SOME ASPECTS OF EARLY SOUTH ASIAN EPIGRAPHY

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THIRUNELVELY
SRI LANKA.
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PREFACE

Epigraphy is the systematic study of inscriptions. Perhaps, nowhere in the world has epigraphy played an important role as in India. India has some of the oldest and the longest inscriptions in the world; It is also a treasure house of inscriptions of various types. At the same time, there has been a continuous stream of inscriptions from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization to the present day covering more than 5000 years. Of course, there are a few gaps in this long period especially between the Indus Valley Civilization and the age of Asoka.

Indian epigraphy is important from more than one point of view. Inscriptions constitute the most authentic source for the history of India from the 3rd century B.C. to the last of the Hindu empires in the South - Vijayanagar Empire which declined in the late 16th Century. They are also valuable from the literary and linguistic points of view. As far as Sanskrit literature is concerned, they generally reflect the trends in the literary tradition in Sanskrit. They contain linguistic features peculiar to them, though they mostly conform to the literary usages. Further, the inscriptions too have a literary form peculiar to them, namely, the prasasti. Its counterpart in Tamilnadu is called Meykkīrti though there are prasastis in Tamil too and certain differences are noted between the two.

The art of writing in India has been a subject of much controversy among scholars whose views vary from the indigeneous origin to the foreign.

The writer is interested in Indian epigraphy especially Sanskrit epigraphy for more than two decades. He has specialized on the early Sanskrit and Prakrit inscriptions.

In this small collection are found six essays on Indian epigraphy especially with reference to the Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions. The origin of the Brāhmī script and its derivatives also are

discussed briefly. The first article was written for the felicitation Volume in honour Dr. D.C. Sircar former Government Epigraphist for India (later professor of History), some time ago. As the writer is not sure as to whether this was published, he has included that article in this collection. The other essays are mostly written for this collection. The writer thinks that this collection of essays will be of some value to all those who are interested in Indian epigraphy. There may be some short-comings in this collection but they will be rectified in a subsequent edition.

The writer is indebted to the scholars who have contributed immensely to the cause of Indian epigraphy either by way of discovering, editing and interpreting the inscriptions or by undertaking an in-depth study of these records or doing both. The writer wishes to place on record his sincere thanks to all those scholars. He also wishes to convey his sincere thanks to Mr. N.Selvarajah who patiently typed the first draft and cut the stencils for all articles except the first one. He is also thankful to Miss. J.Alagaratnam who stencilled the first article. Finally, he thanks all others who helped him in one way or other to the successful completion of this collection.

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C O N T E N T S .

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ACHAEMENIAN AND ASOKAN INSCRIPTIONS - SOME ASPECTS OF COMPARISON.[1]

The Achaemenian Empire flourished for about two centuries (sixth to the fourth century B.C.). At the height of its power, it extended upto the Indus valley in the East, North Africa in the South and Eastern Europe in the West. It was the greatest empire, the then world had ever seen, comprising parts of the three continents of the Old World. The empire was divided into twenty satrapies provinces. Of these, the eastern-most satrapy in the Indus region (to the west of the Indus river) was the twentieth and richest of the satrapies.[2]

The empire was noted not only for the grand military conquests and administrative organisation but for the cultural developments too. It seems to have influenced the subsequent Macedonian empire as well as the Mauryan empire of India, in one way or other. There had been commercial, cultural and ethnic contacts between the Indus region and the countries to the west of it especially Persia, even before prehistoric times. The inclusion of this part of India in the mighty and extensive Persian Empire, strengthened these contacts. This is also reflected in certain activities of the Mauryan Empire (324-187 B.C.) Historians and archaeologists have often pointed out Achaemenian influence on Mauryan architecture[3] and certain preambles of the Asokan edicts.[4] No one except Romila Thapar[5] has so far suggested or claimed any Achaemenian inspiration for the Asokan edicts. Wheeler who is one of the strongest advocates of Achaemenian influence on the Mauryan architecture[6] (including the royal palace at Pataliputra, Asokan pillars, the highly polished Barabar cave dwellings, Indian coinage and the use of iron in India) has said with reference to Asokan inscriptions that he adapted a Persian precedent in carving his precepts upon rocks "and true save for an occasional formula, nothing could be more unlike the c[illegible]o commemorative and administrative records of the proud Persian despots than the gentle exhortations of the equally despotic but more humble-minded Buddhist king (Asoka)" [7] He has gone further and said that "In one way and another, then, the Mauryan was heir to the great king".[8] This might be an overstatement. An attempt is made in this paper to analyse and compare the content of the inscriptions of the Achaeminides and those of

Asoka and see whether the content of the Asokan inscriptions is influenced in some way or other by the former.

The Achaemenian kings generally boast of their military conquests and achievements which they attribute to the glory of Ahuramazda, their God. As for instance, the Behistun inscription of Darius I reads as follows:

> " I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian.
>
> Saith Darius the King; my father was Hystaspes: Hystaspes' father was Arsames; Arsames father was Ariaramnes; Ariaramnes father was Teispes' father was Archaemenes
>
> .....
>
> Saith Darius the King: By the favour of Ahuramazda I am King: Ahuramazda bestowed the Kingdom upon me.
>
> Saith Darius the King. These are the countries which came into me. : by the favour of Ahuramazda I was king of them: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt....."

The other Achaemenian inscriptions too, generally follow the same pattern. The King, in these inscriptions refers to himself in the first person and the third person. His titles like the great king (XSayathiya Vazraka), the king of kings, (XSayathiya Xsayathiyanam) and king of Persia are significant. His genealogy is given. His conquests are eloquently spoken of and are attributed to the glory of Ahuramazda. The kings' patronage to Zoroastrianism and the suppression of heretics are highly praised in these inscriptions.

The earliest extant inscriptions in India are those of Asoka who ruled over a greater part of India in the third century B.C. Most of his inscriptions refer to the extraordinary zeal and the sincere attempts that the emperor made to propagate Dharma which he cherished more than anything else, after the

conquest of Kalinga.[10] The propagation of Dharma was not confined to India alone but beyond the borders of India as far south as Ceylon and in the North west upto North Africa and Greece.[11]

A Comparative study of the Achaemenian inscriptions with those of Asoka points out similarities as well as the differences between the two. Both group of inscriptions were generally inscribed at important places and sometimes in more than one version. The formula in the preamble of both seem to be the same, i.e. the king speaks of himself in the first person as well as in the third person. E.Hultzch has pointed out some Persian words that occur in the Asokan inscriptions even after the Kalinga war, as for instance nipista, nipestita and Nipesapita.[12] Some of Asoka's edicts clearly bring out his great conquest of Kalinga and the subsequent repentance of the king over the atrocities of the war which he himself ruthlessly waged.[13] They also refer to his delight in the conquest of Dharma (Dharmavijaya). The Achaemenian kings speak highly of their aggressive military conquests and attribute them to the grace of Ahuramazda.[14] Asoka was bent on Dharma vijaya (or conquest of righteousness or Dhamma) and it was this conquest that gave him the greatest satisfaction.[15]

Just as the Achaemenian soldiers went out to different countries to conquer them and proclaim the glory of Ahuramazda,[16] the Dharma mahamatras of Asoka went even beyond the borders of India to effect the conquest of Dharma.[17] It appears that the Achaemenides and Asoka tried to unite and establish a sort of cohesion in their respective empires by different means, the former by the propagation of Zoroastrian ideals[18] and the latter by the proclamation of Dharma.[19] Thus, they seem to have had the imperial ideal but the nature and mode of achieving that ideal appear to be different, probably due to their religious inclinations. Had Asoka been a digvijayin, even after the Kalinga war, his inscriptions might probably reflect a similar picture.

The Achaemenians were religious fanatics and suppressed the heretics and fostered Zoroastrianism.[20] Asoka banned the killing of animals and samajas,[21] but actively promoted religious toleration.[22] The action of Asoka in the ban of the samajas perhaps, indicates as has been pointed out by Romila Thapar, that this was a preventive measure against rebellions or plot

against the king. The samajas were festive gatherings and as such many people could assemble on these occasions. Or it might be that Asoka didn't believe in the such festivities as he thought that they were useless. Whatever might have been the purpose behind this ban, there appears to be some resemblance between this measure of Asoka and that of Achemenides. But the religious toleration of Asoka is in complete antithesis to the fanaticism of the Achaemenides. Again this is perhaps due to the uniquenses of the Indian environment, where the ideas of others were tolerated from the time of the earliest record of history in India. That is from the time of the Rgveda itself, where it is clearly stated that "truth is one but sages call it by different names" (ekam sad viprabahudha vadanti)[23]. An example may be cited from India where the Buddha who preached against some of the contemporary social and religious abuses was respected and even deified later, whereas, Socrates who lived more or less at the same time in the West was poisoned for preaching against the prevailing ideas in Greece. Indian history is replete with several examples of the unique toleration. Whereas the Western world until recent times was not tolerant of the religious ideas other than its own.

Just as the Achaemenian kings proclaimed the glory of Ahuramazda, Asoka did that of Dharma. The Achaemenians as well as Asoka have proclaimed or setforth their ideas very directly without recourse to literary embellishments, on durable materials like the rocks and pillars, so that they may prevail for a long time. In fact the king Darius says "Thou who shalt hereafter behold this inscription which I have inscribed, or these sculptures, do thou not destroy them, but thence onward protect them, as long as thou shalt be on good health"[24]. In like manner, Asoka has said that his document of Dharma had been engraved so that it might endure for a long time and that his progeny might follow him.[25]

The Achaemenian kings, wanted others to worship Ahuramazda and be happy in this world and the next.[26] Similarly, Asoka wished that others should follow Dharma and be happy in this life and the next.[27] The Achaemenides as well as Asoka seem to have been concerned not only with the present life but the future too. In this respect, there is a sort of missionary zeal in the propagation and diffusion of these ideals.

Again, there is some similarity in the way the Archaemenians and Asoka looked at their conquests and held their far-flung empires. For example, Darius I says in his Behistun inscription, "Ahuramazda bestowed the kingdom upon me: Ahuramazda bore me aid until I got possession of this kingdom; By the favour of Ahuramazda I hold this kingdom" [28] Asoka declares in one of his edicts, "to protect according to Dharma, to cause pleasure according to Dharma and guard (speech) according to Dharma (morality). [29]

The Achaemenides stressed the ideal of the righteousness as emphasized in Zoroastrianism. One of their inscriptions says "Do not leave the right path, do not rise in rebellion". [30] There is no surprise in this, as the ancestors of Indian Aryans and ancient Persians appear to have had a common homeland and shared common customs, manners and religious thought. A comparison of such statements points to some sort of similarity between these two sets of inscriptions.

The events of a particular reign and the measure undertaken by the king with reference to his conquests, administration and patronage to religion, are sometimes referred to by the reignal year. One may compare "Saith Darius the King, 'This is what I did in both in the Second and third year after I became king'", [31] with "King Devanampiya Piyadasi speaks when I had been anointed twelve years". [32] In stating the events in the reignal year of a king, there appears to have been a definite attempt to preserve important events as they took place. Perhaps, as these kings did not follow a definite era, they reckoned the events by the reignal year of a particular king.

The Achaemenides as well as Asoka appear to have had similar ideals in protecting the weak as against the strong. One of the Achaemenian inscriptions, for example, says "Let not the strong smite the weak". [33] Asoka had similar notions of kingly duties [34] as was common to the kings of India and other countries. The protection afforded by the king for the weak as against the strong has been a fundamental duty of the kings from the dawn of monarchy.

A deeper and more detailed analysis of the Achaemenian Empire and that of a Mauryas with special reference to Asokan inscriptions, besides the religious, economic and administrative

organisation may perhaps throw more light about the Achaemenian influence on the Maurya Empire which flourished subsequently in India. Wheeler has tried to explain as to how the Achaemenian ideas especially on architecture could have reached Mauryan India.[35] He has said "there is in India no precedent for the rock edicts but at the bidding of Asoka in and after 257 B.C."[36] It might be that the very idea of inscribing on the rocks and pillars by Asoka would have been due to the inspiration derived perhaps through the Achaemenian Achaemenian 'master masons, or "artistes and craftsmen" who migrated to India to seek the patronage of the Mauryan emperors, as is postulated by Wheeler.[37]

Further it is to be noted that there were intimate contacts between the Persian Empire and the contemporary (pre-Mauryan) India, at least in the North West India, from the time of the conquest of North West India by Darius I. This contact might have been further strengthened by the Macedonian conquest of the same part of India. Alexander's empire was in a way, a successor state of the Achaemenians in Western Asia and eastwards upto the Indus river. After the sudden fall of the Macedonian Empire, there had been clashes between Candragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire and Seleucus Nikator who succeeded to the eastern half of Alexander's Empire. The results of these clashes seem to have been in favour of the Mauryan Emperor whose empire had now extended right upto the eastern border of Persia, beyond the northwest frontier as had never been before or even afterwards. The Mauryan emperor might have been at a vantage position because his base was in (North west) India at that time and that of Seleucus was further away in the West. And more possibly, Seleucus in order to strengthen his new empire in Western Asia against his powerful enemies would have tried to win over the powerful Indian monarch by some concessions so that there would be no danger in the eastern marches of his empire. The Kandahar bilingual inscription of Asoka clearly shows that the Mauryan empire touched the border of Persia. It is probable though one cannot be certain, that Asoka himself might have visited the heart of the Achaemenian empire. Further, certain parts of the Achaemenian empire (from the border of Persia to the Indus river)were under the Mauryan control from the time of Candragupta to that of Asoka. So Asoka himself would have known of atleast some

vestiges of the Achaemenians. Persian influence in the North West India is clearly seen by the use of the Kharoshthi script in his edicts by Asoka himself in this part of his empire. One might argue as to why the two of his illustrious predecessors Candragupta and his son Bindusara did not think of Achaemenian precedent for inscribing mere important events of their reign. Perhaps, they were too preoccupied with the foundation and territorial expansion of their new empire. It was perhaps Asoka who could think of this idea, since, he had an unswerving zeal for his new ideal of Dharma, after the Kalinga war. The zeal of Asoka for the Dharma, is similar to that of Achaemenides for furthering the cause of Zoroastrianism, as is pointed out earlier. Just as the Achaemenides were eloquent about their conquests and glory of Ahuramazda, Asoka was with the Dharma. Yet, one cannot make deductions on mere apparent similarities. There must also be strong possibilities for such deductions. It is probable that Asoka himself could have known or heard of the inscriptions of the Achaemenides,[38] as Wheeler[39] has pointed out the influence of Persian architecture on that of Asoka, including the cave architecture. As in the case of architecture, the Achaemenidian ideas on inscriptions too might have been adopted to suit the new ideals and local conditions of the Asokan Empire. This might perhaps explain certain basic differences between the inscriptions of the Achaemenides and those of Asoka. It is also probable that the Asokan ideas on the inscriptions is completely original and whatever similarities there are between the Achaemenidian inscriptions and those of Asoka are merely accidental or due to certain common cultural traditions.[40] Since some Achaemenidian ideas appear to have influenced Mauryan architecture, there could have been similar impact on inscriptions too, as the form and content of the inscriptions of Asoka appear to reveal in some respects. By attributing or referring to such an influence on Asokan inscriptions, one does not in any way belittle or impair the greatness of the dynamic Mauryan Emperor Asoka. It is to his credit, that his ideals and inscriptions are quite original, whatever the Achaemenidian inspiration had been or not. History is replete with many an example to show that several great men of the world, whether kings or religious teachers or others who have shaped the course of the history of a particular country or people or who have made an impact on

on the contemporary world, owed atleast in some way or other to those who had gone before in their own country or any other place which is close or far away from them. Diffusion of ideas from one place to another need not necessarily be preceded by political conquest. Wheeler has rightly remarked in one place that "ideas have wings ". [4] Therefore the Achaemenidian ideas on architecture and inscriptions, could have spread to the Mauryan Empire, a greater part of which was never under Achaemenidian control.

A more detailed, critical and comparative study of the history of ancient Persia and India upto the third century B.C. with special reference to the empires of the Achaemenides and the Mauryas would perhaps, unravel besides other aspects, certain problems relating to the inscriptions of the Achaemenides and those of Asoka.

1. This article is a preliminary study on this ~~study~~ Subject.

2. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.) The classical accounts of India. Calcutta, 1960.

3. Percy Brown, Indian Architecture, Bombay, pp.10ff.

   Mortimer Wheeler (i) Early India and Pakistan, London, 1959, pp. 170ff.

   (ii) Civilizations of the Indus valley and Beyond, London, 1966, 115ff.

4. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol.I. p.xlii.

5. Romila Thapar, Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryan Empire pp.127-128. She just refers to the Similarity between the edicts of Darius and those of Asoka.

6. Mortimer Wheeler (1) Civilizations of the Indus valley and Beyond, pp.115ff.

   (2) Early India and Pakistan, pp.170ff.

7. Ibid. (i) p.124.

   (ii) p.176.

8. Ibid. p.176.

9. Kent R.G., Old Persian, American Oriental Society, New Haven, Connecticut, 1953, p.119.

10. i.e. Rock edict XI. "Thus said king Priyadarsin, Beloved of the gods : There is no such gift as the gift of Dharma : (no such acquaintance as) acquaintance in Dharma, (no such participation as) participation in Dharma and (no such kinship as) kinship in Dharma".

11. Vide Rock Edicts of Asoka No.II & XIII.

12. Corpus Indicarum Inscriptionum I.,p.xlii.

13. Vide Rock Edict XIII.

14. Kent R.G., op.cit., p.119.

15. Vide Rock Edict XIII. L.II.Latha prite Dharma - vijayi spi.

16. Kent R.G., op.cit., p.127-8- 'Go forth, Smite that army which does not call itself mine". also vide Ibid.p.144.

17. Vide Rock Edicts II & XIII.

18. 'Ahuramazda is everything for the Achaemenides.' Vide Kent, R.G., op.cit., p.146.

19. Vide Rock Edict IV.

20. Kent,R.G . op.cit. p.151.

21. Rock Edict I.

22. Rock Edict XII.

23. Rgveda 1,164.46.

24. Kent R.G., op.cit., p.132.

25. Rock Edict V.

26. Kent.R.G., op.cit., p.152 "one devoted to Ahuramazda, will be happy when living and blessed when dead".

27. i.e. Rock Edicts XI, XIII.

28. Kent, R.G., op.cit., p.119.

29. Pillar Edict-I (Delhi-Topra) Ll.9-10.

30. Kent. R.G., op.cit., p.138. Also cf.Ibid. p.140 "What is right? that is my desire".

31. Ibid. p.134.

32. Pillar Edict (Delhi-Torpa) Ll.1-2.

33. Kent. R.G., op.cit., p.141-2.

34. Kalinga Edict I.

35. Mortimer Wheeler - Early India and Pakistan, p.173.

36. Mortimer Wheeler (a) Ibid. 175.

(b) Civilizations of the Indus valley and Beyond, p.174.

37. Mortimer Wheeler (i) Civilizations of the Indus valley and Beyond p.120.

(ii) Early India and Pakistan, pp.173.

38. Romila Thapar, op.cit., p.127. "There is no certainty as to whether Asoka know the edicts of the former(Achaemenides). He may have known that the Achaemenides engraved inscriptions on rock surfaces and decided to do the same. The similarity in the form of address suggests that he may have read the text of the Iranian Edicts".

39. Mortimer Wheeler., Civilizations of the Indus Valley and Beyond, pp.116-124.

40. Romila Thapar, op.cit., p.127.

41. Mortimer Wheeler' Early India and Pakistan, London, 1959 p.104.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BRAHMI SCRIPT AND ITS USE IN SOUTH ASIA.

The art of writing has played a vital role in the history of human civilization. It's importance was realized in the earliest centres of civilization that flourished along the banks of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the Nile, the Indus and the Hwang-ho. It took several thousands of years for man to invent and the use the script to his own advantage. The evolution of the script for writing a language had several stages from gestures to pictographs and thence to syllabic and subsequently to actual writing. The invention and use of the art of writing had really revolutionised especially the spread of knowledge from one generation to another and from one place to another. This did not have the hazards of oral transmission which depended on memory and which could have perished altogether, had anything untoward happened to the scholars who tried to preserve it for the posterity. Whatever knowledge that our ancestors have bequeathed to us, could come intact only through the art of writing. In the same way, the knowledge of our times too could be passed on unimpaired only through the art of writing.

The importance of writing is rightly emphasized all over the world. As for example, one may cite the popular Tamil saying that " the knowledge of the numbers and the art of writing are the two eyes of a man" (ennum eluttum kannenattakum). Nārada smṛti a work on Hindu law dated about the fifth century A.D., regarding the importance of the art of writing in connection with documentary evidence says " Had not Brahma the creator created the written (Literature) the best eyes of the world would never have attained to it's happy condition (4.70). Kālidāsa one of the greatest, if not the greatest Sanskrit poet of India has said that " by the proper grasp of the art of writing one reaches the vast treasures of literature as one approaches the ocean through the mouth of the river" (Rv. 3.28).

Like the people of the other countries of Ancient Orient, the Indians too devised their own scripts from the time of the Indian Valley civilization. The scripts usually developed according to the social and cultural background of the area or areas concerned. Generally there may be a Co-relation between the social life of the people and the script they use.

Dr. A.H.Dani speaks of 'Writing as being part of culture' and that he ' would seek to discover a culture through the various traits seen in the available material contents. So it is also possible to search for the different writing styles which can be inferred from the available specimens '1

In India too, there were several scripts. Unfortunately,the earliest script as found in the remains of the Indus Civilization is not yet deciphered to the satisfaction of all concerned. Whether there is any continuity of this script in those of later times or not, the importance of this as a pioneer script should not be forgotten. As far as the extant evidence goes, there might have been some historic connection between this amd the scripts of subsequent times in India.

Though there is no direct evidence to the art of writing in the early Indian literary works like the Vedas, they do not lack in indirect evidence for the prevalence of the art of writing.[2]

There are references to aksaras in the Upanisads (Ch. up. 2. 10 etc). It appears that there were several scripts as mentioned in the later works like the Buddhist Lalitavistara which lists the names of as many as 64 scripts and the Jain Pannavanāsūtra and Samavāyāṅgasūtra which refer to the names of 18 scripts.[3] In all these texts, the lists of the names of scripts begin with the name of Brāhmī [4]. Another Jain text the Bhāgavatī- sūtra begins with a salutation to the Bambhi lipi (Brāhmī script).

A critical study of these scripts mentioned in these texts reveals that some of them are Indian; some others are foreign; while some others are either imaginary or perhaps never existed[5]. The Chinese Encyclopaedia Fan-wan- Sulin (composed in 688 A.D.) helps us to identify these scripts. "This work contains a list derived from Lalitavistara and here too, the name Brāhmī comes first. According to it, the invention of the art of writing was made by three divine powers; the first was Fan (Brahmā) who invented the Brāhmī script and which runs from left to right; the second power was Kia-lu (Kharoṣṭha) who invented the Kharoṣṭhī script which is written from right to left; and the third was Tsam ki, the script invented by whom goes up and down[6]. The Chinese Encyclopaedia further informs that the first two divine powers were born in India and the third in China.

On the basis of this text, it is clear that the name of the script written from left to right was Brāhmī and that written from right to left was known as Kharosthī. Thus, the name of the Brāhmī script never occurs in earlier texts, nor is there any extant specimen of Brāhmī writing anterior to Asoka in inscriptions. Further, the name of the Brāhmī script is taken from the Lalita-vistara and used liberally in the writings of modern times. The name of the Kharosthī script is explained in many ways. Some derive at from Kharostha who is supposed to have invented this script; some others think that it is the Sanskrit form of Kashgar, a province in Central Asia which was the latest centre of this script. Still some others take it to be an Indian adaptation of the Iranian word Khara - Osta or Kharaposta meaning ass-skin. It might be that ass-skin was used for writing this script probably in the initial stages. It might have been a nickname also.

After its use for about seven centuries it appears to have had a natural death as it was neither suitable for writing Sanskrit nor Prakrit. As far as the origin of the Kharosthī script is concerned, it is generally accepted that the original letter forms of Kharosthī were based on Aramaic as far as the Indian alphabet could allow. The remaining letters were evolved by the addition of diacritical marks[7]. But R.B.Pandey rejects this view and advocates the Indian origin of the script[8].

Divergent views are expressed regarding the origin and invention of the Brāhmī Script, the script par excellence of South Asia. Therefore, this has to be studied very carefully without any prejudice. The number of theories propounded regarding the origin of this script may be broadly divided into two groups. There are,

(a) those which trace its' origin from foreign sources.
(b) those which regard Brāhmī as of indigenous origin.

In the early stages of the study of the Brāhmī script, some scholars like Otfried Mueller, James Princep and E.Senart suggested that Brāhmī was of Greek origin. Wilson held the view that it was based either on Greek or Phoenician models. Following him, Sir William Jones argued for its origin from a Semitic alphabet. As there were more than one Semetic script. Scholars were at variance. A. Weber and R.N. Cust suggested a Phoenician origin of the alphabet. A.C. Burnell favoured a Phoenician - Aramaic origin of the

script[9]. Isaac Taylor, Deeke, Sethi and others suggested that the Brāhmī originated from the script known in the South Semetic region. G. Buhler was one of the champions of the North Semetic origin of Brāhmī. His view is given in his Indian Palaeography. He had marshalled all possible evidences in support of his views. But his views had certain limitations as pointed by Upasak[10].

The Indian origin of the script was upheld by scholars both European and Indian. It was first suggested by Lassen followed by Edward Thomas who attributed it's invention to the Dravidians on the basis that they were highly civilized before the advent of the Aryans in India. General Cunningham, R. Shamasastri and John Dowson too favoured Indian origin of the script. With the discovery of the Indus Valley civilization, attempts were made to connect the Brāhmī script with that of the Indus civilization. Further, if this connection is established and accepted, it would mean a continuous history of the script from about the third millennium B.C..Langdon, Hunter, Ojha, R.B. Pandey & Dr. D.C.Sircar former government epigraphist for India were some of the protoganists of this view. These scholars tried to establish some affinity between the two. But the time gap between the disappearance of the Indus Valley civilization and the earliest extant specimens of the Brāhmī script (as in the edicts of Asoka 3rd C.B.C.) is too great to make a direct descent possible. Above all, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the script of the Indus Civilization[11].

Further, the name of the script (Brāhmī) itself is adduced as an evidence of its Indian origin. It means derived from Brahmā the Hindu God of creation. It is also a name of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and the consort of Brahmā. It symbolizes all learning and wisdom. Whether the script is of Indian or foreign origin, its "Indianness" is very explicit in its name also.

After reviewing most of the above views, A.H. Dani quotes David Dirinker the author of the book Alphabet to emphasize his point of view. " Dirinker rightly maintains that alphabet to be originally an invention probably in one region; it is no wonder that the principle under -lying alphabetic writing soon spread with trade and commerce and it may be suggested that the Brahmins found this principle a great help in their Vedic recitals.

They developed it further in their grammatical treatises"[12]. The precedence of grammar over the Indian system of writing is indubitably proved by a critical analysis of the earliest examples in writing known in India. Further Dirinkar also has said that" all historical and cultural evidence is best co - ordinated by the theory which considers the early Aramaic alphabet as the proto-type of the Brāhmī script" [13].

The earliest extant records in Brāhmī are those of Asoka and by way ofcomparison in the shape and number of letters, some scholars like Dirinkar and Dani tried to establish the Aramic origin of the Brāhmī script. According to Dani, both have three vowels and ninteen consonants[14]. Some similarities between the North- Semetic or Aramaic and Brāhmī scripts may be noticeable in the following:

North-Semetic and Early Phoenician		Brāhmī		
Aleph		a		
gimel		ga		
Teth		tha		
yod		ya		
lamed		la		
pe		pa		etc.[15]

The similarities observable in these scripts may not be a mere co-incidence. They point to at-least some sort of contact between West Asia and India. Even if Brāhmī was derived from the West Asian source as indicated above, it cannot be denied that the Indians adapted it according to their own genius. There is no Boustrophedon style in Brāhmī. The most fundamental change introduced by the Indians, if at all they derived it from North-Semetic, was in giving a definite direction to the letters. The way in which aleph is changed into a and lamed into la etc., suggests that the Brāhmī was written from left to right, since its very beginning[16]. Whatever its source or inspiration, it was a creation of the Indian pandits.

Recently, Upasak has clearly shown that in a total of fourty five letters found in the earliest specimens of Brāhmī, there were three vowels and twenty one consonants which constituted the basic letters and rest were secondary forms[17]. Whatever the source of this script, whether indigenous or foreign, there is no doubt that the Brahmi alphabets were made perfect and

complete by the Sanskrit grammarians. Any way, the present order of the letters of the Brāhmī script was definitely the result of their phonetic researches[18].

As Upasak has clearly pointed out that " a knowledge of the phonetic rules of Sanskrit as we have seen is well manifested in their development, especially in the vowel system. We may with probability suggest that the evolved or secondary forms got their shapes from the early grammarians who perfected the Sanskrit alphabet. In the course of this perfection which already existed and evolved the new shapes either basing them upon previous forms or coining them independently to suit their purpose" [19]. The same scholar has rightly put, " In the form in which we have the Brāhmī Script, it is the work, not of merchants but of learned men who had a knowledge of grammar and Sanskrit phonetics. It might have begun as a merchantile alphabet based either on vague memories of Harappa script or derived from contact with Semetic traders or indeed it may have owed to both these sources; but by the time of Asoka, it was the most developed and scientific script of the World[20].

A brief history of the early Sanskrit grammar deems necessary to gauge the possible date of the beginning of the evolution of the script. The most outstanding Sanskrit Grammarian Pāṇini might have flourished in the 6th or 5th Century B.C. He refers to more than sixty of his predecessors. One of his predecessors Yāska, the author of Nirukta - etymology of Vedic words, who lived before Pāṇini about the 7th or 6th century B.C. has mentioned the names of 17 grammarians. The dates of these grammarians may be pushed back to about the 10th century B.C. by which time or still earlier the evolution of the script might have begun. The contemporary Vedic literature too has indirect references to the art of writing though this vast corpus of literature was mainly preserved by a unique oral tradition.

" The Indian alphabet is a marvellous and magnificient phenomenon quite unrivalled in the world. No doubt the arrangement of letters which represent a symmetrical combination of symbols designed to indicate various shades of sound which are grouped together is unique in the world"[21]. It was a simple system of writing which could be studied, memorized and written easily. It could also be adapted easily to indicate new sounds in a language. Therefore, it is no wonder, that it captured the imagination of the people of the whole of South Asia as soon as its use became widespread in the third Century B.C. during

the reign of Asoka from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka. Asoka of course used this script for propagating his Dharma in his dominions and outside.

Asoka's inscriptions were engraved on rocks, pillars and caves, while one was carved on a stone slab. Most of them were engraved on rocks. His inscriptions were written in two scripts namely, the Kharosthī in North West India and Afghanistan and the Brāhmī in the rest and major part of India. There is greater uniformity in the Brāhmī script used in the edicts as they were engraved on the orders of one personality namely the emperor Asoka who was the ruler of all areas where his edicts were found. But in the manner of writing the script there are differences in the shapes of individual letters. As Upasak says "Different hands are noticeable in almost all the inscriptions. Many varieties of a letter found in a particular inscription may suggest different hands used for engraving the same inscription. In the rock edict of Girnar, we find nine forms of 'a', four forms of 'ra' and six types of 'ja' [22]. Craftmanship used for engraving pillars is generally superior to that of the rocks. The letters on the pillars are more accurate and artistic than those on rocks. Angular forms are immensely seen on the rock inscriptions than on pillars. Engraving is poorer on the rocks. Cave inscriptions are few and short. The characteristics of the Asokan Brāhmī are succinctly summarized in the words of Upasak as, " Asokan Brāhmī in its general appearance is straight and angular, though a few letters are round in shape; cursiveness appears throughout, but not abundantly. The height of the letters is usually equal and sometimes even in the conjuncts an equal height is maintained by making the second letter smaller in size. Regularly the lines go from the left to right except in the Minor Rock Edict at Erragudi[23]. It is interesting to note that some sort of punctuation was used in the edicts of Asoka. Regarding the variances in the shapes of letters, Upasak holds that one particular shape of a letter is more common and artistic than the forms of the same letter which appear side by side. The shape which is more frequent was to be regarded as the standard one and other forms should be attributed to other factors[24].

G. Buhler and some others maintained that there existed regional varieties in the Brāhmī used by Asoka, as the Northern and Southern varieties[25]. R.B. Pandey opines that " regional sub - varieties are also traceable in Asoka's edicts"[26]. Pandit G.H. Ojha accepts the regional influence on the Asokan Brāhmī only

partially, as he realizes the stylistic characteristics of a particular engraver. After a careful and in-depth study of the edicts of Asoka, Upasak concludes that the difference is mainly due to the individual stylistic characteristics either in engraving or writing the draft which was copied by the engraver. Regional forms of writing cannot be traced, since there existed fundamental varieties in the inscriptions of same area, some times in the same inscription"[27]. A.H. Dani too maintains the uniformity of the script. But one cannot completely set aside any regional tendencies in the edicts, though these were engraved on the authority of one person. The subsequent history of Brāhmī shows the natural development of the script on a regional basis culminating in the flowering of the regional scripts, in the various parts of South Asia from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka in the latter half of the first millennium A.D.

No Asokan edict has so far been discovered in the Southernmost part of the Indian Peninsula now covered by the linguistic states of Kerala and Tamilnadu which constituted the Tamilakam of ancient times. The edicts of Asoka are quite explicit in stating that the rulers of these areas- Cera, Cola and Pāṇḍya and the Satyaputras and that of Sri Lanka were out of the orbit of his vast Indian Empire[28], though they might have been under the sphere of his influence. The Brāhmī script was used in these areas too, as evidenced by the inscriptions in Tamil-nadu and Sri Lanka from this time onwards.

The Brāhmī script of these areas, shares many features in common with that one found in the Asokan edicts. The importance of the Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions was recently reinstated by Mr. Irawatham Mahadevan[29]. Further, the Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions show closer affinities to the early inscriptions from Bhattiprolu in Andhra Pradesh in the North and those from Sri Lanka, in the South. It appears that Southern Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka shared some common traditions at this time and later for some centuries through commerce as well as, Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism. The importance of Buddhism in this context cannot be ignored altogether. It played a vital role in forging a sort of common bond among these areas.

Dr. W. Saddhamangala Karunaratne a former archaeological commissioner of Sri Lanka who specialized on the Brāhmī Inscriptions of Sri Lanka, has his Ph. D. degree at the

University of London has forthrightly stated that the Brāhmī inscriptions of Sri Lanka and Tamilnadu have several features in common. and that the Brāhmī script was brought to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu. He has even suggested the prevalence of the Brāhmī script in Sri Lanka before the official introduction of Buddhism during the time of Devanampiya Tissa in the 3rd century B.C.[30].

The shapes of the Brāhmī letters of these three areas mentioned above, have certain similarities peculiar to them. Of particular interest, in this respect is the shape of ma 𑀫 The Sri Lankan inscriptions have the other form of ma 𑀩 also as found in the Asokan edicts.

The Tamil Brāhmī devised to write the Tamil, the language of the region (Tamil Nadu) had to provide for certain letters peculiar to this language like la 𑀮, ṟa 𑀶 and na 𑀷. In the other parts of South Asia including Sri Lanka some form of Prakrit was used in the inscriptions except in Tamil Nadu. Even in the North West of India, where a different script like Kharosthi was used, the language was Prakrit. Whereas the situation was quite different in Tamil Nadu, where though the Brāhmī script was used, the language was Tamil. This shows that the Tamil language was highly developed by the time that the Asokan edicts were engraved. Further, had Asoka subjugated Tamilnadu or engraved inscriptions there, he would in all possibility used Tamil; He also would not have used a different script had there been any other script other than the Brāhmī in Tamilnadu. This suggestion is quite plausible, as is evident from his use of Kharosthī in the North West India and Afghanistan and the recent recovery of a bilingual inscription of Asoka in Greek and Aramaic in Kandahar. Regarding the origin and use of the Brāhmī script in Tamilnadu, some scholars think that the Tamil Brahmi & Dravidi are identical, some have postulated the theory of a separate script independent of Brāhmī called Dravidi or Tamili from which the later scripts of Tamilnadu including the present one had evolved. Such a theory is not convincing, when one studies carefully and observes the shapes of the letters as found in the inscriptions of Asoka, Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. As stated earlier, they have more features in common than otherwise. Therefore, it was quite possible that one who lived in Tamilnadu at the that time would have been able to read easily any Asokan edicts in the Brāhmī script or those in Sri Lanka, though he might not

be able to comprehend the meaning of these inscriptions.

The Brāhmī script has established a common heritage and bond in the whole of South Asia from Afghanistan to SriLanka, irrespective of race, religion, language and other factors. It had become the source and basis of nearly all the subsequent scripts of South Asia including those of Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. In a way, it had been a unifying factor of South Asia, though many may not be aware of this phenomenon. Further a critical and comparative study of the Brāhmī script of the edicts of Asoka, Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka and the evolution of the later scripts of South Asia is a desideratum.

Foot Notes.

1. Dani, A.H., Indian Palaeography, Oxford, 1963. p.10.
2. Pandey, R.B., Indian Palaeography Pt.1, Banaras, 1952, pp. 10-16.
3. I. Pandey, R.B., -ibid- 22-24.
   II. Upasak, C.S., The History and Palaeography of Mauryan script, Varanasi, 1960. pp.7-8.
4. Upasak, C.S. - ibid -
5. " " p.8.
6. " " p.6.
7. Dani, A.H., op. cit., pp. 259-260.
8. Pandey, R.B. op. cit. pp. 56-57.
9. Upasak, C.S., op. cit. p.9.
10. " " p.11.
11. " " p. 14.
12. I. Dirinker, D. The alphabet, London, 1949. p.216.
    II. Dani, A.H., op. cit., p.24.
13. Dirinker, D. op. cit., p. 336.
14. Dani, A.H. op. cit. p.27.
15. " " p.28.
16. "
17. Upasak, C.S., op. cit., p. 20.
18. " " p. 14.
19. " " p. 21.
20. "
21. " " pp. 14-15.
22. " " pp. 25-26.
23. " " p. 28.
24. " " p. 29.
25. Buhler, G. Indian Palaeography, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 607.
26. Pandey, R.B., op. cit., p. 17.
27. Upasak, C.S. op. cit., pp. 29-30.
28. Rock Edicts 2 and 13.
29. Mahadevan, The Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions of the Sangam age, Madras, 1968.
30. Morning Star. JAFFNA 11.05.1973, p.4; Daily Mirror, Colombo, 7.6.1973

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SANSKRIT AND THE ART OF WRITING..

The art of writing played a significant role in the history of a language. Ever since a language became the medium of expression of ideas through literature, the art of writing also generally became important. It is true that there are several languages in the world which still do not have a script, though some of them possess some form of literature preserved in oral tradition.

After the evolution of literature, the art of writing becomes more relevant and it is no wonder that the earliest civilizations of the world along the river valleys had one script or other to facilitate their transactions and preserve whatever knowledge they had. As far as the literary traditions are concerned, generally the earliest strata consisting mostly of religious literature had been preserved in the oral traditions before they were committed to writing. Sometimes, secular literature too was written after a period of preservation in the oral traditions.

As far as India is concerned, the earliest stratum of literature in Sanskrit consisting of the Vedic literature was preserved in the oral tradition for several centuries, before it was written down. The word Sruti meaning "heard" or "revealed" connotes the Vedas. It also suggests the idea of oral transmission of this vast sacred lore. A deeper study of the Vedic literature and the history of its unique preservation for nearly 4 000 years also reveals the fact that these sacred texts were preserved by a mnemonic tradition quite unrivalled in the world but written down also, atleast after a certain period. The internal evidence in the Vedic literature suggests the prevalence of the art of writing in the later Vedic literature, if not still earlier. The occurrence of the word aksara (literally, it means imperishable and then letter) in the Āranyakas and Upanisads is quite interesting. This word here meant the sacred syllable "Om" or the highest Brahman or the God. Some scholars find references to the art of writing in the Rgveda itself, but these are quite dubious.

The Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra and the Viṣnudharmasūtra mention documents as one of the legal evidences. The Gautama Dharmasūtra refers to a witness signing in a document. The Vedāngas refer to developed systems of grammar, phonetics and philology which

could not have evolved without the help of the art of writing[1]. The evidence of Pāṇini in this respect, is quite important. His Aṣṭādhyāyī written in the period between the 6th -4th Century B.C. has some important terms suggesting the prevalence of the art of writing[2]. They are,

I. Lipi/libi (writing)
II. Lipikāra (Writer/ Scribe)
III. Yavanāni (Greek Script)
IV. Grantha (a book)
V. Svarita (a mark in writing)

" Goldstucker has pointed out that Kara and Varna seem consonant without vowel, an unpronounceble form that clearly suggests the use of a written symbol. Likewise the tabular nature of the Adhikāra sūtras, and particularly the use of the Svarita accent as one means of indicating them also seems to be thus corroborated. Pāṇini refers to cattle owners marking their cattle with numbers eight and five"3.

Taken together, the evidence from all the above mentioned texts suggests the prevalence of the art of writing during the period of these texts all of which date from about the 6th to the 4th Century B.C., if not still earlier. Again, the evolution of the art of the writing would certainly have taken place much earlier than the 6th Century B.C.

The Epics too contain references to the art of writing. The story of the God Vināyaka consenting to write down the Mahā--bhārata too suggests this idea, though this aspect of the Mahābhārata is treated as legendary. The Arthaśāstra, the core of which atleast dating to about the 4th Century B.C. (the age of Candragupta Maurya) contains direct and specific references to writing. As for examples, one may cite the references to writing, counting (1.5.2), letters (1.6), signs and writings (1.12.6) and royal Śāsanas (10.10). Taking into consideration all the references relating to the art of writing as could be gathered from the literature before Asoka (3rd Century B.C.) - the Vedic literature, the early portions of the Epics and the Arthaśāstra one may conclude that some form of writing was prevalent from about 1000 B.C., if not earlier.

But one is not sure as to whether this form of writing was derived from that of the Indus Valley Civilization or from a West Asian source or both. If the art of writing had evolved from the Indus Civilization, then it can safely be assumed that

there had been a continuity in this art to this day.

The major problem for the historian is to seek for the evidence to establish beyond any shadow of doubt the link between the script of the Indus Civilization and the Brāhmī. Until there is a consensus among the scholars on this subject, one has to be content with the available evidence known till now. Whatever it might be, one cannot deny the prevalence of the art of writing during the later Vedic Period. The script used was in all probability the Brāhmī script, the parent script of almost all subsequent scripts of South Asia and to some extent those of South East Asia as well.

Further, it is clear from the later history of the art of writing that materials like birch bark, palm leaf, cloth, hide and metals were used for writing. It has been pointed out and emphasized by many scholars that the Brāhmī script whatever its origin indigenous or foreign, was devised to write the Sanskrit language. In the form in which it appears in the earliest inscriptions, namely, those of Asoka, it is entirely indigeneous showing the genius of the Sanskrit grammarians and scholars.

One of the curious factors that draws the attention of the historian or researcher on the use of this script is that the earliest extant specimens were in Prakrit. The motivation for Asoka might have come from the Achaemenian precedent, though one cannot have any direct evidence for this view. The Hindus prior to Asoka appear to have used the Brāhmī script on perishable materials to write the Sanskrit language. Further, due to the ravages of time many valuable archaeological and other treasures have been either lost or affected especially during the invasions and subsequent rule of the Muslims in Northern India. A knowledge of the art of writing was essential in Vedic studies especially in grammar. The use of more durable materials for writing appear to have come in the wake of Achaemenian contacts as pointed out earlier. Further, the art of writing appears to have been confined to limited circles of intellectuals and priests who were also averse to write down the sacrod canon at first, as in the case of many sacred texts of other great religions of the world. Later of course due to more historical and other reasons they had to write down the sacred lore preserved in priestly circles, hailing from the rsis of very ancient times. As mentioned earlier, the earliest extant specimens of the Brāhmī script are found in the Prakrit inscriptions of Asoka who had become a Buddhist by the time that they were issued. Prakrit had by this time become a sort of a lingua franca especially after its use by Asoka in his edicts. His successors

and succession states after the disintegration of his farflung empire continued to use it over a wide area. There is sufficient reason to believe that the art of writing had become popular long before Asoka, as evidenced by the Arthasāstra and the Vedic Sūtras already mentioned. It is to the credit of Asoka that he made use of the art of writing on a more durable material. Later, his example was widely followed not only by the Buddhist but Hindu and Jain rulers of India.

Another interesting fact that emerges out of a study of the early inscriptions of India and the early kāvyas in Sanskrit is that the earliest extant ~~Sanskrit~~ Sanskrit inscriptions and the earliest extant kāvyas (after the ādikāvya Rāmāyana which is more an Itihāsa) were written in Western India which was subjugated by the rulers of foreign extraction. In this context, the patronage and contributions of the Sakas and the Kusānas to the popularisation of Sanskrit are of immense significance. The earliest extant inscriptions in Sanskrit date from about the first Century B.C. Therefore, does it mean that there were no Sanskrit works of any sort before this date? Certainly no. The very fact that the Buddhists who preferred Prakrit to Sanskrit in the early period, had by this time resorted to the use of Sanskrit especially in two highly developed literary forms, namely, Kāvya and nātaka[4], shows that Sanskrit had been so popular that the Buddhists too didn't hesistate to adopt it. Therefore, if one takes an analogy from these examples, it is quite clear that the art of writing was prevalent long before Asoka and it was used for writing Sanskrit, besides other items of interest.

Whether there are actual remains of the specimens of writing or not, it appears that there is some sort of substantial evidence for the prevalence of the art of writing in India from the time of the Indus Civilization to the present day, that is, to say for about 5000 years. Of course, there are two problems in this view. One is the time gap between the Indus Civilization and the earliest extant inscriptions (3rd Century B.C.). The other is the difference of opinion regarding the scripts used in the long period. As the origin of the script is discussed in another article, one may briefly trace the development of two of the important scripts - the Devanāgari and the Grantha scripts evolved mainly to write Sanskrit in the Northern and Southern parts of India, though they were used for writing other languages too in course of time. These two scripts evolved from the same Brāhmī and later each had a different course of development in two different areas.

The Brāhmī script as found in the inscriptions from the time of Asoka (3rd Century B.C.), in course of time, by about the early centuries of Christian era developed into regional styles which had become marked by the time of the rise of the Guptas (4th Century A.D.). " These styles tended to become localized and affiliated to various cultural regions. The regional styles might have differentiated still further but for two important factors instrumental in establishing a link between them and also in governing a uniform pattern in their development. One was the use of Sanskrit as a common language which helped in the easy movement of literates and scribes from one region to another and the quick dispersal of technical skill or style of writing. The second factor was the growth of larger kingdoms which by their very nature had to adopt a uniform style of writing within their jurisdiction" [5]. From this development of regional styles or proto-regional scripts developed the regional scripts corresponding to cultural divisions based on geographical, historical and especially linguistic factors. The development of regional languages whether of the Indo- Aryan or the Dravidian group and the development of the regional scripts to write these languages generally appear to have taken place contemporaneously. This trend eventually resulted in the evolution of the present day languages and their scripts of South Asia.

The Proto- regional scripts began to develop by the latter half of the first millennium A.D. in all parts of South Asia irrespective of the differences in the languages Indo- Aryan or Dravidian. Whereas, at one time when Brāhmī was widely used, say during the time of Asoka or a period just after him, a person in Tamilnadu besides his own, could read a Brāhmī inscription found either in North India or Sri Lanka, whether he knows the languages of these areas or not. But, subsequently this was not possible. Towards the close of the first millennium A.D., if not little earlier the various regional scripts of South Asia had become well-defined and their subsequent development was not very spectacular. The salient features of these scripts as found in their forms as at present had evolved by this time. So that even with the knowledge of their present form, they could be identified or deciphered without much difficulty. Finally with the introduction of printing, these scripts have become stabilized by the end of the 18th Century without any further development whatsoever.

The Devanāgari script is one of the most important scripts that evolved from the Brāhmī script in Western India. The use of

this script spread from this area to the Middle and Eastern regions of Northern India as well as to the South. As a script, most of its letters are constituted by straight lines with cursiveness in some. The top line is an essential integral part of all the letters in this script. The formation of such letters were probably due to the type of materials and the tools that were used to write them. But the scripts of the South India and Sri Lanka were mostly cursive. This feature was probably due to the palm leaves that were used for writing and the tools especially the stylus that was utilized for this purpose. The word " Devanāgari " means "that which belongs to the city of the Gods." That meant the script was used in the cities inhabited by god-like men or priests[6]. This probably meant the learned men the majority of whom might have been Brahmins or priests the custodians of Hindu religious knowledge and wisdom in those days. Such learned men might have lived in the cities of Northern India especially where this script evolved. Here, the Western India included the Kathiawar Peninsula, Malwa area, Rajputana, Punjab and Sindh and Kashmir. This part of India, was more vulnerable than any other area till the advent of the Europeans by sea by the end of the 15th Century A.D. There had been intermingling of various peoples and cultures on a large scale in this area. Considerable volume of trade and commerce too passed through this area. Some of the earliest specimens of Sanskrit inscriptions too were issued in this area. This meant besides other things, the use of Sanskrit as a court language. It was in the same area that Ujjain a great cosmopolitan centre of ancient India was located. It was noted for the memories of Vikramāditya and Kālidāsa. The same area or its neighbourhood produced the Devanāgari script which still continues to play a vital role in the cultural history of South Asia.

The development of the Devanāgari script is traceable to the letters in the inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas and thereafter it becomes more marked in those of Harṣavardhana, the later Guptas, the Gūrjara Pratīhāras and finally the Gāhadawālas of Kanauj.

George Buhler the famous German Indologist speaks of Western, Central Eastern and Southern varieties of Nāgari. But they might in all probablity be the regional variations of the same script. According to him, the first specimen of Nāgari are found in the copper plates of the Gūrjara Princes of Kaira (7th Century A.D.), Dabhoi etc.[7] The most ancient document written throughout in Nāgari was the Samangad grant of Rastrabūta Danti durga (A.D.754)

and also the Kanheri inscriptions of the Silahara Princes. These two with some others of the 9th Century show the archaic variety of the Southern Nāgari[8]. Its fully developed form is exhibited in the Kautham Copper plate incised during the time of Cālukya Vikramāditya V. (1009-1010). This Southern Nāgari differs from the Northern variety in some respects[9]. The latest development of the Southern variety of Nāgari is found in the inscriptions of the Vijayanagar Kings (14 - 16 th Centuries). It still survives in the Balboth or Devanāgari of the Maratha districts. It has produced the Nandināgari used for manuscripts[10]. In the Northern and Central India, Nāgari appears first on the Copper Plate of Maharāja Vinayakapala of Mahodaya, dated probably 794 A.D. Archaic forms are noticeable in this record. There were few inscriptions in the next Century. Their number increases after 950 A.D., and in the 11th Century, the script becomes paramount in nearly all the districts North of Narmada[11].

Tenth Century Cālukya records show Northern Nāgari forms of the 10th Century A.D. The Copper plates of the Gahadavala Madanapala of Kanauj (1097) in Northern India, the Udaipur prasasti of the Paramaras of Malwa. Nanyapura plates of Candella Devavarman (1050) & Kalacuri Karna of Tripura (1042) contain good examples in the Nāgari scripts. The last two are from the Eastern part of Central India. The Copper plates of Cālukya Bhīma of Gujarat is a good specimen of the Northern Nāgari of the 11th Century A.D. Finally, good specimens of the Northern Nāgari of about 1100 - 1200 A.D. is found on the Copper plates of Jayacandra (A.D.1175) of Kanauj, Calukya Bhīma II of Gujarat (dated A.D. 1199 and 1207), Paramara Udayavarman of Malwa (A.D. 1200) and the Ratnapur stone inscription Kalacuri Jalla of Tripura dated A.D. 1114 [12]. Following the invasions of the Muslims especially at the end of the 12th Century, a large part of North India was brought under the Sultanate of Delhi established in 1206. Thereafter, the power of Hindu rulers was confined only to a few areas in the North, though the South continued be ruled by Hindu Princes till the early 14th Century by which time that too succumbed. But the South rolled back the Muslim power for a few Centuries. With the rule of the Muslims, the number of inscriptions in indigeneous languages dwindled and there was no further development, though the script was used for purposes of teaching and writing manuscripts.

In the Deccan and the South, the Brāhmī script developed into many scripts of which five are important. Among these, four are devised to write four Dravidian languages of the South namely, the Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Tamil. The Grantha script was

devised to write Sanskrit in Tamilnadu. Except Tamil, the other languages have nearly all the sounds in Sanskrit besides a few sounds peculiar to the Dravidian languages. Therefore, Sanskrit could easily be written in those scripts. But it could not be written in the two major lipis of Tamilnadu - the Vatteluttu and the Tamil lipi. Of these, the former was used in the Southern Tamilnadu and the latter in the North. The former went out of vogue with the expansion of the Imperial Colas in the 10th Century. They introduced the Tamil lipi in the Southern Tamilnadu and made it a common script for the whole of Tamilnadu. As Sanskrit could not be written in these scripts, there was a need to devise a script to write Sanskrit in Tamilnadu. The result was the grantha script which as a script evolved in Tamilnadu shares a good number of forms in common with it, even in the present forms. The word grantha (means bound together) denotes in Sanskrit a literary work. Evidently the script used for writing the Sanskrit works derived the same name[13]. It is also called " as a variety of Tamil lipi" used for writing Sanskrit in Tamilnadu. At one time it was prevalent throughout South India, though it is peculiar to Tamilnadu. When Malayalam language began to borrow freely words as well as the rules of Grammar, this script was adopted for writing the language and was known as Ārya eluttu[14]. A similar adoption of Grantha for writing Sanskrit was also made in the Tulu country but the Tulu language uses the Kannada script. Between these two scripts, Grantha and Malayalam, there is no real difference except the straight lines and angles in the characters of the former are smoothened and written cursively in the latter[15]. The Telugu and the Kannada scripts are practically identical. It is only the talaikkattu or the top line that distinguishes one from the other. If this is removed the similarity between the Grantha and Malayalam scripts on the one hand and the Telugu and Kannada scripts on the other will become easily apparent[16]. A closer comparison will reveal the forms of i,o,ya,ra,la and va are almost the same in all five scripts. The form of 'ai' in both the Telugu and Kannada scripts closely resemble that of the Tamil script. The Sinhala script of Sri Lanka closely resembles the Telugu and Kannada scripts. This similarity might have been due to the impact of the Grantha upon the Sinhala script during the course of its evolution[17].

The evolution of the Grantha script may be divided in to four stages as follows.

I. Archaic Variety: This period includes all that were written before circa 650 A.D. This script developed from the Brāhmī script found in South India especially in Tamilnadu. The archaic grantha stage is represented in some inscriptions of Vengi and Northern part of Tamilnadu. The inscriptions of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I and his immediate successors are typical examples of this stage of the script. The script is mostly ornamental and florid. T.N. Subramanian thought that the script could not have been in daily use and probably intended for incising the inscriptions of Mahendravarman, the one at the Tirucirappalli Rock cut temple is an example of the ornamental type; while those at Mandagapattu, Siyamangalam, and Mahendravādi are of the ordinary type. Narasimhavarman's inscriptions at Mamallapuram and those of Rājasimha at the Kailasanātha temple are other good examples of this period.

II. Transitional variety or stage: This variety is found in the inscriptions of the period circa 650-950 A.D. The records of the later Pallavas and their contemporary Pāndya rulers may be noted in this respect. The Kūram Copper plates of the Pallava Paramesvaravarman, the Kasākkudi Copper plates of Nandivarman Pallavamalla are some of the good specimens of this variety.

III. Medieval Variety: This is found in some Pandya inscriptions and mainly in the inscriptions of the Colas of Thanjavur circa 950-1250 A.D. The larger Sinnamanur Plates of Pandya Rajasimha, the Anbil Plates of Sundara Cola, the Kāncīpuram inscription of Rajaraja I and the Tiruvālankādu Plates of Rajendra Cola I may be mentioned as some of the good specimens of this variety.

IV. Modern Variety: This variety of the grantha dates from about 1250 A.D. This is covered by the inscriptions of the later Pāndyas and the Vijayanagar rulers. Of these the Ranganatha temple inscription from Sri rangam of Jatāvarman Sundara Pāndya circa 1260 A.D. and the Dalavāy Agraharam Plates of the Tirunelveli Pāndya king Varatungarāma Pāndya dated 1588 A.D. may be referred to as two good specimens in this respect.

The grantha script included the Tamil letter la in its alphabet and did not adopt the forms for the vowel letters both long and short of Northern Brāhmī but adopted the Tamil form.

The evolution of the two scripts for writing Sanskrit has been briefly described and their importance cannot be overlooked. The Devanāgri script has assumed greater significance as it is used not only for Sanskrit but for some important modern Indo-Aryan languages including Hindi and Marathi. With the emphasis on Hindi as an all India link language, this script has assumed an all India dimension. Further, it is becoming a popular script even in the South in the writing of Sanskrit for which grantha was widely used.

The Grantha script had a glorious past not only in the Dravidian belt in India but outside India in Sri Lanka and South East Asia where it has contributed to the growth the scripts of these countries. In Tamilnadu, it still contains the valuable religious and cultural treasures of Saivism and Vaisnavism. The Āgamas, Vāstu Sastra, Silpasāstra, Jyotisa Sāstra, Sangīta Sāstra, Nātya sāstra and several other fields of knowledge were written in Sanskrit, using this script. Though a good number of these are now published in the Devanāgari, the importance of the Grantha script is not impaired. But the number of students studying this script is on the decline. Thus, two important scripts evolved from the Brāhmī script and used for writing Sanskrit have played and still playing an important role in the cultural history of South Asia.

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FOOT NOTES.

1. Pandey, R.B. Indian Palaeography, Varanasi, 1952. p. 11.
2. -ibid- p.12
3. Vimalananda, T., Paranavitana Felicitation Volume, Colombo, 1965, p. 320.
4. For example, one may cite the example of Asvaghosa a Buddhist poet and philosopher who wrote two kāvyas and three framas. The use of Sanskrit by the Buddhists shows the Mahayana influence also.
5. Dani, A.H., Indian Paleography, Oxford, 1963, p.108
6. Brahmins were called " Bhūsuras", which meant "Gods on earth".
7. Buhler, G., Indian Palaeography, Calcutta, 1962, p.83
8. " p.84
9. " p.84
10. " p.84
11. " p.84
12. " p.85
13. Subramanian, T.N., South Indian Temple Inscriptions, Vol. III, Pt.II, Madras, 1957, pp. 15-22.
14. " p.11
15. " p. 150
16. " p. 150
17. Fernando, P.E., Palaeographical development of the Brāhmī script from the 3rd C.A.D. to 7th C.A.D., University of Ceylon Review, Vol.VII, No.4, 1949, pp. 282-301.

A NOTE ON SANSKRIT EPIGRAPHY.

Epigraphy may be defined as the systematic study of the inscriptions. Inspite of the various vicissitudes, India has preserved a considerable number of inscriptions in the different languages that prevail there. Of these, a considerable number is in Sanskrit.

The earliest inscriptions of India hark back to the time of the Indus Valley Civilization (about 2500-1500 B.C.). They were inscribed on such materials like the seals and pottery. Though a good number of them have survived to this date, still one is not sure of the language of these records. Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding this subject. Some scholars are of the view that the language or languages might have been of Dravidian origin[1]. Yet, there are historians and epigraphists who do not agree with this view.

After the age of the Indus Valley Civilization, there appears to have been a long gap in the history of Indian inscriptions till the glorious epoch of the Maurya emperor Asoka (3rd Century B.C.). He issued a large number of inscriptions for inculcating Dharma to his subjects and others who lived in other parts of South Asia not under his suzerainty and West Asia[2]. His inscriptions were written mostly in Prakrit[3]. It had become the language or one of the languages of the Indian royal courts by this time, if not before. In a way, it had become the lingua franca of India during the time of the Mauryas and continued enjoy this position for about six to seven centuries after Asoka. But very soon, Sanskrit already a well-developed and polished language with a literary history of nearly two and a half millennia, came to be used in inscriptions too from about the first Century B.C. and gradually ousted Prakrit from the inscriptions[4]. In some areas of India Sanskrit was the undisputed inscriptional language, till it was used with the regional language, as will be pointed later.

Sanskrit used in literature is divided into three phases, namely, the Vedic, the Epic and the Classical. Of these, only the Classical Sanskrit is used in the inscriptions, though some inscriptions have quotations from the Epics as imprecatory verses; While some others are influenced

either by Vedic or Epic ideas. When one speaks of Sanskrit as a language of the inscriptions, he means its function as a vehicle of expression in the inscriptions. Further, one can speak of "inscriptional Sanskrit", as it has some peculiarities as found in the inscriptions.

The earliest script of India is found in the inscriptions of the Indus Valley Civilization. Some scholars hold the view that the Brāhmī script from which most of the scripts of the present day South Asia evolved was derived from that of the Indus Valley Civilization. The word Brāhmī means 'derived from Brahmā', the Hindu God of creation; it also denotes Sarasvatī the Goddess of learning and consort of Brahmā. Thus, the name of the Script symbolizes learning especially the sacred knowledge of the Vedas in Sanskrit. It is for writing this language that the script was devised. This script was especially devised for writing Sanskrit[5]. But as far as the inscriptional evidence goes, Sanskrit was written in the Brāhmī script about two centuries, after it was already written in Prakrit. It does not mean that Sanskrit was not written in Brāhmī before this date. [illegible]. In course of time, from the Brāhmī script that was in vogue in North India, there developed the scripts of modern Indo-Aryan languages. The devanāgari script also developed from the same source.

This script which was originally used for writing Sanskrit developed from the Brāhmī script by the latter half of the first millennium A.D. Besides Sanskrit, this script is now used for writing some North Indian languages like Hindi and Marathi. In the South, where the Dravidian languages predominate, Sanskrit was written in the Brāhmī script followed by the proto-nāgari and the regional scripts except in Tamilnadu where after the Brāhmī script, the grantha script was devised for writing Sanskrit. The use of this script soom spread across the seas to Sri Lanka and South - East Asia. In these countries, Sanskrit was used in the royal courts, religious (Hindu and Buddhist) rites and some other aspects of life. Therefore inscriptional Sanskrit has a history outside India too.

Sanskrit inscriptions are found engraved mostly on stone and copper and to lesser extent on materials like bronze, iron silver and pottery.

These inscriptions whether they are found in India or out - side, as in the case of inscriptions in other languages, were written for different occasions and purposes like detailing military conquests, patronage to religion and culture, achievements in peace and war& the good qualities of kings and other patrons; some were votive in character; some refer to the various grants of the kings and other donors.

The position of Sanskrit in Indian civilization and culture is different from other languages. Though it would have been in its early stages, the language of a group of people who were generally called 'Aryans', over the centuries it developed to be the language of civilization and culture particularly of the upper strata of Indian society. It had already become the sacred language of Hinduism and Mahayanism. It developed well as a court language. It is in this capacity and its unique position as the vehicle of all sāstras and language of the elite that it came to be used in the inscri- ptions also.

As time went on, several rulers of India whether they were emperors or petty chieftains vied with one another in the patronage extended to this language alone or with the language of a particular region. As for example, in Tamilnadu, Sanskrit was fostered along with Tamil in the courts and so in inscriptions too. As a result, one could notice a number of bilingual inscriptions in Tamil and Sanskrit. A similar trend is observed in other parts of India also.

A literary genre peculiar to Sanskrit inscriptions, evolved in course of time. This is called praśasti (eulogy). This appears to have had its' literary antecedents in the dānastuti hymns of the Rgveda, Gāthās and Nārasaṁsīs of the later Vedic Literature and the Epics. Some inscriptions in Prakrit too seem to have served as models or prototypes for this type of inscriptional eulogy. The early Sanskrit inscriptional praśastis like the Girnar Inscription of Rudradāman I or the Allahabad stone piller Inscription of Samudragupta do not refer to themselves as Praśastis though they have all the salient features of a prasasti. But the Iholo inscription of Pulakesin II particularly refers to it at the end as a praśasti. Similarly, several praśastis were written in the various regions of India and some of them especially those from Tamilnadu ran to several lines.

This prasasti form was later followed in Tamil and other regional languages of South Asia. As for instance in Tamilnadu, prasastis were written in Tamil during the Pallava-Pandya ascendancy. One may for example refer to the Velvikkudi Copper plates of the Pāṇḍya king Neduñja-daiyan. Another interesting and perhaps more important eulogy peculiar to Tamil inscriptions called Meykkīrti developed from the time of the Cola emperor Rājarāja I (985-1014 A.D.). As far the extant evidence goes, the earliest examples of this literary form date from the time of this monarch who is said to have initiated this type of composition followed by generations of his successors in Tamilnadu for several centuries.

Sanskrit inscriptions are found scattered all over South Asia, South East Asia and some parts of Central Asia and China too. Taken together, they point out the unique position of Sanskrit as a language of culture and civilization not only in South Asia but in some other parts of Asia as well. In this respect, it cuts across all geographical, regional linguistic, religious and other barriers and fosters a common bond in these vast areas of Asia mentioned above. Consequently, the contributions to Sanskrit came from various parts of Asia especially, South Asia. As a result of this, it is no surprise to hear of a Dharmapala (a Buddhist monk and scholar) from Kāncī in Tamilnadu presiding over the Nālandā University in Bihar. Further, a Śaṅkarācārya hailing from Kerala traversed the whole of India propagating and re-establishing the Advaita Vedānta and the Śanmatas(six cults in Hinduism). He established five mutts in the four corners of India from the Himalayas to Kāncī, to achieve his goal.

An inscription of the king Indravarman(877-889 A.D.) of Cambodia at Prasat Kandal Dom refers to his guru Sivasoma hailing from the royal family " as having learnt the Śāstras from the Bhagavat Śaṅkara whose feet were touched by the heads of all sages"[6]. As pointed out by Dr. R.C.Majumdar, " from the Indian point of view this furnishes the only authoritative evidence for the date of Śaṅkara so far known to us"[7]. As Indravarman ruled in the later part of the 9th century, "his guru Sivasoma may be assumed to have visited Śaṅkarācārya about the middle 9th Century". This recently discovered evidence

shows that the fame of the great Śaṅkara had spread as far as Cambodia in his life time (which too was very short - 32 years) to attract a student from the royal family to come over to India and study the subtleties and niceties of Advaita Vedanta and Sanmata under the Great Teacher himself.

The Sanskrit inscriptions are important from literary, linguistic and historical points of view. The literary merit of the Sanskrit inscriptions cannot be gainsaid. Apart from the praśastis mentioned above, there are several inscriptions written in chaste and lucid style. They are noted for their śabdālaṅkāras and arthālaṅkāras. One may cite for example, the Sanskrit inscriptions of the Guptas, or the Cālukyas or the Pallavas or the Colas.

Another interesting fact about the Sanskrit inscriptions is that more inscriptions are found in the South than in the North. It might be that as North India was subject to various invasions, many valuable treasures of the past including the inscriptions were greatly affected or lost and further relatively longer records are found in the South especially in Tamilnadu. One may cite as example, some of the copper plates of the Pallavas or the Pandyas or the Colas. Good examples of Sanskrit inscriptions were also engraved by the Guptas, Vardhanas, Palas, Gurjara-Pratīhāras and Gāhadavālas of the North, and Cālukyas and Rāṣtrakūtas of the Deccan.

These inscriptions were written in prose or verse or in both. They reflect the contemporary kāvya trend as found in the literary works. They are in the Vaidarbha and the Gauda styles. Some of these inscriptions help the Sanskrit scholars to fix the date of great poets like Kālidāsa. In this respect, a few inscriptions from Malwa are of considerable significance as revealing the influence of the works of Kālidāsa. Another interesting fact is that a good number of poets of no mean calibre are known only from the inscriptions, though some records are anonymous. One may cite for example Ravikīrti the composer the Ihole Praśasti of Pulakesin II or Nārāyana the composer of the Tiruvālaṅkādu Copper Plates of Rājendra I.

The language of the Sanskrit inscriptions too are important for the history of the Sanskrit language particularly from the 1st century A.D. to the 13th century A.D., though

there are only fewer inscriptions during the period of Muslim rule. But there were some states larger or smaller which were independent or relatively free from muslim domination. Some of the inscriptions reflect certain peculiarities of the area in which they were written. Some reveal Prakrit influence; while others the regional language. There are some grammatical and other features peculiar to the inscriptions. Taken together, the inscriptions constitute a distinct position in the entire range of the history of Sanskrit language and literature from about the 1st century A.D. They cover a wider area of not only South Asia but South East and parts of Central Asia during various periods. They also point out that "Sanskrit was never a dead language". But some scholars without proper understanding of the subject assume otherwise. On the other hand the inscriptions clearly testify to the fact that Sanskrit has been a dynamic and rich language enjoying state and popular patronage and sacredness. The richness of the language is found in the inscriptions also. Unfortunately, they are not fully explored or studied from the point of language and literature save for some occasional articles and books by scholars like Dr. G. Buhler[9], Dr. D.C.Sircar[10], Dr. R.C. Majumdar[11] and Dr. C. Sivaramamurthi[12].

These inscriptions are of vital importance to the historian of India in the absence of very reliable sources. These help the historian with some relevant facts to reconstruct the history of South Asia from the first Century A.D. to the 13th Century A.D., in the North and a Century later in the South. A more reliable history of several royal families and their achievements are known only from the inscriptions. They also help the historians to confirm the historical data culled from literary and other sources. Some of the inscriptions are not mere records of particular kings but dynasties as well. They also suggest that the details of the reigns of the rulers were preserved in the state archives and these seem to have been used by the composers of the inscriptions also. They help the historians not only to reconstruct the political but religious, cultural, social &economic history of a particular area during a particular time. Thus, they are of immense value to the historians of Ancient and Medieval India to a lesser extent and to South East Asia to a lesser extent. Thus, Sanskrit epigraphy

has considerable bearing on the history of Sanskrit language and literature and the history of South Asia in particular. The historical aspects of these have already been explored to a large extent but the literary aspects are not fully exhausted as yet.

FOOT NOTES:

1. a. News Letter of the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Nos 1-5, Copenhagen. 1969 -

   b. Journal of Tamil Studies, Vol.II,No.I, Madras, 1970, pp. 13-28; 89-109.

2. Vide Rock edicts 2 & 13.

3. A bilingual inscription of Asoka is discovered at Kandahar. This is written in Aramaic and Greek.

4. Sircar, D.C. Indian Epigraphy. New Delhi,1965,p.40.

5. a. Buhler, G. Indian Palaeography, Calcutta,1959,p.38.

   b. Upasak, C.S. The history and Palaeography of Mauryan Brāhmī Script, Varanasi,1960,pp.192-193.

6. Majumdar, R.C. India and South East Asia. Delhi, 1979, p. 208.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Buhler, G. The Indian Inscriptions and the antiquity of Indian artificial Poetry (Tr. V.S.Ghate), Indian Antiquary Vol. xlii, pp. 29-32; 137-148; 172-179; 188-193; 230-234; 243-249.

10. Sircar, D.C. Successors of the Satavahanas in the Lower Deccan.Calcutta, 1939.

11. Majumdar, R.C. op.cit. pp. 200-218. (Sanskrit and South East Asia).

12. Sivaramamurthi, C. 1. Ephigraphical echoes of Kālidāsa. Madras, 1944.
    2. Numismatic parallels of Kālidāsa. Madras, 1945.
    3. Iconographic gleanings from ephigraphy, Proceedings and transactions of the 13th Oriental Conference, 1946.

A recent Sanskrit ephigraphical discovery in Sri Lanka.

Recently seven Golden Plates containing the famous Prajnā Pāramitra Sūtra of the Mahayanists were discovered near the Jetavanarāmaya at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. These were written in Sanskrit in Sinhala script.

Vide The Island 24.12.1982 p.8. It appeared as a news item in this news paper.

Maureen Seneviratne, Knowledge incised on Sovereign Gold The Island. 23.01.1983 p.5.

THREE PRAKRIT PRAŚASTIS - HISTORICAL AND LITERARY STUDIES

The three Prakrit prasastis[1] that are taken up for a detailed analysys both from historical and literary points of view are the Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravela[2], the Nanāghaṭ inscription of Nāgammikā[3] and the Nasik cave inscription of the time of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Pulumāvi[4]. All these inscriptions have certain common features. All of them are written in Prakrit prose. All of them refer to or describe the achievements and personal traits of particular kings[5]. Two of them were issued at the instance of the queens. All of them are found in the Daksināpatha, two in the western and one in the eastern portion of Deccan[6]. All of them refer to the patronage of the kings to three different religions of India, namely, Jainism, Brahmanism and Buddhism. They are the earliest extant specimens of inscriptional praśastis in India in some form or other. Their dates range from the second century B.C. to second century A.D., even if we give allowance for the divergent views on the subject.

The important political, administrative, economic, religious and cultural institutions that are found in these prasastis may be discussed next.

I. Political Institutions:

I. Kingship: The form of government was hereditary monarchy. The king was to be endowed with all good qualities[7]. As a further elaboration of the king's good qualities and military skill, he is compared to the epic heroes like Rāma, Yuthiṣṭhira and a few others in one praśasti[8]. The queen also was noted for truth, generosity, non - injury to living beings, forbearance and penance[9]. The coronation of the king was of great significance in the life of a king[10]. He gratified his subjects[11]. He sympathised with the weal and woe of his subjects[12]. In his early days, the Prince underwent sufficient training befitting his status and needs, prior to being installed as the crown-prince. Khāravela is said to have undergone all physical training necessary for a king till his fifteenth year[13]. Thereafter till his twenty-fourth year, he mastered writing, arithmetic, the coinage

and the rules regarding the affairs of the state[14]. Thus it is clear that the crown-prince was trained in the best traditions of the ksatriyas. Queens like Nāgammikā and Balasrī participated actively in the affairs of the kingdom as is known from the two inscriptions[15].

II. Royal titles and epithets: The important royal titles and epithets may be divided into four types on the bases of this significance as:

i. Those generally denoting the power and prestige of the king like rājā[16], mahārājā[17], and rājarāja[18].

ii. Those celebrating the political and military achievements of the king and his sway as, saka-Yavana-palhava-misūdana[19], khakharatavasanīrava-sasakarasa[20], Tisamudatoyapītavāhana[21] Mahāvijaya[22], Dakhimapathesara[23], Dakhinapathapati[24], and Kalingādhipati[25].

iii. Those indicating the religious persuasion of the king such as Khemarāja[26], Bikhurājā[27], vadharāja[28], and Dhamarāja[29].

iv. Those of the queen like mahādevī[30].

I. Rājā: This is one of the titles of the king in ancient India, from the time of the Rgveda. It had been used with reference to kings of great power and prestige in course of time[31].

Mahārājā: This is found from the time of the Later Vedic Literature, though its usage in Indian epigraphy is closely associated with the occupation of North Western India by the Persians and Scythians. This title occurs in Ceylon epigraphy from the third century B.C. The use of this title didn't necessarily indicate that the kings who assumed this title were emperors, though in the case of Khāravela it was probably so.

Rājarāja: This is another high-sounding title used by Indian kings and it is also connected with the contact that India had with Persia and later the Parthians who were subject to Persian cultural influences.

II. The first two titles in the second category refer to important victories of Gautamīputra Satakarni against the Sakas, Indo-Greeks, Parthians and Kṣaharāta satraps who were powerful in the Western part of northern India. The destruction of the power of the Kṣaharāta satraps of western India is further confirmed by numismatic and literary evidences[32].

Tisamutatoyapītavāhana: The Sātavāhana empire extended from sea to sea from the East to the West and the kings had maritime commercial activities with South East Asia on the one hand and western Asia, Egypt and especially the Roman Empire on the other. This title seems to refer to their commercial and not the political influence across the sea. Their commercial activities are further confirmed by coinage[33] and the works of Greek and Roman writers[34].

Mahāvijaya: This may be taken to signify the great conquests of Khāravela in India.

Dakhinapathesara and Dakhinapathapati: The word adhipati occurs in Vedic literature in the sense of overland[35], Khāravela built up an extensive empire. The nucleus of the empire was Kalinga, which was his ancestral demain. The king took one of his titles after the name of his country.

III. All the four titles in the third category are used with reference to Khāravela. The first two may probably be taken to indicate the peace and prosperity prevailing in the kingdom. Further Kṣema means ' protection ', 'safety', well-being and happiness[36]; so it may refer to the protection or happiness afforded by the king. The other two definitely indicate the religious leanings of the king. Though these two are common to all Indian religious systems, they are used here with reference to the Jaina persuasion of the king. It is also interesting to note how Asoka was very much devoted to Dharma[37].

IV. Mahādevī is the only significant title of the queen found in one of the prasastis. This is analogous to the high sounding titles of the king, like the Mahārāja. The word Devī means the queen as well as the goddess.

Genealogy: Of the three inscriptions, the first was issued by a scion of the Mahāmeghavāhana dynasty and the other two by the Sātavāhanas. The genealogy of the kings does not go back to the more than two generations before that of the contemporary king. One of them refers to family of the queen also[38].

Digvijaya: Indian kings after consolidating their power in their respective ancestral dominions or in some place used to go on periodical expeditions against their neighbours and adjoining states to extend their sphere of influence. That a king should undertake a grand digvijaya is enjoyed on him by the Indian political thinkers as evidenced by the Arthasāstra and the Mahā bhārata. Kautilya says, " Hence king shall endeavour to augment his power and elevate his happiness[39]." This aggressive imperialism was not the ideal of only Hindu kings but that of Buddhist and Jaina monarchs, inspite of the emphasis on Ahimsā by the Buddha and the Mahāvīra. One may cite the famous Buddhist emperor Dharmapāla whose wide conquests are enumerated in his Khalimpur prasasti[40] or the Jaina Khāravela.

Khāravela wished to become an emperor, this is clear from the account of his digvijaya, described in the first inscription and the reference to him as chakkavati (cakravartin) in an inscription of his queen[41]. It is stated that he was destined to have wide conquests as that of Vena[42]. Vena was a Vedic personality and according to the Padmapurāna Vena began well and fell into Jaina heresy[43]. There is no wonder that a Jaina ruler's ideal was one that was followed by an illustrious ruler of his faith.

The digvijaya of Khāravela started in his second reignal year and went on till his twelfth reignal year, with some intervals. The major campaigns of Khāravela seem to have been undertaken in three different directions. The first major military operations were undertaken in the west and directed against the contemporary Sātavāhana ruler Sātakarni overlord of the Deccan, and whose territory lay to the west and contiguous to Kalinga. The forces of Khāravela were victorious and took the city of Musika (at the confluence of Krismā and Musi). This campaign apparently resulted in no permanent annexation of any part of the dominion of Sātakarni. This Sātakarni might be, Sātakarni I or II,

probably the former. This victory seems to have been followed by the defeat of the Vidyādharas, the Rathikas and the Bhojakas[44]. The territories of the last two were in Northern Mahārāstra. The territory of the Vidyādharas is not certain but it is probably contiguous to the Sātavāhana dominions.

Khāravela undertook three expeditions in Northern India in the eight, tenth and twelfth reignal years. In former times, northern emperors like the Nandas and Mauryas marched into Kalinga. Now it was the turn, of the Kalinga overlord to march northwards right into the heart of the once mighty northern empires of the Nandas and the Mauryas. In the course of the first expedition he sacked Gerathagiri (Barabar Hills) and threatened Rājagṛha in Magadha. This was quite possible for Khāravela who was very strong enough to defeat Deccan rulers. Since the contemporary political conditions in Northern India were in a state of chaos and confusion and the Bactrian Greeks taking advantage of this, marched through the unguarded North Western routes of India and poured into the heart of North India. The Greeks came under Dami(tal) who was most probably Demetrius I or Demetrius II or some other Greek king into the Ganga plain are said to have made a hasty retreat on hearing the military campaigns of Khāravela. In the course of his second expedition, he seems to have gone further into the Ganges plain as is denoted by the word Bhāratavarṣa which probably meant the Ganges plain and not in whole of India. Incidentally, it is the earliest extent epigraphical reference to Bhāratavarṣa. In the course of his third expedition, in the North[45] undertaken in his twelfth reignal year, he invaded Magadha and occupied Susangīya. The contemporary Magadha king Brhasvatimitra (Brhaspatimitra) submitted to him. It is not certain whether he was one of the Mitra kings of Magadha. If it is so, then one has to accept the view that Khāravela flourished in the first century B.C. It was in the course of this expedition that Khāravela recovered an image of Jina taken away from Kalinga by a Nanda king 300 or 103 years ago. The Nanda king referred to was probably Mahapadma Nanda as he was the greatest of the Nanda kings whose power extended over a greater part of North India and parts of Deccan. The recovery of the Jaina image probably suggests the religious persuasion of not only Khāravela but the Nanda ruler whoever he was. A somewhat similar course of action was followed by some of later Andhra rulers. For example,

the victorious Pallava general of Narasimhavarman I, Parañjoti is said to have brought an image of the God Vināyaka from the capital of the Cālukyas and consecrated it in the Pallava Kingdom. Similarly king Krisnadevarāja of Vijayanagar brought an image of Bālakrisna from Orissa after defeating the Gajapati ruler and conscreated it in a special temple. Khāravela is said to have brought booty from Magadha and Anga. This meant that he either defeated one Anga ruler also or both Magadha and Anga might have been under one ruler Brhaspatimitra. This seems to have been the last of the expeditions undertaken by Khāravela, according to this inscription.

The third major campaign was directed in the Southern direction. There seems to have been more than one campaign in this direction also. In the course of one such campaign, he captured the market town Pithundra founded by the Ava king. It is identified with Ptolomy's Pitundra - a city in the upper part of the Coromandel coast[46]. Jayaswal takes this to mean the king of Avas or Āndhras. Khāravela ploughed it with a plough drawn by asses. This has been one of the methods of harassing and punishing an enemy. This mode of punishment is referred to in early Tamil literature[47].

Once again, Khāravela seems to have turned his attention to the South in his eleventh reignal year. This time, he concentrated his attacks on the Tamil states of the Far South. A confederacy of Tamil kings probably consisting of two or more of the three crowned kings (i.e. Cera, Cola and Pāndya dynasties) and minor chieftains had become a source of danger to his expansionist policy and Khāravela therefore tried to destroy the confederacy which was formed one hundred and thirteen years ago.[48] Unfortunately, the inscription does not refer to the details of the confederacy, like the leader and the participants. Long before Khāravela, the three Tamil states had become well- organised as evidenced by the inscriptions of Asoka (third century B.C.)[49], Kātyāyana's vārttika (fourth century B.C.)[50] and Megasthenes[51]. As a result of this expedition, Khāravela obtained much booty which included the famous pearls from the Pāndya country. Barua's reading and interpretations of these lines differ completely from this[52].

As the inscription ends with his thirteenth reignal year, we do not know the subsequent events of his reign, had he

continued to rule. This is a contemporary record, giving the events of Khāravela's reign year by year to the thirteenth reignal year. As such it is a unique record in Indian Epigraphy and its importance cannot be minimised inspite of certain poetic exaggerations. As the inscription was written by a court-poet, the defects of the king were probably glossed over. Yet one cannot dismiss this as a mere eulogy on the king. There is less panegyricism than in many of the later inscriptions. Some of the contents are confirmed by the inscriptions of his queen[53]. Inspite of the mutilation in certain parts, much of the information given here may be taken to contain some historical kernel. The digvijaya might have been based on the conventional pattern. Further, Orissa also seems to have preserved some events of Pre-Khāravela period, such as the Nanda relations with Orissa. The references to certain details regarding the cost of repairs (35,000) to irrigation facilities and the expenditure (38,000) incurred on the construction of his palace are important as showing familiarity with the State records or the author himself might have been a high dignitary in the kingdom like Harisena the writer of the Allahabad praśasti. Next to Asoka's inscriptions at Tesali and Dhauli, this is the earliest important epigraphical record in Kalinga.

In the second inscription, the conquests, of the Sātavāhana king Śatakarni are suggested by certain epithets and references to the king's heroism and power and the performance of two aśvamedhas and one rājasūya. Of the epithets Vīra (warrior), Sūra (hero) apratihatacaka (of irresistible sovereignty) Dakhinapathapati are notable and further, the king is referred to as the first warrior on the earth surrounded by the oceans. The performance of two horse-sacrifices suggest two great military conquests or two successful digvijayas, the details which are unknown. The Vedic rājasūya sacrifice can be celebrated even by petty kings" [54]. But the rājasūya as detailed in the Mahābhārata "makes it performable by very powerful kings after they have completed a digvijaya ". [55] So taking all these into consideration, it appears that Śatakarni would have undertaken a grand digvijaya.

The third inscription refers to the digvijaya of Gautamīputra Śatakarni[56]. One or more of the Major campaigns seem to have been directed against the Sakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas of Western India. The word Sakas here probably refers to Western Satraps or may refer to the Saka chieftain

or chieftains of North West India (including the Saka Satraps of Western India). The Yavanas here were the Indo-Greeks and Pahlavas (the Parthians). All these three groups of foreigners were in the western part of North India. It might be that the army of the Western Satraps included Greek and Parthian chieftains or soldiers or both. The major campaign or campaigns appear to have been undertaken against the Western Satraps with whom the Sātavāhanas carried on a grim struggle for nearly two centuries. In the course of this bitter struggle, certain portions of North-West Deccan and Kathiawar Peninsula frequently changed hands between the Sātavāhanas and the Western Satraps[57]. Gautamīputra Śatakarṇi is said to have completely uprooted the contemporary Kshaharāta Satrapal family to which Nahāpaṇa belonged. This is confirmed by numismatic and probably literary evidences. Besides, one may reiterate his claim of re-establishing the fame of the Sātavāhana family (whose fortunes had sunk low just before Gautamīputra Satakarni's time due to the victories of Nahapāna). In the course of his digvijaya, the Sātavāhana ruler seems to have recovered the traditional territories lost to the Western Satraps and went right into the heart of the Satrapal dominions. His inscriptions at Nāsik and Poona districts show that Nahapāna's son-in-law and viceroy Ṛsabhadatta was ousted from these places.

The names of places and mountains enumerated as found in the empire of the Sātavāhana king, may generally be located in Peninsular India. It is doubtful whether all the claims of the Sātavāhana king are reliable. There is considerable exaggeration in the prasasti, as it was written probably by a court-poet or someone enjoying his patronage. Further, the account of the digvijaya might have been based on the conventional pattern of digvijaya. Whatever it might be, there must be atleast some basis for such an account as some of the claims of conquest by Gautamīputra Śatakarṇi are confirmed by other independent sources. The statement that he was obeyed by the circle of all kings might be taken as a reference to the mandala theory enumerated by Kauṭilya and other political thinkers of Ancient India whom the Indian rulers followed. His digvijaya itself might have been undertaken following the mandala theory or this word mandala here meant the provinces of his empire, or it might be just a panegyric of the prasasti writer.

II. Administrative, economic, socio-religious and cultural institutions.

The three prasastis mainly boast about military conquests of the kings and their character-traits and have very few references to the administrative economic, socio-religious and cultural institutions. It might be that the prasasti writers in order to win over the kings by their flattery were more concerned with the achievements and personality of the king than the other aspects of his rule. Further the former aspect would lend itself for the poets to show their talents.

(a) Administrative and Economic Institutions:

A study of three prasastis generally shows that the Crown Prince participated in the administration with the reigning king[58] as Khāravela did for nine years. The administration was geared to the threefold pursuits(trivarga) of life[59] as enunciated by the writers on Political Theory[60]. The word madala (mandala)[61] might be a large unit of administration like the province. One does not exactly know what is meant by pora (m) janapada[62]. It is interpreted as 'inhabitants of towns and districts,[63] city corporation and realm corporation'[64].

In foreign affairs with regard to his relations with other states, the king followed the threefold policy of chastisement, alliance and conciliation[65]. This again indicates his familiarity with Kautilyan ideas[66].

Gautamīputra is said to have levied taxes according to Dharma[67]. Khāravela exempted the brahmins from taxes, so also the hundred masons whom he settled to construct the tower. These indicate that generally atleast in theory, the king was expected to levy taxes justly and squarely and that there were certain categories of people who were exempted from taxes. Booty from the defeated kings was a great source of revenue[68].

The army consisted of the traditional fourfold divisions of cavalry, infantry, chariots, and elephantry[69]. This is in keeping with the ideas set by the Indian political thinkers like Kautilya[70].

The king cared for the weal and woe of his subjects[71]; gratified his subjects[72] on the occasion

Khāravela repaired the losses caused by a cyclome in Kalinga[73], Khāravela improved and extended at great cost the irrigation facilities for the economic improvement of his kingdom[74]. One of the inscription refers to the various types of gifts that the king bestowed upon the brahmins at his sacrifices as dakṣiṇā[75]. The dakṣiṇā included kārṣāpaṇas, gold, silver and villages. Kārṣāpaṇa was a kind of coin used in ancient India.

According to K.P. Jayaswal's reading of the Hāthigumphā inscription, there is a reference to Chinese silk. This is quite possible as Sino-Indian commercial relations had begun atleast by the time of the Mauryas.

Socio-religious and cultural Institutions:

As all these are interconnected, they may be taken together. The socio-religious Varṇāśramadharma continued to prevail with great vigour im the Sātavāhana empire as evidenced by the Nāsik praśasti. Gautamīputra Satakarni as a follower of Brahmanical Hinduism is said to stopped Varṇasaṅkara[76] (confusion of castes) and thus upheld the Smṛti ideals. Thus, the society was caste-ridden. The kings action may be explained im the context of the presence of foreigners especially im Western India. In later times, kings assumed titles indicating that they uphold the varṇāśramadharma, as Varṇāśramavyavasthāpana-pravṛttacakra[77] & caturvarṇāśrama-pālaka[78]. The Sātavāhanas at this time played the role of the custodians of Indian culture as against the Mlecchas (Sakas) who were becoming powerful in Western India. The Sātavāhana patronage to Brahmanical Hinduism is further confirmed by the performance of elaborate sacrifices like the aśvamedha, rājasūya and others and the bestowal of a variety of gifts to the brahmins, by an earlier king and his queen[79]. The queens like Nāganikā participated in the sacrifices as the Sahadharmacāriṇī of the king.

The Hāthigumphā inscription refers to the vigorous patronage of Khāravela to Jainism. The inscription itself starts with a Jaina form of salutation, as salutation to Arhats and salutation to all Siddhas. The very purpose of the inscription was to record some of his services to Jainism. He caused the excavation of caves, serving as shelters for monks; provided other amenities for the Jaina monks. In his thirteenth reignal year, on the Kumari Hill where Jainism was preached, he offered with respect 'royal [illegible] garments' and China silk clothes

and white clothes to the monks who died in the Jaina fashion by austerities and preachers on the religious life and conduct at the relic memorial". Even as a lay Jaim, he is said to have realised the nature of jīva and deha. He is even called a Bikhurāja[80]. He is said to have been seeing, hearing as realising the Kalyānas[81]. He summoned a council of the Jaina monks from all quarters near the relic depositary of the Arhat on the top of the Kumarī Hill. As this part is mutilated, it is difficult to have a complete picture of what happened. He set up four columns inlaid with beryl at the cost of seventy five thousand. He caused the text of the seven fold Angas of the sixty four (letters). Unlike the Buddhist Canon, the extant Jaina Canon was compiled in later times (fifth century A.D.). One doesn't know the exact contribution of Khāravela to this compilation. One school of Jainism maintains that there were seven Angas. Some of the sixty four letters referred to were mere symbols. Khāravela's patronage to Jainism is further confirmed by an inscription of his queen[82].

The Nāsik prasasti ends with an exhortation to renunciation of all enjoyments, an ideal emphasized in Buddhism. The same prasasti refers to the donation of a cave by the Sātavāhana king and his mother Balasrī and the grant of a village to embellish this cave by his son Vāsisthīputra Pulumāvi. The Sātavāhana's active patronage to Buddhism is confirmed by the extant archaeological remains in the Deccan.

The kings were tolerant of other faiths. The toleration had been of a positive type like that of Asoka[83]. A very devoted Jain like Khāravela patronised other sects[84]. Staunch Brahmanical Hindus like the Sātavāhanas actively patronised Buddhism. The donation of a cave to the Bhadavanīya Buddhist monks reminds us of Asoka's donation of caves to Ājīvika monks.

The kings were patrons of fine arts. Khāravela was proficient in music. He entertained the people at his capital with the display of (instrumental and vocal) music and dancing[85], caused festivals and Samājas to be held in his realm[86]. Gautamīputra Satakarni also held Samājas[87]. It is interesting to note that Asoka had banned all Samājas

in his far-flung empire (including the Deccan)[88]. So after his death, there had been a revival of all the festivals and Samājas in the Deccan. The successors of the Mauryas in the Eastern and Western Deccan seem to have lifted this ban amd patronised these cultural activities. It is also significamt to note . a Jaina king indulging in wars as well as in fine arts.

The Hāthigumphā inscriptiom refers to Khāravela's building activities. He built a great palace as great kings did before amd after him. Further, he is said to have built excellemt towers with carved interiors.

Thus, during the period of these three inscriptions, Brahmanism, Buddhism amd Jainism flourished side by side in the Deccan.

These three imscriptions are also important for the general history of ancient India. It is from these inscription that we are able to know atleast some details about Khāravela, Śatakarmi I or II amd Gautamīputra Śatakarmi, about whom we know very little from other sources. We would not know about the digvijaya amd the personality of Khāravela and Gautamīputra, if not for these records. Further, we know somethimg about the pre-Khāravela period of Kalinga history also from the Hāthigumphā inscriptiom. The Namda occupation of Kalinga, referred to in the Hāthigumphā inscription is confirmed by the Purāmas.

III. Literary Aspects: Of the three inscriptions, only two are important from the literary point of view[89]. The other record is partially mutilated and is of very little value as a piece of literary composition[90].

Although, these inscriptions were written in Prakrit prose, the style of atleast two imscriptions is of great importance for the history of Prakrit and Sanskrit prose. The use of long compounds is a notable feature in these records. Im the Hāthigumphā inscriptiom, the lomger compounds consist generally of five to six words, as for example:

Lekha-rūpa-gaṇana-vavahāra-vidhi-visāradhena[91]
dapa-mata-gīta-vādita-samdasanāhi[92]

But the Nāsik inscription has still longer compounds reminding us of the works of Bāṇa and Subandhu. One may cite for example:

-Patigahīta sasamasavarāja-loka-madala[93]
Vijha-chhavata-Pārichata sahya Kanhagiri-macha-siritana-
Malaya-Mahida-setagiri-chakara-pavatapatisa[94]

There are alliterative effects and assonance in the above example. For further examples, one may cite,

Kīditā kumāra - kīdika[95]
Vātavihitagopura-pākāra-nivesanam[96]
anugaha-anekāni sata sahasāni...
Vajhiraghara watigusitagharinī[97]
hajagaja mara radha bahulam dandam[98]
vīrasa sūrasa apritinatacakasa dakhinapathapatino
... pathaviya pathamavīrasa[99]
Varavāramavikama charuvikamasa
Bhujagapatibhogapīmavātavipuladīghasudabhujasa[100]
porajana mivīsosasamasukhadukkhasa[101]
mahādevīmahārājamātāmahārājapitāmaha-[102]

In the examples quoted above, some of the compounds remind us of the 'ojas' emphasised for prose by Dandin in later times[103]. There are altogether nineteen caus. verbs,[104] besides a few participles[105] and infinitives,[106] from the caus. base, in the first inscription. Examples of simple verbal forms are not lacking[107]. The preponderance of caus. forms might have been due to the fact that the author enumerates the achievements of the king in war and peaceful pursuits or it might be that the author was fond of caus. forms. The use of this derivative form shows some development in the language.

The second inscription has only three past participles[108] in the extant portions. All these are used in the passive voice with the instrumental case. One such form (dīnā) is repeated in the enumeration of the king's various gifts to the brahmins.

The third inscription has a paucity of verbs. Of the 12 lines in the inscription, there is only one verb - that too a participle[109] for the first nine lines and part of the tenth line. Besides, the simple present verb dādati is repeated twice in lines 11-12. The lack of verbs in the major part of the inscription dealing with the achievements of the king is compensated by the abundant use of compounds. The kings in these inscriptions are praised particularly with reference to their genealogy, military conquests,

bravery, compassion, munificience and other qualities worthy of emulation. This form of praising kings remind us of the Epics and especially the kāvyas, through the inscriptions are comparatively free from literary embellishments and exaggerations.

For example, Khāravela is praised as " the great king, the descendant of Mahāmeghavāhana, the increaser (of the glory) of the Chedi dynasty (endowed) with excellent works and features possessed of virtues which have realised (the ends of) the four qualities, the overlord of Kalinga" [110]. But there is greater elaboration in the Nānāghāt inscription and especially the Nāsik inscription, showing greater elaboration and embellishments[111], from one to another as time went on.

The praise on Gautamīputra Satakarni shows greater elaboration and fares perhaps a more significant stamp of the hero of a kāvya. He is compared to the mountains[112] and some prominent Epic heroes[113]. His wonderful feats in battles are compared to some forces of nature and supernatural beings like the wind, the Garuda, the Siddhas, the Yaksas, the moon and the sun[114]. Further, he is panegyrised as the "unique hero, unique controller, unique archer ---"[115]. He is said to be the abode of traditional love, refuge of the virtuous, asylum of fortune, the fountain of good fortune"[116].

Again, there is contrast in the description of the qualities of the hero. On the one hand, Gautamīputra Satakarni was an aggressive military comqueror but at the same time he was very compassionate in that he was alien to hurting life even towards an offending enemy[117]. A similar picture may be noted in the case of Khāravela also.

Of these three inscriptions, only one[118] has some figures of speech of which there are a few similies. These were drawn from nature, Epics and mythology. A complete simile may be seen as for example,

divasakarakaravibodhita kamalavimala sadisavadanasi[119]

The king's face is said to be as beautiful and pure as the lotus bloomed by the rays of the sun. It was so fresh and fine, free from any blemishes like the lotus bloomed anew in the natural way. Usually the poets do not give the attribute of comparison, whereas it is given here. His pleasant sight is described as lovely and radiant like the orb of the full-moon[120].

He is compared to the best of elephants, in his gait[121]. The epithet varavāraṇa is significant. This rules out an ordinary elephant. All these three are drawn from nature. In his prowess the king is compared to Rāma, Kesava and Arjuna of Epic fame[122]. His famous battles are compared to those fought against the forces of Nature and supernatural beings like the sun, wind, Garuda, Yakṣa and Vidyādharas[123]. His arms were ' as rounded and muscular, broad and long as the folds of Ādiśeṣa (Lord of serpents and bearer of the earth)[124]. Just as the Ādiśeṣa bears the burden of the earth, the king bears the burdem of the kingdom.

The Tiranhu hill is compared to the mount Kailasa and the cave that is donated to the Buddhists is compared to the mansion om the holy abode (kailāsa) of Siva and Pārvati. This indicates the religious toleration of the period also. The above similes have been inspired by the Epics and mythology. It is important to note that such similes occur for the first time in epigraphy in the Nasik inscription. They might have beem drawn from or influenced by the early kāvyas that were extant then.

Taking all the features of this literary aspect into consideration, one may state that these three inscriptions throw some light on the development of Prakrit and Sanskrit prose as well as Sanskrit kāvyas. The development of Prakrit prose reflects the parallel development in Sanskrit. As we do not have any early specimen of Sanskrit prose in epigraphy before Rudradaman I (150A.D.), the evidence of these Prakrit inscriptions is interesting, especially when we consider the long compounds, alliteration, assonance and similies which are drawn from the Epics and mythology. They may perhaps in a way help us to trace the origins of inscriptional praśasti to the Epics. Further, the high flown style in prose as found in the Nāsik inscription, forshadows the more elaborate prose style of the Allahabad stone pillar inscription of Samudragupta and the prose works of Bāna and Subandhu of later times.

Further, these inscriptions on the whole, suggest the prevalence of the Samskrit kāvya tradition in the two centuries before and after the christian Era. They also help us to trace the development of the early kāvya after that of Valmiki (4th C. B.C.) to those of Asvaghosa (1st century A.D.) The kāvya style was in all probability

becoming popular so that the writers of these inscriptions too seem to have been influenced by it. The Hāthigumphā inscription is the earliest lithic record written in the Kāvya style so far discovered[125].

Although one cannot speak of a definite form of an inscriptional prasasti in Prakrit or even Sanskrit at this time. Yet atleast two of these inscriptions (Nos. 1 and 3) are the specimens of the earliest extant inscriptional prasastii in the stages of its evolution. It is only in later times that the inscriptional prasasti came to have definite form as found in the Sanskrit inscriptions. Therefore, these Prakrit inscriptions help us to trace the origin and development of Sanskrit inscriptional prasastis also.

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NOTES:

1. These are prasastis only in a very limited sense. For the definition of an inscriptional prasasti vide the present writer's "A study of Sanskrit Inscriptional prasastis in India up to the end of the fifth century A.D." unpublished M.A. dessertation submitted for the University of Ceylon, 1969, p.6.

2. (I) Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XX, pp.79-89. (II) Sircar D.C. Select Inscriptions, Vol.I, Calcutta 1965, pp.213-221. (III) Law, N.N. Wintermitz Memorial Number, 1938, pp.259-285. (IV) Sashi Kant, The Hāthigumphā inscription of khāravela and the Babru Edict of Asoka - A critical study, Delhi, 1971. The present writer mainly follows (I) and (II).

3. Sircar, D.C. opt.cit. pp. 192-197.

4. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. VIII, pp. 60-62. Sircar, D.C. opt. cit. pp. 203-207.

5. In this article, these inscriptions are referred to as Ins. I, II, III. The Hāthigumpha inscription is unique in the sense that it refers to the career and achievements of Khāravela year by year to his 13th reignal year,

6. Ins. I in the easterm and II and III in westerm Deccan
7. Ins.I. L.1 cf. Ins.III. L1. 3-10 for greater details.
8. Ins.III. L1. 8-9.
9. Ins.III. L1.9-10. It is said that Balasrī had all these befitting the partner of a king.
10. Ins.I. L.3.
11. Ins.I. L.4.
12. Ins.III. L.5 cf. Arthasāstra I. XIX.
13. Ins.I. L1.2.
14. Ibid.
15. Vide Ins. II and III.
16. Ins. I. L.17; II. L.6.
17. Ins. I. L1.1,3; III.L.10.
18. Ins. III. L.1.
19. Ins. III. L.5.
20. Ins. III. L.6.
21. Ins. III. L.3.
22. Ins. I.L.17.
23. Ins. III. L.11.
24. Ins. II.L.2.
25. Ins. I.L.I.
26. Ins. I.L.16.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ins. III. L.11.
31. For further references to this and the two following titles vide the writer's unpublished dessertation "A Study of Sanskrit Inscriptional Prasastis in India up to the end of the 5th century A.D."
32. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri (Ed.), A Comprehensive History of India, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1957, pp.310-312.
33. Mookerjii, R.K., Ancient Indian Shipping, London 1912, pp. 50-52.
34. Strabo, Pliny, the author of the Periplus and Ptolemy.
35. Vajasaneyi Samhita, 9.20: 18.28.
36. Monier Williams, Sanskrit- English Dictionary, Oxford Univ., 1872, p.240.
37. Vide Asokas' Inscriptioms especially the 7th pillar Edict.
38. Vide Ins. II. Cf. Sircar D.C. Op. cit. pp. 190-192.
39. Arthasāstra VI.2 "Tasmacchaktim Siddhim ca ghatetātmanyāvesayitum". The translatiom given is that of R. Shamasastry.
40. Epigraphia Indica IV - pp. 243-53.
41. Sircar D.C. op.cit. p. 222.
42. Vide Ins. I. L.2.
43. Apte, V.S., Sanskrit- English Dictionary, Delhi, 1959, p.532.
44. Vide Ins. I L1. 5-6.

45. The word utarapada (samskrit uttarāpatha) usually meamt North India.

46. Majumdar,R.C. (ed.) The Age of Imperial Unity, Bombay, 1953, p. 214.

47. Puranānūru it refers to the Pāndya king Palyākasālai mutukutumipperuvaluti, as having ploughed the streets of enemies' territories with asses.

48. Sircar takes this to meam 1300 years-vide Select Inscriptions, p.217, footmote. Evem if this read im this way, it may mot actually be so but may meam some hundreds of years.

49. Rock Edict, II, L.2.. Coda pada-satya-puto keralaputo....

50. Vārttika on Pāmimi IV.1.168(Pāmdya); IV.1.175 (cola)

51. Mac Crindle (Tr.) Amcient India as described by Megasthenes and Arriam, Londom, 1977. p.159.

52. Law, N.N. op. cit., pp. 267,279.

53. Sircar, D.C., op. cit., pp. 221-222.

54. Narendramath Law, Aspects of Amcient Indian Polity, O U P, 1921, p.97.

55. Ibid. 'yasmin sarvam sambhavati yasca sarvatra pūjyate/
yasca sarvesvaro rājā rajasuyam ca vindati //
Mahabharata II.13.47.

56. For identificatiom of place names vide Nilakantasastri, K.A. (Ed.) The comprehemsive history of India,Vol.II,Ch.X, Ch. XII. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), op.cit., Yazdami (Ed.) Early History of the Deccam Parts I-IV, O.U.P. 1960, Ch.II.

57. Cf. Ins. III with the Inscriptioms of Nahapāma and Rudradāman vide Sircar D.C. op. cit. pp. 164ff.

58. Vide Ins. I. L.2.

59. Vide Ins. III. L.4.

60. Arthasāstra I. VII.

61. Vide Ins. III, L.3.

62. Ins. I. L.7.

63. L.W.N.N. op. cit. p. 227.

64. Jayaswal, U.P. Epigraphia Indica Vol. XX, p. 86.

65. Vide Ins. I. L.10.

66. Kautilya refers to sixfold policy which includes these three also. Arthasāstra, VII, I.

67. Vide Ins. III, L.5.

68. Vide, Ins. I. Ll. 10,13, of Arthasāstra.

69. Ibid. Ins. I. L.5.

70. Arthasāstra XX.4.

71. Vide Ins. III, L.5.

72. Vide Ins. I. L.4.

73. Ibid. L.3.

74. Ibid.

75. Vide Ins. II,Ll. 6ff.

76. Vide Ins. III. L.6.

77. 'whose soverign power was employed im the proper arrangement of castes and orders of life' Epigraphia Indica. Vol. IV. pp.208ff. (With references to Prabhākarvardhana, an ancestor of Harṣa)

78. 'the protector of the four castes and orders' Epigraphia Indica vol. III, pp. 120ff. (with reference to Harihara II of the Vijayanagar Empire).

79. Vide Ins. II, L1. 5ff.

80. Cf. Similar traditiom about Asoka.

81. The five Mahākalyāṇas in Jainism comsist of Descent, Birth, Imitiation, attainment and Final Deliverance in the life history of Jina. But the kalyāṇas here may be taken to represent such good principle of humam action as those mentioned by Asoka im his pillar Edicts. vide Law, N.N. op.cit. p. 282, footnote 218.

82. Sircar, D.C., op.cit., pp. 221-222.

83. Vide Rock Edict. 12.

84. Vide Ins. I.L.17.

85. Ibid. L.5

86. Ibid.

87. Vide Ins. III, L.8.

88. i.e. Rock Edict I.

89. Ins. I. & III.

90. Ins. II.

91. Ins. I.1.2.

92. Ibid, L.5.

93. Ins. III. L.3.

94. Ibid. ll. 2-3.

95. Ins. I. L.2.

96. Ibid.

97. Ins. I.L.7.

98. Ibid. L.5.

99. Ins. II. (L.2-3). For the influence of these lines on the subsequent inscriptiom vide Ins. III, L1.7.

100. Ins. III, L.4.

101. Ibid.,L.5.

102. Ibid., L.10.

103. Kāvyādarśa 1-80. Ojas samāsabhūjastvametadgadyasya jīvitam.

104. i.e. Pāpumāti, patisamkhārayati, bamdhāpayati, kārayati, pathāpayati kīdāpayati, pavesayati, karāpayati, pāyayati, patithāpayati.

105. Nivesitam.

106. Kārayitum.

107. i.e. upalabhate, yacchati.

108. hutā, yitham and dīnā may be noted.

109. karita (causal part participle).

110. Ins. I. L.1.

111. Cf. Ims. II. L1.2-3 and Ins. III, 1-9.
112. Ins. III, L1. 1-2.
113. Ibid., 7-8.
114. Ibid., 8-9.
115. Ibid., 7.
116. Ibid.,
117. Ibid., 6.
118. Ins.,III.
119. Ibid., L.3.
120. Ibid., L1.3-4.
121. Ibid.,L.4.
122. Ibid., L1. 7-8.
123. Ibid., L1. 8-9.
124. Ibid., 1-4.
125. Sashi Kant, op. cit., p. 66.

SOME ASPECTS OF PRAKRIT INSCRIPTIONS.

The Indo-Aryan languages constitute one of the major families of speech in South Asia. From the original Indo-Aryan language developed the Vedic Language (the language of the four Vedas and their constituent parts, the Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, Upaniṣads and Sūtras) which is generally considered to be a hierarchical language and the various Prakrits (Prakrit means raw, natural, unpolished etc.) from which the modern Indo-Aryan languages of South Asia originated. The Prakrit when polished becomes Sanskrit. A later phase of the Indo-Aryan language which is polished and systematized by the famous grammarian Pāṇini by about the 5 th century B.C. or a little earlier or later, is known as "Samskṛt" or Sanskrit, as it is called in English. But, generally, the entire range of language used in the Vedas, the Epics and Classical literature is called Sanskrit.

As a literary language, Sanskrit has a continuous history of nearly four thousand five hundred years but as a language of the inscriptions, it was used from about the 1 st century B.C., whereas Prakrit and Tamil were used from about the 3rd century B.C. in the inscriptions. Unlike Prakrit, Tamil belongs to the Dravidian family of speech.

Prakrit inscriptions are found all over India except perhaps in Assam and Tamil Nadu. They are found outside India in Afghanistan and Central Asia which were subject to Indian influences also. The Prakrit records are usually short or of medium length. There are hardly any inscriptions which can rival the lengthy prasastis found in Sanskrit. It is also quite possible that several Prakrit inscriptions like many literary works were lost particularly in Northern India which was subject various invasions in historic times especially those of the Muslims.

Another notable feature of the Prakrit inscriptions is that they were written in two scripts, namely the kharoṣṭhī and the Brāhmī . The kharoṣṭhī script was used in North West India and beyond which were subject to Persian influences and the Brāhmī script was used in the other parts of India. These were engraved usually on materials like stone, copper, silver and gold.

The importance of these inscriptions for the study of the early history of India from the 3rd century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. is immense. They throw considerable light on the Dharmavijaya of Asoka. If not for these, the historian of Asoka has to be satisfied with the evidence from the literary and other sources, some of which are biased.

The personality of Asoka as revealed from the inscriptions is more dynamic than from the literary sources. He was very eclectic, though he accepted Buddhism after the Kalinga war.

Several kings of indigenous and foreign extraction who ruled after the Mauryas in the North and South are known from these records. The political, administrative, economic, and cultural history of India from the 3rd century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. is reconstructed mainly from these inscriptions and literary sources.

Further, the inscriptions are more reliable than the other sources. These mostly refer to contemporary events and the composers of these records usually write what they have personally seen or in which they themselves have participated. These are also not subject to any interpolation or change after they are engraved. As they are engraved on more durable materials, they survive for a longer time. As such, these inscriptions whether they are long or short or fragmentary are of immense value to a historian of ancient India.

The word Prasasti is of Sanskrit origin. It is derived from the root " Sams", "to praise" with the upasarga "pra" and the suffix "ti"[1]. The word thus formed means the "action of praising or eulogy". It may also be interpreted as "praising in a special manner"[2].

The word occurs in Sanskrit literature right from the earliest stratum, namely, the Vedic literature down to later times. It is found in the hymns of the Rgveda, especially the "Dānastuti hymns"[3]. But one is not sure as to whether it occurs in the special meaning as found in the inscriptional eulogies in Sanskrit. In the above mentioned hymns, " the praise of the God is united with the glorification of the victorious king". In some way or other, there seems to have been a certain historic connection between these two forms of eulogy.

The Gāthās and the Nārāśaṁsīs found in the later Vedic literature are closely related to the Dānastuti hymns in this respect. Gāthā meant a song and later a distinct type of composition. As a Nārāśaṁsīgāthā, it constituted of those songs which celebrated the heroic deeds of men. The Indragāthās celebrated the heroic deeds of Indra. They formed such a necessary element of Vedic sacrificial ceremonies that they were included in the rituals of some great sacrifices like the aśvamedha. These two also may be taken to be the direct precursors of the heroic Epics. It may therefore be inferred that these constitute the important antecedental forms of praśastis. Just as the Gāthās and Nārāśaṁsīs in the later Vedic literature appear to have some antecedental elements of a praśasti, the Epic literature also contains elements of similar nature. The nuclei of the Epics constituted a cycle of heroic songs extolling particularly the Kuru-Pāñcāla and the Iksvāku clans. They are closely related to the Gāthās and Nārāśaṁsis. There are references to the praises of heroes by Sūdas, magadhas and vandins, in the Epics. They were bards or wandering minstrels who eulogized their patrons, whether they were kings, chieftains or affluent persons. In the inscriptional eulogies whether in Prakrit or Sanskrit or Tamil or any other Indian languages, reference is often made to the Epic heroes as models or ideal types to be followed and eulogized by them.

The tendency to eulogize and praise a benefactor, whether he be a God or a secular leader or a king is a marked characteristic of the literature from the earliest times. Just as the Epic poems developed out of the tendencies inherent in the Vedic literary elements such as the Dānastuti, Gāthā and Nārāśaṁsī, the same literary tendencies contributed to the growth of a panegyrical style of composition culminating in the development of praśasti literature.

Next to the inscriptions of the Indus Valley Civilization, the earliest extant inscriptions of India are those of the Mauryan emperor Asoka who held undisputed sway over a greater part of India and the present day Afghanistan in the 3rd century B.C. The emperor got the inscriptions engraved on rocks, pillars and caves. These records were mainly about the Dharma that he sought to preach to the

people in his far-flung empire and outside, after the conquest of Kalinga. A few inscriptions refer to his inclination and patronage to Buddhism, though he was very eclectic. As far as the present stage of research on pre-Asokan times is concerned, Asoka does not appear to have had any indigenous model for his inscriptions. Probably, he was inspired by the precedent set by the Achaemenian emperors of Persia who maintained political, cultural and commercial relations with North- Western India and Afghanistan which also formed part of the vast empire of Asoka and his two immediate predecessors. (Candragupta Maurya and Bindusāra). In all probablity, Asoka seems to have emulated the Achaemenian example, though the content of the two sets of inscriptions (of the Achaemenian and Asokan) differ considerably, as pointed out in a separate article in this collection. The Asokan inscriptions are not prasastis though they praise in a way the efforts of the king in his pursuit of Dharma vijaya. Further, it is interesting to note that though Sanskrit continued to be the vehicle of Hinduism, higher learning and wisdom for several centuries, Prakrit was used in the inscriptions, from the time of Asoka (3rd B.C.) to the 3rd century A.D. in the North and 4th century A.D. in the South[4]. But gradually Sanskrit became popular as a language of Indian inscriptions from about the dawn of the Christian Era and blossomed forth during the time of the Guptas and later. As far as the non-Sanskrit literary works prior to Asoka are concerned, one may point out the Buddhist Canon in Pali (a Prakrit language) and the earliest portions of the Jaina Canon. But they do not appear to have influenced him in this respect (inscribing on stone). Several Prakrit inscriptions were written after Asoka for about five centuries in the North and six centuries in the South. The popularity of Buddhism and Jainism in the courts of kings during this period probably accounts for the popularity of Prakrit. But with the resurgence of Hinduism, Sanskrit the sacred language of Hinduism naturally became popular.

Among the Prakrit inscriptions, there are many in which the hero or the patron alone or with his ancestors are praised in one or few lines. Such inscriptions are not treated as prasastis in the full sense of the term. Therefore, at this stage, it is necessary to define an inscriptional prasasti to have a proper understanding of the subject.

" An inscriptional prasasti may be defined as a form of literary composition on stone or metal, which usually describes a king in a special manner (as in a kāvya etc.) with reference to his genealogy, titles, fame conquests, administrative measures, patronage of religion and culture, qualities, talents and other accomplishments worthy of emulation. Such a composition usually begins with an auspicious symbol or word or a salutation to a deity and ends with a blessing or wish for the welfare of the people and the country. It is written either in prose or verse or in both; some times, it bears a date"[5].

A study of inscriptional prasastis written during the different epochs of Indian history, in various places shows that prasasti has become a distinct literary genre on stone or metal as stated in the above definition. Some of the Sanskrit inscriptions clearly refer to themselves as prasastis, whereas there are others which do not refer to their literary genre but contain all the elements necessary for an inscriptional prasasti[6]. As noted in an earlier paragraph, the earliest inscriptions of India were mostly in Prakrit followed by those in Sanskrit and other Indian languages.

Unfortunately, among the extant Prakrit inscriptions, only a few contain all the salient features of a prasasti. Of these, the Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravela and the Nāsik cave inscription of the time of Vāsisthīputra Pulumāvi, especially the latter, are of great significance, in this respect. A detailed study of three important Prakrit prasastis including the above two is given in a separate article.

A study of the extant Prakrit inscriptions reveals that the form of an inscriptional prasasti did not develop fully as yet in Prakrit, except perhaps in the one or two mentioned above.

Further, inspite of the paucity of Prakrit prasastis, it is plausible to surmise that the Prasasti in all probability developed out of similar literary models in Sanskrit mentioned in some of the early paragraphs. The history of the development of prasasti is also closely interlinked with the history of the Sanskrit kāvya tradition which was in its formative stages during the

period of Prakrit inscriptions and fully blossomed in the period of Sanskrit prasastis. Therefore, the early inscriptional prasasti in Prakrit did not develop well, though it was influenced by the Sanskrit kāvyas of the time.

An important fact that emerges from the study of early inscriptions in India is that except in Tamilnadu, where Tamil was the language of inscriptions right from the beginning (3rd c. B.C.), Prakrit continued to be the language of inscriptions from the 3rd B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. in the North and fourth century A.D. in the South (other than Tamilnadu). In some areas especially in the North, Sanskrit was used alone or with Prakrit in the inscriptions in the latter part of the above period. Some Prakrit inscriptions were influenced by Sanskrit and similarly some early Sanskrit inscriptions were influenced by Prakrit during this period[7].

It is a unique fact that a Prakrit inscription was hardly ever engraved in Tamilnadu, though the early Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions were slightly influenced by Prakrit which was the main language of inscriptions during the period mentioned above. But as a literary language, Sanskrit was popular among the Buddhists and Jains of Tamilnadu later, as in other parts of India. But, the uniqueness of Tamil as the language of inscriptions right from the inception has not been pointed out by many of the leading Indian epigraphists who have somehow or other overlooked this point, even after Mr. Irawatham Mahadevan hasclearly proved that the language of the early Brāhmī inscriptions of Tamilnadu is Tamil[8].

Another important fact that is evident from the study of Prakrit inscriptions and the early Sanskrit inscriptions is that as language of the inscriptions, Sanskrit was first fostered mostly by the kings of foreign extraction or Indianised foreign kings of Indo-Greek, Saka-Parthian and Kusāna origin. This is clearly pointed out by Dr. D.C. Sircar[9].

It is surprising to note that though Sanskrit continued to be a literary language and vehicle of higher learning and wisdom, it came to be used as a language of inscriptions so late, as about the dawn of the Christian Era; Whereas, Tamil had already become the language of the inscriptions in Tamilnadu by about the 3rd century B.C. more or less

At the same time when Prakrit was first or rather widely used in the inscriptions. As far as the extant evidence goes, some scholars ascribe a century earlier than Asoka for a few Prakrit inscriptions[10]. It is also clear that Tamil had become a well developed language by the third century B.C., and Tamilnadu was under the sway of indigenous Tamil kings. Therefore, there was no occasion for the employment of Prakrit in Tamilnadu. But the same Brāhmī script was used for writing both Prakrit and Tamil. The evidence of Prakrit inscriptions also shows that the Sanskrit kāvya continued to develop in the early centuries of the Christian Era.

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FOOT NOTES.

1. Vide Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī 3.3.94 for an explanation of the formation of this word.
2. Sivasamy, V. A study of the Sanskrit Inscriptional praśastis in India up to the end of the 5th c.A.D. unpublished M.A. dissertation submitted to the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, 1969. A discussion on the various meanings and references to Praśasti is given in Ch. I.
3. Rgveda, 1.126; 8.1; 8.26 etc.
4. Sircar, D.C., Indian Epigraphy, New Delhi, 1965, p.40.
5. Sivasamy, V. op. cit., p.8.
6. One may cite for example the Nāsik cave inscription to the time of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Pulumāvi in Prakrit or the Girnar Rock inscription of Rudradāmanī in Sanskrit.
7. Sircar, D.C. Select Inscriptions .. Vol 1, Calcutta, 1965 pp.139-40etc.
8. Mahadevan, I. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions of the Sangam age, Madras, 1966.
9. Sircar, D.C., Indian Epigraphy, New Delhi, 1965, p.41.
10. Pandey, R.B. Historical and literary inscriptions, Varanasi, 1962, pp.1-3.

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