

to the southeast (Nepal, Bengal),³² the south (Karnataka, Tamilnadu) and possibly further south to Southeast Asia from 4th century onwards.³³ There are at least six pre-Angkorian/Angkorian inscriptions in Cambodia that mention the sect, which indicate a wide spread dissemination of their religious system.³⁴ Khmer inscriptional records clearly mention the presence of Indian Brahmins marrying into the Khmer royalty.³⁵

The inscriptions indicate that Pāśupata missionaries were willing to travel and populate the countryside in return for land.³⁶ The missionary nature of the sect is indicated by the example set by their founder Lakulīśa, who is recorded as walking to Ujjain and initiating four disciples to launch a tradition of propagation. The inscriptions mention similar activities by Pāśupata ācārya.³⁷ The re-creation of a Śaiva landscape of Indic sacred sites in Cambodia is seen as early as 6th century CE. As Alexis Sanderson comments:

‘The effect of the practice is to transfigure the Khmer realm by creating a Śaiva landscape whose sacred enclaves could be seen as doubles of those of the religion’s homeland.’³⁸

Śaivism became intimately connected with the Khmer land. Many names of Śaiva sites and sanctuaries recorded in the pre-Angkorian inscriptions are borrowed from the holy places of the Indian tradition.³⁹ Bhadreśvara, the benevolent form of Śiva well known in Indian sources, became the state god of not only the Khmers at Sambor Prei Kuk, but also of the Chams at M̄y S̄on. Sanderson has argued that there were at least eight Pāśupata Śaiva sites such as Amareśvara, Prabhāsa, Siddheśvara present in Cambodia.⁴⁰

By the 7th century Pāśupata teachers had been able to secure a place for themselves in the Khmer royalty and we may assume in the Cham domain as well. These priests would have played a key role in the royal sphere during the early period and maintained a powerful hierarchy similar to that which was theirs in India. Legitimation was not only the attraction of Hinduism for tribal leaders. O. W. Wolters has argued:

‘In Khmer “Hinduism” the man of prowess, with his ascetic advisors, was now Śiva’s foremost worshipper. What can be said of the “Hinduism” of his “servants”, those who had come under his influence?’⁴¹

The highly developed system of magical power derived from meditation (*tapas*) must

have been revered in the Khmer domain. Ascetics are indeed mentioned under several terms in the Khmer inscriptions, such as *muni*, *mahāmuni*, *ṛṣi*, *maharṣi*, and *tapasvin*, *tapasvindrapaṇḍita*⁴², and among them are Pāśupatas. They are placed in charge of temples, presumably as the first stage of the aspirant’s life and many a times are beneficiaries of land grants.⁴³

Pāśupatas in Khmer and Cham epigraphy

The Pāśupatas played an important role at the Khmer royal courts, obtaining the confidence of kings. An important figure mentioned in the *Skandapurāṇa* with respect to the history of Pāśupatas is Somaśarman, who was initiated by the Lord Śiva into a branch of the Pāśupata order.⁴⁴ The importance of Somaśarman in the religious history of the time is seen in two pre-Angkorian inscriptions.⁴⁵ The early inscriptions of Sambor Prei Kuk are landmark inscriptions for our understanding of the Pāśupata sect, especially Īśānavarman I (617-35) who entrusted one of them with the care of a temple⁴⁶, and Bhāvavarman II (r.?- ca 657) who employed another one as a poet; he practiced asceticism according to the Śaiva method.⁴⁷ One of the earliest Cambodian inscriptions K. 604 clearly states how a Pāśupata Brahmin who is to be appointed by the king for the worship of the god should be the beneficiary of the foundation.⁴⁸ Pāśupatas must have played a significant role during the reign of Indravarman I (r. 877-889) and Yaśovarman I (r. 889-ca. 910). The Prasat Prei inscription of Yaśovarman I clearly differentiates Śaiva and Pāśupata ācārya and their doctrinal differences (Śaiva-Pāśupata – Jñāna).

‘Then (after the king), the Brahmin should be honoured above all others; if there are many, their qualities and their learning should be taken into consideration. The royal prince, the minister, the commander of army, and eminent people should be honoured a Śaiva ācārya and a Pāśupata ācārya. The ācārya who is most learned among the scholars of Śaiva and Pāśupata doctrines and of grammar, that professor is to receive the highest honours in this great āśrama.’⁴⁹

The first dated Cham inscription (C 96) is from 658 CE, which documents a marriage between a Cham prince and a daughter of king Īśānavarman I who founded the capital of the kingdom of Īśānapura, identified with the modern archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk.⁵⁰ This is the first local inscription that records the