

A Study of Historical Inscriptions in Ancient Deccan

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Introduction:-

The archaeological evidences are obtained by the systematic skilled examinations of buildings, monuments and work of art. The credit for excavating the pre-Aryan past goes to Sir William Johns of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. James Prinsep, the secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal succeeded for the first time in deciphering the Bramhi script. Archaeological evidence may be divided into following four categories (a) Inscriptions (b) Coins (c) Miscellaneous . This research paper deals with the early history of Deccan. Also this paper discuss about some inscriptions of early Deccan.

Inscriptions

Inscriptions are the most reliable source to understanding the ancient history of Maharashtra. They are generally devoid of myths and narrate facts. These are mostly carved on stones and metals. Their script enables us to determine the approximate age of the inscription. Thus as historical evidence, inscriptions take precedence over mode of literature. Regarding the inscriptions in Maharashtra these are written in different languages such as Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil etc. Before the Gupta period 95 per cent of such inscriptions were written in Prakrit.

The inscriptions engraved on the walls of religious buildings mainly bear information on the socio-religious and cultural aspects of ancient Maharashtra. Some important inscriptions regarding proposed research work.

1) Naneghat cave inscription of Satavahan Queen Nagnika

This inscription is located about 27 kms north west from the historic town of Junnar in Pune district, now it lies in ruins. The Naneghat pass once served as a busy trade route linking up country with the seaports of north Konkan. It served as a busy trade route connecting Kalyan, Nalasopara with the upcountry. This inscription has immense importance as far as the origin of the Satvahana rule is concerned and records the governance and prowess of third Satvahana king, Satkarni I, and performance of different sacrifices by him.

The inscriptions in the caves indicate that they are the work of Satavahana rulers who came into prominence after the fall of the Mauryan empire. It is believed that a powerful woman ruler Naganika, the wife of Satakarni (180–170 BCE) of the Satavahana family commissioned the cave, the statues and the inscriptions. Inscriptions in the cave mention her and her family members.

The central figure of the inscription is Naganika, perhaps the first woman in India's recorded history who has determined the political affairs of a state, even having her own coinage.

Across the Naneghat pass we get a ranzan (a stone pot), where apparently the toll was dropped in it . A merchant by profession, Nane is said to have built this ghat to facilitate business at the ancient Deccan for the merchants in Konkan. All those, who clambered up the ghat for business or

otherwise, had to pay the toll. The existence of huge stone pot at the entrance to Naneghat is thus believed to be for collection of tolls as well as a form of octroi on the incoming goods.

According to a Prof. G Buhler, Naneghat inscriptions belong to the oldest historical documents of the western India and in some respects more interesting and important than all the other cave inscriptions taken together. The script of inscription is Brahmi and the language is Prakrit and the period of the inscription is first century B.C.

The inscriptions on the cave also records the accounts of no less than 18 sacrifices performed together by Satkarni and Naganika, which include two Ashwamedhas, a Rajsuya and a Vajpeya sacrifice, as well as number of cows, horses, elephants, chariots, garments and karshapana coins donated by the couple on the occasion. The celebration of Rajsuya suggests Satkarni's coronation and two Ashwamedhas demonstrate his political supremacy. Naganika, after the death of her husband, ruled the kingdom for some time with the help of her father, all of which are recorded in the inscriptions.

2. Hatigumpha Inscription of King Kharavela

This inscription is situated at Udayagiri, near Bhuvaneshwar in Odessa. This was inscribed by Kharavela, the emperor of Kalinga in India, during second century B.C. Starling has discovered this inscription in 1825.

Hatigumpha Inscription consists of seventeen lines. The inscription is written in a Prakrit language with Brahmi script. We may find impression of Sanskrit on it and also suggesting a date around 150 B.C.

In this inscription Kharavela inscribed his remarkable work after the coronation. The Hatigumpha Inscription states that:

In the second year of his coronation, without caring of Satakarni (His Majesty) sent to a large army consisting of horse, elephant, infantry and chariot and struck terror to Asikanagara with that troop that marched up to the river Kanhavemna.

In fourth year of his majesty, he tract the Vidhadhara, that had been established by the former kings of Kalinga and had never been crossed before. The Rathika and Bhojaka chiefs with their crown cast off, their umbrella and royal insignia thrown aside, and their jewelry and wealth confiscated were made to pay obeisance at the feet of his majesty.

3. Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman I

This rock inscription is carved near Girnar Ranges in Junagaddist- Kathiawad. Rudraman- I was a Saka ruler from the western Kshatrapas dynasty, who inscribed this rock inscription. Script of this inscription is Brahmi and language is Sanskrit. Period of the inscription is 150 .A.D. Rudraman- I was instrumental in the decline of the Satavahanaempire.

According to the inscription, "Rudradaman-I was the lord of the whole of eastern and western Akaravanti (Akara- East Malawa and Avanti –West Malawa), the Anupa country, Saurashtra, Aparanta and other territories gained by his own valor."

Also he maintained matrimonial relationships with Satavahana and conceded the country of Aparanta to Vashishtipurta Satakarni, his son –in-law and probably son of Gautamiputra Satakarni, as dowry. In spite of matrimonial link, at least two wars took place between them wherein he defeated Satavahana but spared the life of Vashishtipurta Satakarni because of their relationship.

4.Nashik inscription of emperor Nahapan-

Ushavadata the viceroy and son-in-law of western Kshatrapas Emperor Nahapana had carved this inscription on the back wall of 10th cave at Nashik.

The script of this stone inscription is Bramhi and language is Sanskrit. We found the influence of Prakrit on it. Also names of the places in contemporary Maharashtra such as Shurparak, Nangol Govardan , Trirashmi were also carved on it.

The inscriptions of cave no 10 reveal that in 105 -106 B.C. Kshatrapas defeated the Satavahanas after which Kshatrapa Nahapana's son-in-law and Dinika's son –Usabhdatta donated 3000 gold coins for this caves as well as for the food and clothing of the monks. Usabhadattas wife (Nahapanas daughter) Dakshmitra also donated one cave for the Buddhist monks.

Nahapana was the great emperor of Kshaharat dynasty. According to this inscription he ruled over Maharashtra at the beginning of second century A.D. In his prominent rule he did the public welfare work. Ushavadatta accomplished various charities and conquests on behalf of his father-in-law. He constructed rest houses, gardens and tanks at Bharukachchha (Broach), Dashapura (Malava),Govardeana (near Nashik) and Shorparaga (Sopara in Thane district).He excavated one of Pandavleni Caves in the Trirashmi hill near Nashik and offered it to the Buddhist monks.

5.Nashik Inscription of Vasisthiputra Pulumavi

This inscription has carved on the entrance of third cave at Nashik. This inscription describes the gallantry of Gautamiputra Satakarni. Also we get the information about the socio-economic, religious, political situation and the chronology of Satavahana dynasty.

Script of this inscription is Bramhi and language used in it is Prakrit , we found impression of Sanskrit on it. According to this inscription mother Gautami Balashri has donated caves to Buddhist Sangha and also villages for their livelihood. We may see the religious tolerance of the rulers from the inscription.

6.Pillar Inscription of Virpurushdatta

Superintendent of Madras archives Mr. Sarasvati has discovered Nagarjunkonda settlement in March 1926. Some Buddhist sculptures and this inscription has found while excavation of Nagarjunkonda in 1927-28 under the supervision of Loug Hurst .

Script of this inscription is Bramhi and language is Prakrit and the period is third century A.D. “The wife of Virpurushdatta ‘Bappashri’ has carved this inscription in the remembrance of her mother Hammasirinika.

Also she built a massive chaitya for the Buddhist Sangha. This pillar inscription enlightens us about the contemporary religious tolerance and religious independence of women in society.

7.Copper Inscription of Prabhavati Gupta

Prabhavati Gupta was the royal regent and queen who belonged to the Vakataka dynasty and daughter of Chandragupta II of the Gupta Empire. Kubernaga was the mother of Prabhavati Gupta. Queen Prabhavati Gupta wedded king Rudrasena II of the Vakatakaempire and she had controlled the reigns of her empire in 385 A.D. following the demise of her husband. She ruled as a royal regent on behalf of her two sons named Damodarasena and Divakarasena for 13 year. Her father Chandragupta II extended his cooperation towards Prabhavati Gupta in the supervision of her kingdom.

Prabhavati Gupta is known to have issued Pune copper plate inscription during the final and 13th year of her regime, as the mother of the prince Divakarasena.

This copper plate inscription has preserved by Balvant Bhau Nagarkar and their ancestry. Their native place was Hinganghat in Vardha district. The script of inscription is Kilakshirshak and language is Sanskrit. The period of the inscription is 415-420 A.D.

This inscription enlightens us about the prominent position of women in politics and society. Also this is the only historical evidence which throws lights on chronology of Vakataka.

8.Aihole Inscription of Pulikeshin II -

The Meguti temple at Aihole, Bagalot district of Karnataka stands on top of hill .Embedded in the eastern wall of the Jaina temple, is a 19- line inscription in Sanskrit verse, written in the southern script typical of the 7th century. The inscription is dated in the year 634-635 A.D. The composer, a poet named Ravikirti has built this temple. The inscription is a prashasti of Chalukyas especially the reigning king Pulikeshin II. This inscription contains many details about the history of this dynasty.

This inscription describe about the gallantry of Chalukya king Pulikeshin II. He defeated emperor Harshavardhan and he becomes a master of whole of India south of the Vindhyas and considerable territories to the north of that natural frontier. His reputation seems to have travelled beyond the confines of India, and it is believed that letters and presents were interchanged between him and king Khusru II of Persia.

The Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang pays a just tribute to the power and virtues of Pulikeshin II and the valour and heroism of his subjects.

It also enlightens us , “Almost equal to Indra, He by means of all the three powers, gathered by him according to rule, and by his noble birth and other excellent qualities, acquired the sovereignty over the three Maharashtra as with their nine and ninety thousand villages.”

9.Bhor Copper plate inscription of Rashtrakuta king Dharavarsh Dhruv

Presently this copper plate inscription is in collection of King of Bhor princely state. Prof G.H. Khare has published this inscription in historical exhibition. The script of inscription is Nagari , the language is Sanskrit and the period is 780 A.D.

While the halt at the bank of Neera river Rashtrakuta king Dhruv had donated a village ‘Laghuwing’ to a Bramhin ‘Vasudevhatta’, a son of Durgabhata, he was inhabitant of Karad. This copper plate inscription has written by Gaudasut Sawant.

This copper plate inscription enlightens us about the chronology of Rashtrakuta and contemporary socio-economic and political conditions of society.

Conclusion:-

The reconstruction of history of early Deccan presents great difficulties such as Lack of historical materials, indefinite chronology, Lack of single government, mixture of fact and fiction and different eras. But in spite of all these difficulties, there are certain sources which help a lot in the reconstruction of ancient history of Deccan.

While studying the history of ancient Deccan we have to study the socio-economic and political conditions and also the study of contemporary sources. Lack of authentic sources is a well-known problem regarding proposed issue but nowa days this problem is demolishing due to research efforts of new researchers and now we are getting many sources in the said topic. Though these sources are very glorious, rich and varied, it fails to present a clear conception of history of ancient Deccan.

Society of ancient Deccan has attached more importance to religion and philosophy and they cared very little about the political and materialistic activities of their time. In conclusion we could

say that above discussed inscriptions are helps to know the history of early Deccan also these helps to reconstruct the history of Deccan.

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