

A GLIMPSE OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS OF U.P. AND M.P.

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INTRODUCTION

As we are aware, more than the invention of fire or wheels the greatest contribution of mankind is the Art of Writing. Writing is the graphic representation of language. Perhaps, many of us do not know that there is a long history behind the origin and development of writing.

The earliest known system of writing is found on the seals used by the people of Indus valley about 3000 B.C.E. to 1500 B.C.E., but this writing has not yet been deciphered successfully. India is singularly rich in epigraphical wealth. It is estimated that so far more than one lakh inscriptions have been discovered from the length and breadth of the country and still a large number of inscriptions have to be brought to light by conducting an intensive and systematic survey of our vast sub continent.

Epigraphy forms one of the very important source for understanding the history and culture of the Indian people from the time of the Mauryan emperor Asoka (3rd century B.C.E.) to the late Medieval period. The study of the memorial inscriptions unfolds the salient features of the cult - practices of the ancient times and the continuity of the tradition.

Early Brahmi Inscriptions were written in Prakrit Language and they are found from 3rd century B.C.E. to 3rd Century C.E. Prakrit was a popular lingua franca and its usage is found throughout the length and breadth of the country. Along with Prakrit inscriptions, there are few Sanskrit inscriptions found in the early part of the 1st century A.D. It is interesting to note that during this period we first the influence of Prakrit in Sanskrit inscriptions, similarly Sanskrit inscriptions are found influenced by Prakrit and this period is considered as a transitional phase.¹ Earliest memorial inscription from Uttar Pradesh is belonged from Sarnath (now kept in Sarnath Archaeological Museum) incised on the Pedestal of a broken idol, records that the image in question was the gift of Param - opasaka Na [nna], in memory of his parents. This inscription is dated in 3rd Century C.E.

Another memorial inscription found from Mathura in Mathura tahsil and district of the same name engraved on a Pillar and belonging to the Gupta King Chandragupta II (dated in 380 C.E.) records that the lingas of Upamatesvara and Kapilesvara were installed in the teacher's shrine by arya Uditacharya from the Bhagavat Kushika, Fourth from the Bhagvat Parasara, a stainless desciple of the Bhagavat Upamita for the commemoration of his perceptors and for the augmentation of his own religious merit.

Uttar Pradesh has not yielded any memorial inscription for a span of about nearly 600 years i.e. from the 5th to 11th century. Thereafter the record available is from Arhera in Kiraoli tahsil in Agra district dated Vikrama 1330 (1273 A.D.) engraved on a stone and mentions a certain Suraala of Raheregrama in whose memory the stone seems to have been set up as indicated by a human figure lying on its back carved above the writing.

The inscription dated in Vikrama 1405 (1349 A.D.) from Sangam, in Allahabad engraved on the pedestal of a sculpture of a male and female with a linga between them, belonging to the king Virajadeva, records the death of a person at the holy Sangama.

A record of Saka 1271² (1350 A.D.) from Etawa, in Etawa district incised on a stone lying in the kuti of a Baba, near the Etawa Fort, records the erection of a stone (smaraka - sila) by the king named Suroddharana at the outer entrance of Siva temple which was situated in a fort.

There is another sati stone record with the figures in relief dated in Vikrama 1494 (A.D. 1437) from Ashthabhujia hill near Vindhya-chala, in Mirzapur district seems to record the commission of sati.

The inscription dated Vikrama 1759 (1702 A.D.) from Lalitpur, in Jhansi district engraved on a sati stone belonging to the Maharaja Durjanasimha, ruler of Chanderi mentions a memorial pillar of Krasnakumari (Krishnakumari), who was the daughter of Kesau and Kumjamati and the wife of Krishnasaran.

An inscription dated in Saka 1698 (1776 A.D.) from Deogarh in Jhansi district incised on a sati stone, records that Surjjavati committed sati.

A Brahmi inscription of Vasishthiputra Sivaghosha (1st century A.D.) was discovered about two decades ago in Baghora in Jabalpur tahsil and district. The inscription refers to the amatya, whose name is not mentioned of king Vasithiputra Sivaghosha son of Ananta and grandson of Andhodhaka.³ The amatya was irresistible in battle, knower of the Brahma and honoured by his own kinsmen. The reading of the word gatram (restored) suggest that amatya had died at the place and a stone was erected over the mortal remains of the dead.

To the right of the inscribed portion there is a figure of a man with sirastrana on his head; he is holding perhaps a spear in his right hand and his left hand is seen controlling two horses which are engraved towards his left. In front of the figure of the man there is depiction of bhringara (a vase of a particular shape) and an umbrella, the staff of which is probably decorated with a streamer.

In the light of the figures depicted above, we may suggest that someone influenced by the heroic deeds of the minister of Vasishiputra might have got the present inscription as well as the carvings engraved. This is the earliest hero-stone record in the North perpetuating the memory of a hero.

Sati pillars are very numerous in Balod (Drug district), on the banks of all tanks in the village and in the fort; the most interesting of these is one on the roadside, about half a mile to the east of the city. This pillar has served three times successively as a sati monument. On one side is a date, 1005 with a long inscription, which is perfectly illegible, below this inscription is another one; the date is quite worn out, but the word Samvat is visible. On another face are three sculptured portions; the top most represents a man and a woman on either side of a lingam, the second portion has had its figures broken; the lowest represents a figure seated cross-legged; below these, is an inscription in three lines, in characters which Princep ascribes to the 2nd century. A.D. This inscription is very important, as it is the earliest sati inscription as yet found. Its importance is still further highlighted by the sculptures which show that here, at that early period when Buddhism was the predominant religion in other parts of India, Saivism flourished.

Eran- memorial inscription of Sridharavarman (c.-3rd century A.D.) is incised on a small stone pillar, afterwards converted into a siva linga, which stands near the left bank of the Bina between the ancient town of Eran and the neighbouring village of Pehelejpur, in the Khurai tahsil of the Sagar district. Another record of Goparaja which will be discussed in the sequel is also incised on the same pillar. The column on which the present inscription is incised is called Yashti. The present pillar was erected by Satyanaga, the Senapati. Of the Saka king Sridharavarman, apparently to commemorate some great battle, fought at Erikina (modern Eran) in which several Naga soldiers had met with a heroic death. This is indicated by the original sculptures carved on it. On each of the three-faces of the pillar, there is a panel showing horseman holding the reins of the horse in left hand and a sword or a javelin in right. In the present inscription Satyanaga expresses the hope that the yashti raised by the Nagas themselves (Nagaireva) would inspire future generations of warlike people to perform similar heroic deeds; for, it was a place where foes met in a spirit of service and reverence.

Supia (old Rewa State) pillar inscription of the time of Skandagupta, Gupta year 141 (460 A.D.) records the erection of a memorial pillar styled balayasti which was a gotrasalika (i.e. family [pillar of] stone) by Vargagramika meant for the name and fame (yasah and kirti). The use of the word yashti in the sense of a pillar raised in memory of the dead suggests that Varga raised the pillar bearing the inscription in memory of his grandfather Kaivarti - sreshthin, his father Hari sreshthin, his elder brother Sridatta and his younger brother Chhandaka of Avadara who were apparently dead. The memorial pillar is also called a gotra - sailika or 'family [pillar of stone]' apparently because it was raised in memory of several members of a family. It is interesting to note that this is the earliest record commemorating the death of several members of a family in this region.

The Bhumara pillar inscription of Hastin (5008-09 A.D.) records the erection of a memorial pillar (bala-yashti) by Sivadasa, son of the Gramika vasu and grandson of Indana. The use of word yashti in the expression bala - yashti occurring in the present inscription suggests that the Bhumara pillar was a memorial raised in honour of a dead relative of Sivadasa. This relative was possibly his grand father or grand mother Indana, although it is not clearly stated in the inscription.

The Eran posthumous stone pillar inscription of Goparaja referred to above records that in the company of a powerful king named Bhanugupta, a chieftain or noble named Goparaja came to the place where the pillar was set up and fought a battle; that Goparaja was killed; and that his wife accompanied him, by offering herself in the funeral pyre. It is dated in the Gupta year 191 (A.D. 510-11) on the 7th lunar day of the dark fortnight and solar day of Sravana (July - August) and is one of the two older Sati records in the Northern part of the country. The above event was fittingly commemorated, evidently by the order of the Gupta emperor by incising another short inscription on the opposite side of the same yashti which had been exhorting warlike people to perform such heroic deeds for more than a century. Mandasor stone inscription of Yasodharman and Vishnuvardhana (533-34 A.D.) found in an old well, somewhere in the lands of Mandasor, the chief town of the Mandasor district records the construction of a large well by a person named Daksha, the younger brother of Dharmajosh who was a minister of Vishnuvardhana in memory of their deceased uncle Abayadatta, who had formerly held same office over the tract of country bounded by the Vindhyas and Pariyatra mountain and the western ocean.

— A pillar from Sesai in Shivapuri district belonging to the 7th century A.D. records the death of a person, whose name seems to be Durgaraja, in a cattle raid. This is the earliest reference to the cattle lifting that we have come across so far in this state.

— Padhāvli' in Morena district of Madhya Pradesh contains three memorial pillars belonging to the 9th century C.E., two inscriptions of which are damaged and fragmentary. In Paonra, Jabalpur district is noticed a memorial stone (9th century C.E.) in a paddy field containing the name of a person.

An inscription dated in Vikrama 960 (904 C.E.) from Terahi in Gird district is on a prostrate pillar, refers to the fight, of the illustrious Guaraja and Undabhaa (a general or feudatory of the paramount sovereign of the country, the rulers of Kanyakubja), whose name occurs in line 1 of the inscription, and it records the death of a warrior in a battle, whose name ends in varinan and who, in line 2, appears to be described as a samanata and asvapati. From the same place another inscription dated in Vikram 962 (906 C.E.) records that a lady named Nanna, daughter of Doddasiddha, burnt herself, apparently in the funeral pyre of her husband.⁴

An inscription belonging to the 10th century C.E. from Bhilsa records the death of a warrior in a battle with the Karnatas. It is interesting to note that all the three inscriptions mentioned above are inscribed on the coins while in earlier examples memorial inscriptions are engraved on stone pillars and stone slabs or tablet.

A record of the same date found in Maihar in Satna district and engraved on a big slab in the niche of the main shrine, records the construction of a temple of the goddess Sarasvati by a brahmana named Devadhara in memory of his deceased son Damodara. It is a rare instance, that a temple is being raised instead of a memorial stone.

There are a number of sati pillars in the Damöh district, those at Hatta, Hindoria and Batihagarh being well known. One of them at hindoria is dated 1056 C.E. Bhiñoni, Phutera, Jamata, Kanoda Ryotwari, Kanti, Kaithora, Khamargor, Muhas, Marhiadoh, Narainpura, Piparia, Ghansham, Ranch, Sunwaho and Sekhor contain more or less illegible inscriptions.

An inscription (11th century C.E.) from Jharoli in the same district and incised on a hero-stone fixed into the ghat of the tank called Bhavani-tal, mentions a certain Ramaka Si(dha) raja and his minister Jalha as well as a certain Kabhana. The details are not clear.

An inscribed stone inscription (11th century C.E.) kept in the Jardine Museum at Khajuraho in Chhatarpur tahsil and district (find spot is not known) records the construction of a Mahamandira, by Sādha, son of Kakēka who was the son of a Kayastha named Parvva and who died in a battle in the service of his master.

The Simra stone Inscription⁵ (11th century C.E.) refers itself to the victorious reign of the Bhatrakaprabha, the illustrious Kara, whom judging by the characters and provenance of the present inscription, seems to be identical with the well-known Kalachuri king of that name. The object of the inscription appears to be to record the death of some persons who are said to have gone to the holy world. It is not stated on what occasion they lost their lives. Since the name of Karia is mentioned in the beginning, it may be conjectured that they met with death in a battle fought on behalf of the king. The record ends with a statement that it was set up by Janada (Janardana ?).

The sati stone inscription from Hoshangabad in the tahsil and district of the same name belonging to the reign of Harischamradēva of Paramaras of Malwā records probably the death of Talh [1], the wife of Tāmvasiha, the son of Rajagasiha.

Several stone inscriptions of the Yajvapala or Jajapella king Asalla (or Asala), his son Gopāl and grandson Ganapati, all of whom had their headquarters at the hill-fort of Nalapura (modern Narwar in the Shivapuri district of Madhya Pradesh, are known to scholars. Bangla a small village in the Shivapuri district is studded with a number of memorial stone pillars many of which are inscribed.⁶ Seven of them refer to the death of certain warriors who lost their lives fighting on behalf of the Yajvapāla (Jajapella) king Gopala against the Chandēla king Vtravarman whose known dates range between 1262 and 1286 C.E. All these seven inscriptions are dated in Vikrama 1338 corresponding to C.E. 1281. These records were found on stone pillars commemorating warriors killed in fighting and often bearing representations of footmen, horsemen and

elephant riders engaged in battle, The fallen warriors are shown worshipping the iva-iiliga or enjoying the company of celestial damsels in heaven. In some cases the persons are represented as worshipping the Siva linga jointly with their wives, implying thereby that the ladies committed sail on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Generally only one face of the pillar bears such a representation with an inscription above.

The Sesai memorial stone pilar⁷ (dated in Vikrama 1341 (1284 AD.) belonging to the reign of Göpāla of Yajvapala dynasty states that Rao (Rauta which is derived from Sanskrit Rajaputa) Malayadeva of the family called Domgrot was judhita (i.e. yuddhita in the sense of dead as the result of flightng in a bane) in connection with a case of cattle-lifting at the Pratoli (i.e., a street or ward) of Sesaigrama. It is further stated that his elder wife named Mahinidē (i.e. Mahinidevi) and younger wife named Nāvuladēvi (i.e., Navuladevi) also became judhita. It is clear that Malayadēva lost his life while resisting the operations of certain cattle-lifters at the village of Sesai. His two wives were probably killed by the enemies who appear to have invaded Malayadva's residence at the village. The memorial pillar was caused to be made by Rao Hirmana and Rao Hamsaraja who were respectively the elder and the younger sons of Malayadēva.

This inscription is interesting as it indicates that polygamy was in vogue in the 13th century C.E. in the Madhya Pradesh. It is second record (first mentioned earlier) referring to the death of persons in connection with cattle-lifting.

Another inscription incised on a slab set up in the quadrangle of the temple complex at Pacharai, in Pichhore tahsil in Shivapuri district refers to the administration of Mahapradhana Rao Harnsaraja and records the death of Valha, the son of Kachchharaneju and probably the performance of sati by Sulthi, the daughter of padihara Salabhane and [Halju, the daughter, of Rao Anaisiha.⁸ The third inscription (dated in V.S. 1348 (1291 C.E.) from Kolaras in Shivapuri seems to record the committing of sati by the queen of Govindarāja.

– An inscription from Narwar in Gird district dated in V.S. 1355 corresponding to 1298 C.E. belonging to the king Gaiapati of Yajvapala dynasty records the construction of a Siva temple and a well by Palhadeva in memory of his deceased brother Hamsaraja.⁹ Rarely we get reference found on a coin to this nature from the numismatic evidences. Another interesting feature is a reference made to the construction of temple and well simultaneously by one and the same person. This further establishes his belief in Saivism.

In a village named Salaiyā in Damoh district three miles from Bahmni, there are two sad records, one dated in 1304 C.E., And the other in 1309 C.E. respectively erected during the reign of Vaghadeva and of Alaud-din, indicating that the Parihāra-Chandella rule had come to an end in 1310 C.E. through the Muhammadan invasion.

The successors of Bhojavarman were not known before the discovery of a sati record in a village named Bamhni. It appears that the last king of the Chandella dynasty was Hammiravarmadeva, who aparently held sway until 1309 AD. This record is dated in V.S. 1365 i.e., 1308 AD.

Parambhēt(bha) tarakenadhirajavalitrayipeta kalijyarādhipati srimad Hammiravarmmadēvali Vijayarajye Samvat 1365 Samaye Mahārajaputra Sri Vaghadva bhujiyamana varthamaneh) va(ba)mhnigrame bhumiputra palha bhārjā malhai sarhtam Hatusidhi putra jāmē patumaiakvatrah pam Jai (jaya) pala likhitisti.¹⁰

The composer of the record is probably not well versed in Sanskrit. Hence he could not compose properly, but has succeeded in expressing what he intended to say. This is an example of the rural composition.

The three inscriptions mentioned above are interesting for reconstructing the regional history whence they are found.

Temara, a small village in the Bastar area has yielded a sail stone inscription which records that during the reign of Harichandradeva Arnaga, an executive officer (adesakarim) of the above king, having gone to heaven (svarga) his companion and chaste wife Manikya [devi] [entered] eternity by entering into fire. It is dated on Saturday, the 12th day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra in the Saka year 1248 (1324 C.E.).

A sati stone inscription from Rōnd in Damoh district dated in V.S. 1383 (C.E. 1327) belonging to the time of Muhammad Tughlaq records the performance of sati at Araudigrama (i.e. Rond), by the two wives of Narasimhadeva of the Pratihara family, one of whom, Dhamhdhā was the daughter of a Rāhai patti (lord of Rāhadi?) and another was the daughter of pamo Kēsava. The name of the subordinate ruler described as a Maharnalika is not clear. Another inscription³⁶ dated in aka 1252 [2] (1330 C.E.) from Samlur in Dantewada tahsil of Bastar district also records the sari committed by the two wives of a mahapradhana dandanayaka. These two inscriptions are interesting as they show the prevalence of polygamy among the higher class of the society at that time.

A sati pillar inscription dated VS. 1398 (1341 C.E.) from Gurji in Jabalpur District records the death of a sati named Jasudevi, wife of Vijayadva of the rivastavya-Kayastha community. It is interesting to note the community name in this record.

There are five inscriptions from the same place dated in 1342 C.E. referring to a similar practice.

In the temple of Rāma, on the Ujyarsagar tank, at Kawardha of the Chhattisgarh division, there are two inscribed pillars which are much worn out. They appear to be sati stones now utilised as pillars to support the mandapa of the temple built out of stones and materials brought from Boria.¹¹ One of the inscriptions dated in Sarfivat 1414 and on Monday the 12th day of the bright fortnight of Margairsha corresponding to 5th December, 1356 C.E. during the reign of Maharaja Sri Ramadeva, and the other in Sathvat 1422 (1364 C.E.), The second epigraph mentions that the deceased Nayaka Mahadva had three wives, Metai, Jaukhai and Divamāi, of whom only Meta committed sari and it was in her memory that the pillar was erected. This inscription is important as it indicates two things; (i) Though he had three wives, it was not compulsory for all

wives to commit sati. (2) one would have been interested in accompanying her husband to show her devotion and affection.

Allahabad Museum pillar inscription belonging to king Vallābhādeva¹² (dated in Vikrama 1417 (1306 C.E.) from the erstwhile Rēwa State^{4°} refers to a memorial pillar'(gatra) raised by some persons in memory of a dead man named Maharaja whose two wives committed sati.

A sati stone dated Vikram 1422 (1365 C.E.) from Manor in Panna tahsil and district of the same name and another sarti record dated Vikrama 1450 (1393 C.E.) from Madumar, Tikamgarh district record the performance of sati.

The epigraph from Javli in Bhanpura tahsil of Mandasaur district dated Vikrama 1503 (1446 A.D.) records the performance of sari by a lady named Dharami, the wife of a Shāti (i.e. mason) named Vija [da] dēva and the daughter of Shao Siha[ra]. It mentions the name of the community.

Two inscriptions, one (Vikrama 1519 = 1462 C.E.) from Dudakhedi in Mandasaur District and other (Vikrama 1545 = 1488 C.E.) from Budhi Chandēri in Mungaoli tahsil in Guna district record the performance of sai by Ludi of the [Me]datavalajñati in the former record and sati by a women (name not known) in the latter record.¹³

Indore Museum sari stone of Vikrama 1555 (1490 C.E.) in the local dialect and Nagari characters records the death of a certain Sāha Dēv, the son of Saha Ghohatha and the performance of saḡagarnana by sati Devaladē of Nagara-gotra at giravata-sḡhana. This inscription is important as it mentions the word saḡagatnana in place of sari which is generally found mentioned in all the above records. Another important point is this that it refers to the gotra of the person. Unfortunately the findspot of this record is not known.

Of the two inscriptions, one of Vikrama 1564 (1507 C.E.) from Usārā in Bhanpura tahsil in Mandasaur district engraved on a chhatrt of an Ahir refers to the performance of sari by the wife of the son of Ahir saga while the second dated Vikrama 1570 (1513 C.E.) from Tharraka in Damoh tahsil and district belonging to Amanadasadeva of Gond dynasty records the performance of sad by a lady named Chade (Charhdè), the wife of a Paroshi Bhau, the eldest son of a brghmana named Pāthdu. The second inscription also mentions the name of the chief of Jujhara-ghat.¹⁴ It may be added here that the custom of committing sati was in vogue both among the elite as well as among the group of socially or economically backward.

An interesting information is provided by an insription dated Vikrama 1584 (1522 C.E.) from Chanderi in Mungaoli tebsil in Guna district belonging to the reign of Mediniraya, the ruler of Chandri. It records that innumerable Rājput women committed jauhara on the bank of a tank here in the fort called Charagiri-durga in 1528 C.E. in order to save their chastity-on the occasion of king's battle with Babur. Three points are to be noted here; 1) The inscriptions indicate that the saving of chastity was one of the reasons behind

the custom of sati 2) this is the only sati inscription in Madhya Pradesh in which occurs the word Jauhara. 3) It suggests that the popularity of the sati system was greater among the warrior class, particularly the Rājputs.

An inscription dated Vikram 1650 (C.E. 1593) from Sāmvat in Bhanpura tahsil of Mandsaur district incised on a pillar set up on the bund of a tank belonging to Maharaja Bhimaji records the performance of sati by the wife of Kumvara Sāmaladāsaji, son of Lasha (ksha) maaji and grandson of the ruler. In an inscription dated Vikram 1708 (1651 C.E.) from Khimlasā in Khurai tahsil of Sagar district is recorded sati committed by Mauhundè, belonging to Kaitha Mathura-gotra and Khumāna caste.¹⁵ Another inscription from the same place dated in Vikrama 1709 (1652 C.E.) also records the performance of sati by Nanhā who belonged to the kori caste (i.e., weaver).

It is interesting to note that not only the princely family but also the common people practised sati. Instances to this practice can be multiplied by quoting the inscriptions available from Seopur in Morena district dated Vikrama 1712 (1655 C.E.), from Hidorta in Damoh district dated Vikrama 1745 (1688 A.D.) belonging to the reign of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, from Hathbardi in Morena district dated Vikrama 1771 (1714 C.E.), from Orchha in Tikamgarh district dated Vikrama 1785 (1728 C.E.) and from Gurji in Jabalpur district dated Vikrama 1790 (1733 C.E.). Hiocria sati stone mentioned above gives the name of the local chief—Thakura Amarasithha and caste of the sati as brāhmaa.

Khimlasa contains three memorial stones dated 1753 C.E. with three pairs of foot-prints carved on three chhatri' a pair of foot-prints on each one. The first, second and third chhotri represents the footprints of Mahanta Pam Sri Viharidasa, pam Sri Pitmbara and path Sri Amaradasaji, respectively.

It is a rare instance to find these foot-prints carved on memorial stones. Two inscriptions from Datia in Dada tahsil and district dated in 1784 C.E. and 1786 C.E. respective' record that memorials were constructed for ilsa queen Bhojakuvari and queen Amara Kuriwari on their death.

Two sati records one (1823 AD.) from Narwar (Kārera tahsil in Shivpuri district) and another (1829 AD.) from Monaipur Seopur tahsil-in Morena district also refer to the performance of sati.

The last memorial inscription in Madhya Pradesh dated in Vikrama 1957 (1900 A.D. from Jabalpur, in Jabalpur tahsil and district of the same name records a death of the goldsmith Goluchaudhari and construction of a memorial platform with steps for him by the inhabitants of Mahallah Nibaragahja in Jabalpur.

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3. The Eran stone inscription of Saniudragupta (CII., Vol. III, p. 18) and Mandasaur Stone inscription of Yasodharman (CII., Vol. III, p. 142, undated about 532-33 C.E.) fall in this category. A Jayasthambha could sometimes be also regarded as a kristambha.
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