūpa's then political centre. However, the account mentions neither the name of Śrīcandra's adversary nor the extent of his success.<sup>29</sup> The Kāmarūpa Pāla armies also do not figure in this account. Śrīcandra's direct control appears to have extended to Sylhet, as the land donation was made in Śrīhaṭṭa *maṇḍala*, but his subjugation of Kāmarūpa remains uncertain. Given the complete silence on this expedition in his seven other records, Śrīcandra's raid was probably short-lived and the effects of Candra presence were restricted to only a small portion of Kāmarūpa.

About five decades later, Śrīcandra's son Kalyāṇacandra (r. c. 975–1000) led another military campaign against Kāmarūpa whose then ruler was Indrapāla (r. c. 960–990). A generation after this invasion, the *Gachtal plate of Gopāla* (r. c. 990–1015), Indrapāla's son, gives a direct reference to their clash and Kalyāṇacandra's defeat by Indrapāla in a naval war.

Strong Kalyāṇacandra, Śrīcandra's son, the king of Vaṅga, he of the invincible arms [demonstrated] in his clash with the frenzied Gauḍas, was himself overtaken (by the army of Indrapāla) at the border of the battlefield. Defeated by him (Indrapāla), he slunk miserably away to somewhere, abandoning with fearful mind his fleet of boats beautifully festooned with fluttering golden medallions as well as his glory.<sup>30</sup>

What makes the reference noteworthy is the way it portrays Kalyāṇacandra. He is credited with having demolished the frenzied Gauḍas with his undefeatable arms. Here the expression, "the frenzied Gauḍas" (*mādyad-gauḍa*) alludes to the

29 Dani (1966, 34), on the other hand, on the basis of his revised reading of the *Dacca plate of Kalyāṇacandra*, suggests that the Kāmarūpa ruler who was defeated by Śrīcandra was Ratnapāla. His new reading sounds plausible since both the rulers were contemporaries. However, Śrīcandra's victory over Ratnapāla was very unlikely to lead to the annexation of Kāmarūpa. For more details, see Islam (2018, 622).

30 The *Gachtal plate of Gopāla*, v. 20, ll. 36–38: *mādyad-gauḍa-vimarḍa-durddama-bhujah śrīcandra-sūnuḥ svayaṁ prāptaḥ saṅgara-sīmni vaṅga-ṅṛpatiḥ kalyāṇacandro valī cañcat-kāñcana-cakra-cāru-racitaṁ nau-cakram uttrasta-dhī tyaktvā yad-vijitaḥ sahaiva yaśasā dīnaḥ pralīnaḥ kvacit||*.

Pālas of Bengal renowned for their war elephants rutting in battlefields.<sup>31</sup> The portrayal of Kalyāṇacandra as the vanquisher of the Gauḍa army indirectly inflates Indrapāla's superiority, because this Kāmarūpa ruler becomes the annihilator of the Candra king. By accentuating the military achievement of their adversary, the Kāmarūpa Pālas could successfully cast themselves as the strongest power in eastern India.

In contrast, the records of Kalyāṇacandra's successors, Laḍahacandra (r. c. 1000–1020) and Govindacandra (r. c. 1020–1045), refer to Kalyāṇacandra's triumph in Kāmarūpa in a very metaphorical way: "he caused shedding of big tears in the eyes of the *mleccha* women"<sup>32</sup> and "he made double the waters of the Lohitya river by means of the tears from the eyes of the *mleccha* women, which had been caused by him through killing their husbands."<sup>33</sup> We cannot in actual fact be certain about the result of their clash, since both dynasties claimed to be the victor. Nevertheless, the fact that the Candra accounts make no direct reference to the war itself throws doubt on their claims. Considering the difficult mountainous terrain and overflowing rivers in Kāmarūpa, which gave all Bengal armies including the Bengal Sultans and Mughals in the later period little chance of success, Kalyāṇacandra may also have faced the hard reality of ultimate defeat. It is therefore understandable why the later Candra records are eager to project a successful image of Kalyāṇacandra with such a conventional poetic expression.

Support for this supposition also comes from the term *mleccha*, which is applied to describe the people of Kāmarūpa. Scholars including Sircar (1973, 49) have been quite explicit that the *mlecchas* figured in later Candra records mean the second ruling family of Kāmarūpa known as the Mleccha dynasty. However, this is very unlikely to be the case in view of two facts: first, the period of Kalyāṇacandra's campaign simply did not match up with that of the Mleccha rule which flourished in the eighth-ninth centuries in the mid-Brahmaputra valley with present Tezpur of Assam as its political centre; and second, a dynastic name is not a common feature of presenting others in the epigraphic practice of early medieval eastern India, which almost always uses a name of a region in referring to another political power, such as Gauḍa, Vaṅga, Samatāṭa, Harikela and so on. The Candra records, too, use Kāmarūpa or Prāggyoṭiṣa to denote both

31 For the abundance of elephants in the Pāla army described in an Arab account of the ninth century, see Ahmad (1989, 43–44).

32 *Laḍahacandra's first grant*, v. 8a: *mlecchīnān nayaneṣu yena janitaḥ sthūlāśru-kośa-vyayo*.

33 *Govindacandra's grant*, year 6, v. 7: *yenāsau dviguṇikṛtaḥ pati-vadhād udvejitānām ghanair mlecchīnān nayanāmbubhir vīgaltair lohitya-nāmā nadaḥ*.



the polity and the people of the northeastern region at the beginning of the tenth century.

If so, how do we explain the appearance of this new nomenclature, *mleccha*, in the eleventh-century Candra charters? To answer this question, we must first recognise that it arose in the context of increasing Brahmanical influence on the last two Candra rulers: Laḍahacandra and Govindacandra. Though both continued to use the Buddhist symbol of the *dharmacakra* as the emblem on their seal and the Buddhist epithet *parama-saugata* as one of their titles, their donations were neither made in the name of the lord Buddha, nor contained any other Buddhist elements. On the contrary, Laḍahacandra granted lands in the name of Viṣṇu, a form of whom was even named after himself, and Govindacandra did the same in the name of Śiva, to whose son Mahāsenā he was considered to be equal.<sup>34</sup> Laḍahacandra was a Vaiṣṇava and Govindacandra had obvious Śaiva leanings. The Candras' self-image was also redesigned in accordance with the new genealogical claim tracing their descent from the moon god Candra, the light sprung from the sage Atri's eye (*atri-netra*).<sup>35</sup> This claim certainly drew on the origin myth of the Candravamśa well known in Epic-Purāṇic traditions.<sup>36</sup> Given a long absence of Kṣatriya identity-making based on the

34 The two charters of Laḍahacandra record grants of land in the name of Vāsudeva-bhaṭṭāraka (the lord Vāsudeva, i.e. Viṣṇu) in favour of Laḍahamādhava-bhaṭṭāraka (the lord Laḍahamādhava) installed by the king. See *Laḍahacandra's first grant*, ll. 53–54; *Laḍahacandra's second grant*, ll. 20–21. As Mādhava is a well-known name of the god Viṣṇu, Laḍahamādhava was undoubtedly a form of Viṣṇu named after the king Laḍahacandra himself. His strong attachment to the Brahmanical creed is also attested in his pilgrimage to Vārāṇasī and Prayāga, where he made an offering to his ancestors and offered gifts of gold to numerous Brāhmaṇas. See *Laḍahacandra's first grant*, vv. 16–18. *Govindacandra's grant*, on the other hand, records a donation which has been made in favour of the dancing form of Śiva called Naṭṭeśvara-bhaṭṭāraka, in the name of Śiva-bhaṭṭāraka (the lord Śiva). It also refers to this king as an equal to Mahāsenā (i.e. Skanda, Kārttikeya), and his parents to the latter's parents, Śiva and Śivā. See *Govindacandra's grant*, ll. 46–47, v. 13. Despite its beginning with a prayer to Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, Govindacandra's charter concludes the record of donation with a prayer to the gods Svayambhū, Hari, and Hara. See *Govindacandra's grant*, v. 16.

35 *Laḍahacandra's first grant*, v. 1; *Govindacandra's grant*, v. 2.

36 As one of the seven great sages who were all born from the god Brahmā's mind, Atri figured prominently in the Vedic-Epic-Purāṇic corpus. He was married to Anasūyā Devī and had three sons, namely, Dattātreyā, Durvāsas, and Candra. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.14.1–9.24.67 tells us that the god Brahmā had a son called Atri, and the latter had a son called Soma (i.e. Candra), who was born out of his tears of joy. Soma had a son, Budha (i.e. Mercury), by his spouse Tārā, and Budha had one offspring, Purūravas, by his consort Ilā. It

Lunar/Solar lineages in eastern epigraphic records, the Candras' conscious attempt to link themselves to the prestigious Candravamśa is even more noteworthy.

Seen in this context, the emergence of the Candras' Kṣatriya consciousness and the rise of their contemptuous attitudes towards the neighbouring Kāmarūpa people were processes which unfolded simultaneously over the first half of the eleventh century. This simultaneity suggests that boosting their self-image was bound up with demeaning the image of others. Often translated as 'barbarian,' the term *mleccha* used to refer not only to aliens from outside of the subcontinent, but to tribes who were not part of the agrarian *varṇa* society of Indic civilisation. In general, these groups were recognised as perpetual outsiders and potential contesters of Brahmanical norms and, therefore, often mentioned in unfavourable terms in Sanskrit literature (Talbot 1995, 698; Parasher-Sen 2006, 435). Labelling the Kāmarūpa people as *mlecchas* may have been instrumental to the primary goal of providing the Candra rulers with a self-image as the upholder of law and society. A strong tribal substratum, which left the northeastern region with much less Brahmanical influence than its neighbours, was another important factor in accentuating the otherness of the Kāmarūpa people. What is also noteworthy is that the term *mleccha* is never applied to the people of Gauḍa, the nuclear area of the Bengal Pālas, though they were also the Candras' adversaries.<sup>37</sup>

However, we should not take that as an indication of a regionalist view. In Kāmarūpa too, rulers similarly employed the Brahmanical concept of *mleccha* for political rivals within their region, as it was one of the most resonant images of the other. For instance, the first known charter of the Kāmarūpa Pālas refers to the founder of the previous dynasty with discernible disdain as the supreme lord of barbarians (*mlecchādhinātha*).<sup>38</sup> Though not in epigraphic records, the negative image of the Kirātas, a local tribe vanquished by Naraka, the son of the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu, is well reflected in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* of the first half of the eleventh century, probably composed during the reign of Dharmapāla of the Kāmarūpa Pālas. Here the Kirātas embody the Brahmanical notion of the tribal other, devoid of culture and civilisation. Naraka's victory against this

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then gives us a long list of the descendants of Purūravas, all of whom comprised the renowned Lunar Dynasty called Candravamśa/Somavamśa. For further details of changing genealogical claims of the Candras, see Shin (2022b, 1–8).

37 For instance, the later Candra plates proclaim Kalyāṇacandra's great victory over the people of Gauḍa or Gauḍa king, but they never use the term *mleccha* in this context. See *Laḍahacandra's first grant*, v. 8; *Govindacandra's grant*, v. 7.

38 The *Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla*, v. 9; the *Śaratbāri plate of Ratnapāla*, v. 9.

“strong, cruel and foolish people” is deemed a preamble to a Brahmanical kingdom in Kāmarūpa, renowned for its sages, Vedic studies, and practice of *varṇa* order and *dāna* (*Kālikāpurāna* 38.101, 128–130). It is noteworthy that the Kāmarūpa Pālas, being discounted as *mlecchas* by the Candras, in turn discounted their local people as the typical tribal other. The new royal epithet *śrī-vārāha*, the one born in the family of illustrious Varāha, was used in a figurative way to represent the Kāmarūpa Pāla kings’ descent from Naraka, emphasising their Vaiṣṇava patrimony (Shin 2022a, 583–617). The considerable importance attached to this epithet in the time of Gopāla (r. c. 990–1015) and Dharmapāla (r. c. 1035–1060) suggests that the making of a Brahmanical vision of kingship in contrast to the barbarian other was not limited only to the eleventh-century Candras.

Behind this development of a new type of representation worked deeper political, social, and religious changes in eastern India. First, the strong grip of Mahīpāla I (r. c. 987–1035) and Nayapāla (r. c. 1036–1051) on Bengal probably curbed the military activity of both the later Candra and Kāmarūpa kings (Islam 2018, 628). This is clear from the complete absence of verses praising the military achievement of Laḍahacandra and Govindacandra in their charters, and also from the very poetical exaggeration of Dharmapāla’s valour in his *praśasti*. When they did not or could not have any martial accomplishment to celebrate and commemorate, their self-promotion was made either at the expense of others or on the basis of an inflated genealogical claim, or sometimes both. In this context, Vaiṣṇavism with its Brahmanical orthodoxy proved attractive to both the Candra and Kāmarūpa Pāla rulers. A clear shift in the religious affiliation of Laḍahacandra and Dharmapāla towards Vaiṣṇava faith at the personal level contributed to reinventing their images as an embodiment or a descendant of the god who ruled the cosmos and the world by taking on many different forms.<sup>39</sup>

Migrant Brāhmaṇas, hailing from north Bengal and induced to settle in Vaṅga and Kāmarūpa by land grants, probably played an important role in the creation of a “Vaiṣṇava” lordship of both the rulers. The installation of Laḍahamādhava, Viṣṇu named after Laḍahacandra, may have been induced by the Brāhmaṇas from north Bengal where the prevalence of the same habit is

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39 The two charters of Laḍahacandra begin with an invocation to Vāsudeva: *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*. See *Laḍahacandra’s first grant*, v. 1; *Laḍahacandra’s second grant*, year 6, v. 1. The last charter of Dharmapāla of Kāmarūpa also begins with a salutation to Viṣṇu in his Varāha form: *svasti śrīmān sa kroḍa-rūpo jayati*. See the *Puspabhadra plate of Dharmapāla*, v. 1.

attested by several pieces of epigraphic evidence.<sup>40</sup> The worship of *Laḍahamādhava* at *Paṭṭikeraka*, established by *Laḍahacandra*, remained as a symbol of royal authority till the late thirteenth century, as the *Grant of Viradharadeva* attests.<sup>41</sup> In the case of *Kāmarūpa*, it is evident that *Brāhmaṇas* with a *Vaiṣṇava* orientation migrated from north Bengal to the region upon the direct intervention of *Dharmapāla*, who donated the largest plot of land to a *Brāhmaṇa* in over two hundred years of *Pāla* history.<sup>42</sup> The last, but not least, point concerns the close ties between this religious change and self-projection: the singular devotion to *Viṣṇu* was developed in parallel with overt emphasis on the *Kṣatriya* origin of both the *Candra* and *Kāmarūpa Pāla* rulers, and this lineage-based self-representation was followed by new dynasties including the *Varmans* (r. c. 1050–1125) ruling southeastern Bengal, and another *Candra* line (r. c. 1120–1200) holding sway over the lower *Brahmaputra* valley in the twelfth century.<sup>43</sup> The rulers of India's easternmost region finally fell within the ambit of the early medieval convention of making *Kṣatriya* identity, which, in contrast, was never attempted by the imperial *Pālas* till the end of their days. The two lesser powers were more adaptive and responsive to new modes of political representation. Those modes were followed by the *Senas*, who eventually overpowered the imperial *Pālas*.

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40 According to *Furui* (2013, 397), a number of *Viṣṇu* images are inscribed with names ending with his epithets like *Mādhava* and *Nārāyaṇa*, which are prefixed with male or female personal names. For instance, a form of *Viṣṇu* called *Sonnakādevī-Mādhava* was named after a woman called *Sonnakā* or *Sonnakādevī*. For the presence of *Brāhmaṇas* hailing from north Bengal in the *Candra* kingdom, see *Fleming* (2010, 225).

41 The *Grant of Viradharadeva* of the later *Devas* was made in favour of the lord *Vāsudeva* named *Laḍahamādhava*. For palaeographic reasons, his plate is assigned to the thirteenth century by *S. C. Bhattacharya* (1983, 20, 23).

42 For instance, *Madhusūdana*, a *Brāhmaṇa* donee attached to the worship of *Mādhava* from his boyhood, is said to have originated from a village called *Khyātipali*, an abode of pious and learned *Brāhmaṇas* as well as a place of sacrifice and Vedic study, probably situated in *Varendra* of Bengal. *Madhusūdana* was the only *Brāhmaṇa* who was granted land yielding as much as 10 000 (*droṇas* of) paddies during the rule of the *Pālas*. See the *Puspabhadra plate of Dharmapāla*, v. 18; vv. 9–11; v. 21. For more details, see *Shin* (2022a, 605).

43 The *Vaiṣṇava Varmans* traced their origin from *Yadu* and claimed their status as the kinsmen of *Hari* (*Kṛṣṇa*). See the *Belava plate of Bhojavarman*, vv. 1–4. The *Candras*, whose charter begins with a salutation to the lord *Vāsudeva* and invokes *Varāha-Viṣṇu*, also claimed *Candravaṁśa* origin. See the *Assam plates of Vallabhadeva*, vv. 1–3.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the epigraphic representation of self and others should be viewed as contextual articulation. Only through understanding the changing context of politics, society, culture, and religion can one account for the diversity in the representational practices of the Pālas of Kāmarūpa and the Candras of Vaṅga, the two lesser powers flourishing on the edge of the Pāla empire of Bengal in a transitional phase.

First, their self-image as leaders chosen by the people appeared at the time of their ascendancy, the first half of the tenth century, when the Kāmarūpa Pāla and Candra rulers consciously adopted the political idiom of the Bengal Pālas to disguise their obscure origin and to secure legitimacy. However, when the Pālas reassumed their sway over much of eastern India from the late tenth century, a heroic vision of the past surfaced in the two dynasties' records, with detailed references to their military action or political intervention directed at earlier Pāla kings. As a point of reference, the Pālas were used continuously in making the consummate self-images of their contenders, and in doing so, the Pāla sphere of influence in representational practices expanded even as this strongest polity of eastern India became an empire in decline. Second, while representing themselves in relation with the imperial Pālas, the two powers defined their political rivals as *mleccha*, clearly connoting a lack of culture and civilisation. By the first half of the eleventh century, the Candras applied this term to the Kāmarūpa Pālas, and the latter did the same to the previous dynasty of their region, which had arisen from local tribal people. Their contemptuous attitudes towards others, whether within or outside a region, coincided with their growing consciousness of the Vaiṣṇava divine kingship and Kṣatriya genealogical claim, in which migrant Brāhmaṇas from north Bengal played an increasingly important role. This pejorative characterisation of the others was, therefore, a by-product of the process of their identity formation, and in the course of which the other was always defined in an uneven power relation.

Located on the periphery of the imperial Pāla heartland, the two lesser powers constructed their image through a twofold process: adapting political idioms and religious attributes from north Bengal on the one hand, and distancing themselves from others, whose deficiency in Brahmanical norms is highlighted, on the other. Self-representation and the presentation of others were not effected in isolation: they were reflective and reciprocal.

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See page xvi about references to primary sources in general, and page xvii about DHARMA digital editions with a corpus ID and a number.

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# Self-Representation and Presentation of Others in Indic Epigraphical Writing

Edited by  
Dániel Balogh and Annette Schmiedchen

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